

With publication of Woody Allen's *Apropos of Nothing* memoir, venomous #MeToo attacks continue

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Apropos of Nothing, New York: Arcade, 2020, 400 pp.

Apropos of Nothing is a newly-released memoir by comic and director Woody Allen, which treats his life growing up in Brooklyn in the 1930s and '40s, as well as his film career and more recent personal troubles.

As readers may recall, the announcement in early March by Hachette Book Group, an industry giant, that it was publishing Allen's book provoked protests from Ronan and Dylan Farrow, the veteran filmmaker's estranged children. Dylan Farrow, his adoptive daughter, accuses Allen of molesting her as a child, a claim ruled out by exhaustive investigations. Ronan Farrow preposterously insisted that Allen's work needed to be "fact-checked" before it could go before the public, presumably by Farrow himself.

In the face of the Farrow family complaints and protests by its own employees in New York, Hachette cravenly capitulated to the #MeToo forces and canceled plans to release the memoir.

Subsequently, Arcade Publishing, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, released *Apropos of Nothing*, on March 23.

Having failed at the attempt to silence Allen, the #MeToo elements, utterly without shame, have shifted to attacking his autobiographical work. The *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian/Observer* have joined hands in the effort to further smear and discredit the 84-year-old director. It should also be noted that the campaign against the memoir coincides with the so far successful endeavor to prevent Allen's 2019 film, *A Rainy Day in New York*, from being distributed in the US.

This is not the occasion to examine *Apropos of Nothing* from every angle, or, for that matter, to render final judgment on Allen's movie career. His book is a deliberately breezy, "low-brow" account, whose attempts at wit sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. Allen offers certain, limited insights into his life and work and numerous intriguing anecdotes. Whether he is being somewhat disingenuous when he forcefully asserts he is no "intellectual" and acknowledges he has "never made a great film," the reader certainly has no reason to dismiss Allen's contribution both as a comic in the 1950s and '60s, and his most interesting years as a filmmaker, from 1977 (*Annie Hall*) to 1992 (*Husbands and Wives*).

The ferocity being directed against *Apropos of Nothing* has little to do, in any case, with his artistry and a great deal to do with Allen's refusal to kowtow to his critics.

His most unforgivable crime lies in daring eloquently and convincingly to mount a defense against the 1992 molestation charges involving then seven-year-old Dylan Farrow. Allen refers to the two

major investigations carried out in regard to the allegations: "One by the Child Sexual Abuse Clinic at the Yale–New Haven Hospital, whom the police used to look into such matters, and one by New York State Child Welfare. Unlike so many women who complained of sexual misconduct only to have their complaints swept under the rug and not taken seriously, [Mia Farrow's] accusation was taken most seriously."

Allen cites at length from the written conclusion reached by the Yale–New Haven Child Sexual Abuse Clinic, which found that "Dylan was not sexually abused by Mr. Allen," and, further, "we believe that Dylan's statements on videotape and her statements to us during our evaluation do not refer to actual events that occurred to her on August 4, 1992." The clinic concluded that either Dylan made up her statements or that the child "was coached or influenced by her mother, Ms. Farrow. ... We believe that it is more likely that a combination of these two formulations best explain Dylan's allegations of sexual abuse."

In addition, Allen points out, "the molestation accusation was dismissed by New York State Child Welfare investigators who examined the case scrupulously for fourteen months, and came to the following conclusion. From the letter received on October 7, 1993, I quote: 'No credible evidence was found that the child named in this report has been abused or maltreated. This report has, therefore, been considered unfounded.'"

Allen's arguments have had a certain effect. In the hostile reviews of the book, Dylan Farrow's claims hardly come into play. Allen's well-argued denials have obviously pushed those charges to the back burner for the moment, but his assailants find new or sometimes old grounds for their vitriol.

One of the filthiest comments appeared in the *Washington Post* March 27 by Monica Hesse, a feature writer and "gender columnist." The general character of the piece can be judged by its headline, "If you've run out of toilet paper, Woody Allen's memoir is also made of paper."

Hesse refers blithely to "the original controversy" about the book, "Dylan Farrow's longstanding accusation that Allen, her adopted father, had molested her in 1992." She acknowledges that the "allegations were investigated at the time; Allen has denied them, and he was never charged." Not letting that stop her, however, Hesse asserts that "you do not need to reinvestigate these charges to have feelings about this book: both guilty and innocent people can be boring, vindictive and self-indulgent."

She wittily goes on, "You need only ask yourself: Do you like

400-page books in which wealthy 84-year-old Oscar-winning directors, who successfully navigated New York and Hollywood for half a century with unlimited creative control, who shaped mass pop culture into their own worldview, now portray themselves as innocent naïfs who just can't catch a break?"

Allen's films are now being blocked from screening in the US and a concerted attempt was made to suppress his memoir. The director has been denounced by dozens of performers and transformed into a pariah in the American film industry, while the media subjects him to a never-ending smear campaign. If Allen, whatever his career and previous good fortune may have been, is not *now* a victim of mistreatment and outright persecution, what is he?

