

Woody Allen's *Coup de Chance*: The “wonderfully wealthy” businessman as a sociopath

David Walsh
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The newest film by Woody Allen, *Coup de Chance* [stroke of luck], had to be made in France because the US movie industry has essentially excluded the veteran writer-director. Discredited sexual abuse claims against Allen have been vindictively leveraged to damage and if possible end his career. The 88-year-old filmmaker is regularly described in the media as “controversial” or even “disgraced,” although intensive official inquiries cleared him of any potential wrongdoing decades ago.

With extraordinary hypocrisy and dishonesty, Hollywood, well-known for its high ethical standards and sexual piety, has blacklisted Allen, along with French-Polish director Roman Polanski. Disgracefully, according to *Variety*, Allen is “believed to be facing more difficulties to find big-name American actors willing to star in his films.” This is all the result of the especially odious and strong influence of upper-middle class identity politics in the US, which has produced a new McCarthyism in the form of the #MeToo campaign.

Allen recently told the digital weekly newsletter *AirMail* that, not astonishingly, “All the romance of film making is gone.” He was referring specifically to new structures of film production and distribution, but obviously the comment extends beyond that, and includes his own travails.

Allen further observed that when asked by an interviewer about “cancel culture,” he had replied, “If you’re going to be canceled, this is the culture that you want to be canceled from. Because who wants to be part of this culture?”

Coup de Chance takes place in Paris in the present day. Fanny (Lou de Laâge) and her somewhat older husband, Jean (Melvil Poupaud), seem to live a charmed life. He is a financial adviser, who has obviously done well. They

live in the lap of luxury. He is domineering and tends to present himself as a predator, in business as well as in deer-hunting and other activities. We learn that a former business associate of his disappeared mysteriously some years before, and that Jean was suspected of having something to do with it, before eventually being cleared.

Although she has her own career working for an art auctioneer, Fanny worries she is merely a trophy wife, a pretty ornament in Jean’s life. She meets an old schoolmate, Alain (Niels Schneider), on the street one day. Alain is a writer, only in Paris temporarily. He explains that he had a crush on her when they were in high school, although he never let on at the time. They arrange to have lunch, and one thing leads to another. Through Alain, Fanny comes to recognize her discontent with her present existence.

The jealous, severely possessive Jean begins to doubt his wife’s fidelity. A private detective only confirms his worst fears. He takes extreme action, and when his mother-in-law becomes suspicious about Alain’s disappearance, plans to deal drastically with her as well.

This is not a comedy, and neither Allen nor a surrogate for his long-established persona appear in *Coup de Chance*. The filmmaker seems able to make a more objective assessment of the given social milieu, the French upper-middle class and above.

The film adopts a generally healthy, that is to say, hostile, attitude toward the very affluent. Early on in the film, Jean smugly informs his wife that “‘Too sexy’ doesn’t exist. Not ‘too rich’ either.”

Later, she mildly complains that even as his wife, she is not clear as to what he does for a living.

Jean replies, “This is crazy. Why does everyone find it so mysterious? I’ve already explained a thousand times. ... I am adding to assets. It can’t get any clearer. Rich people

want to become richer. Less tax, more for the children. I help with that, and that's how I earn [income]."

And everything's legal, she asks?

"Uh, yeah. Mostly."

She subsequently tells Alain that her husband makes "rich people richer."

During a cocktail party conversation, the couple's friends too wonder aloud precisely what it is that the "wonderfully wealthy" Jean does:

- A brilliant businessman, they say.
- What does he do?
- Nobody knows how he makes money.
- What are you insinuating? Is there something fishy?

(As noted above, rumors abound about the vanishing of Jean's former partner. We learn at a certain point that Jean indeed was homicidally responsible ...)

Fanny complains that the people Jean invites are "boring" and "shallow," their "only quality is being wealthy. It's about money and the best hotels. If I mention Rome or Madrid, they only talk about fancy restaurants there."

Poupaud as Jean does well, suggesting someone who, as the character explains, "was not born rich" and who has "worked like mad to get my money." There are no "red lines" in regard to what he will do to maintain his position and money.

The Alain-Fanny romance is relatively formulaic. The notion of a bohemian novelist—who likes to quote from Jacques Prévert—living in a garret in central Paris, one of the most expensive cities on earth, in this day and age is largely a fantasy.

There are other formulaic or overly simple elements here, but the heart of Allen's film is generally in the right place.

How seriously are we to take the film's insistence on the role of chance?

Alain explains that the book he is writing is "about the irony of life. Everyone's at the mercy of chance and coincidences. ... Life as a cruel joke." Fanny later says to him, "You believe deeply in luck." Without coincidence, he argues, they wouldn't have met.

A portion of the novel Alain is writing reads:

She drew the conclusion that life was uncertain. The chance of your existence is one in four hundred billion. So every life is a miracle. Every living creature is a jackpot in the cosmic lottery. Do not waste that miracle. She felt ready to continue until the end of her choices and her mistakes. It remained no less terrifying to realise the immense role played in all things by chance and the importance of being lucky. It was better not to dwell on it.

No, perhaps not.

For his part, the ruthless Jean despises "people who rely on luck. Luck doesn't exist. You must force things. ... I create my own luck."

This is not especially edifying. If we follow Allen's logic, his own current difficulties, for example, are merely the result of his meeting and involvement with X, whereas happiness would later prove, in fact, to lie in a relationship with Y. If he had never met X, his life would have been a paradise.

However, the fact that there have been a rash of #MeToo victims suggests that Allen has not merely suffered from *bad luck*, but that a certain *necessity*, reflecting the needs of specific social layers and political forces, found expression in his *accidental* fate.

To borrow from a great Marxist, that this particular American comic-filmmaker found himself under attack in this unprincipled and vicious manner was a matter of chance, but if he had been lacking, another would have filled his place (and, in fact, numerous others have suffered the same fate). Such a victim would have been found, sooner or later, because such a victim was necessary.

The character of his own witch-hunting apparently remains obscure to Allen, perhaps too painful to probe, and this continues to weaken his film making. If he could have drawn together serious thinking about the #MeToo hysteria with his critique of the very rich, something significant could have emerged. In any case, *Coup de Chance* at least points in the right direction.



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