Hesse continues in her crude vein, "Within moments of the book's release, some websites started printing lists of all the weirdest stuff. I could not bring myself to do that here without giving Ronan Farrow a chance to comment first, though, and the thought of asking him some of these questions made me want to flush myself down a toilet."

Dwight Garner in the *New York Times* ("Woody Allen's New Memoir Is Sometimes Funny—and Tone Deaf and Banal," March 26) manages to express unhappiness with Hachette's decision to drop Allen's book and implies a certain skepticism about Dylan Farrow's allegations. In his case too, however, the possibly suspect character of "the original controversy" surrounding Allen doesn't prevent him from adapting himself to the #MeToo hysteria. Anything less would be unthinkable on the pages of the *Times*.

Allen, "a 20th-century man in a 21st-century world," Garner complains, "is incredibly, unbelievably tone deaf on the subject of women." Nearly every time a woman is mentioned in *Apropos of Nothing*, the *Times* article goes on, "there's a gratuitous pronouncement on her looks. ... The heavy breathing gets more intense as the book moves on. ... Christina Ricci 'was plenty desirable.' Léa Seydoux 'was a 10 plus.' Rachel McAdams 'looks like a million bucks from any angle.'" Scarlett Johansson, he cites Allen as saying, was not only "gifted and beautiful, but sexually she was radioactive."

Disgusting, pornographic—one can easily see why Allen deserves to be banished. Garner later goes on to pay fulsome tribute to Ronan Farrow—the former State Department agent and Hillary Clinton aide, an out-and-out scoundrel—as someone who has "grown up to become a journalist, a determined and righteous exposé of the evil that powerful men do."

The special, pious voice of English liberalism (which speaks, in Trotsky's phrase, with "a degree of absolute vulgarity"), in the form of the relentlessly moralizing, endlessly empty *Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers, had to be heard from in regard to *Apropos of Nothing*. *Observer* columnist Catherine Bennett ("Brought to book: Woody Allen's memoir is the most damning indictment yet," March 29) suggests that the "film director's own words reveal him to be a scheming, sexist, creepy adventurer."

Belittling the issue of censorship and democratic rights, Bennett writes facetiously that "[Author] Stephen King, among many others, was right to worry about [the memoir's] suppression. The only person who stood to benefit from the silencing of Woody Allen was Woody Allen." Allen, she goes on, "is, as previously alleged, a man from whom girls and women would be well advised [to recoil]—unless they actually enjoy being objectified."

Bennett writes: "If the book's main purpose is to depict him as a blameless creative and doting father, wronged by a scheming ex-partner, he seems only marginally less determined that readers marvel that he enjoyed what he describes as 'romantic adventures' with

countless lovely, often strikingly younger women." Again, one is scandalized.

The *Observer* columnist is especially incensed by Allen's reference to "#MeToo zealots," a perception that he shares with much of the population, who increasingly see the collection of mostly Hollywood complainants and their media backers like Bennett as self-centered, neurotic and vengeful.

Allen refers in *Apropos of Nothing* to the unprincipled, reactionary character of the campaign against him. Toward the end of the memoir, he points to the fact that the various actors and actresses denouncing him and vowing not to work with him have "never looked into the details of the case (they couldn't have and come to their conclusion with such certainty)," while some of them "said it was now their policy to always believe the woman. I would hope most thinking people reject such simple-mindedness. I mean, tell it to the Scottsboro Boys."

Outdoing "one another in profiles of courage," such people "were against child molestation and were not afraid to say it, particularly with these new scientific discoveries in physics that the woman is always right."

Allen notes his appearance in *The Front* (1976), about the McCarthyite era, and adds that he was "very aware of what Lillian Hellman referred to as 'scoundrel time,' when so many frightened or opportunistic men and women behaved badly. I bring that up only because any number of actors and showpeople said to me and various friends of mine privately how appalled they were by the clearly unjust, disgusting publicity I was receiving and that they were solidly on my side, but when asked why they didn't speak out and say something, they all admitted they feared professional repercussions."

Allen quite rightly points to the irony of the fact that Ronan Farrow attempted to suppress a *New York* magazine interview with Soon-Yi Previn, Mia Farrow's adoptive daughter and Allen's wife for the past quarter-century, which painted a negative picture of her mother. Allen writes, "Is this not the quintessence of hypocrisy when Ronan writes a book critical of NBC for trying to kill his story on [film producer] Harvey Weinstein? But, I guess whatever works."

In general, the campaign against Allen and *Apropos of Nothing* has exposed for many to see the bullying, blacklisting character of the #MeToo campaign. There's much chatter to the effect that "voices must be heard"—except the voices with which one disagrees.

These are right-wing elements, who select "monsters"—in this case an individual who has never been charged with a crime, much less convicted of one—with which to appall and intimidate disoriented, self-absorbed layers of the affluent middle class in particular, layers all too eager to be diverted from the great issues of poverty, social inequality, war. While masses of the population are moving to the left as capitalism discredits itself irrevocably in the current pandemic calamity, the "#MeToo zealots" will plunge deeper and deeper into political and social reaction.



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