

## **Blue Jasmine (2013) Woody Allen (1935 - )**

P Michell, 2015

Director: [Woody Allen](#)

Writer: [Woody Allen](#)

Starring: [Cate Blanchett](#), [Alec Baldwin](#), [Bobby Cannavale](#), [Louis C.K.](#), [Sally Hawkins](#), [Peter Sarsgaard](#)

### **Synopsis:**

Jasmine French used to be on the top of the heap as a New York socialite, but now is returning to her estranged sister in San Francisco utterly ruined. As Jasmine struggles with her haunting memories of a privileged past bearing dark realities she ignored, she tries to recover in her present. Unfortunately, it all proves a losing battle as Jasmine's narcissistic hang-ups and their consequences begin to overwhelm her. In doing so, her old pretensions and new deceits begin to foul up everyone's lives, especially her own.

### **Trivia**

Costume designer [Suzy Benzinger](#) had a budget of only \$35,000. The Hermès bag that Jasmine carries was worth more than the entire budget and was borrowed, as were most of the designer outfits.

Because [Woody Allen](#) doesn't get into motivation or background of a character when he's directing actors, [Cate Blanchett](#) and [Sally Hawkins](#) got together and invented the background for the sisters' relationship. So every scene when they talked about their past, although it's vague on the script and for the viewer, they both knew exactly what the sisters are talking about.

Loosely based upon [Tennessee Williams](#)' "A Streetcar named Desire".

Many critics and viewers of this movie noted that the plot bore many essential similarities to [Tennessee Williams](#)'s 1947 play A Streetcar Named Desire. Despite the unmistakable similarities between the plots of Streetcar and [Blue Jasmine](#) (2013), however, there was no acknowledgment of Williams in the credits, and [Woody Allen](#) was nominated for an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay (not Adapted). With [Blue Jasmine](#) (2013), Allen was repeating the tactic for creating a screenplay that he had used for [Match Point](#) (2005), which bears unmistakable plot similarities to [Theodore Dreiser](#)'s 1925 novel An American Tragedy but which didn't credit Dreiser. Allen was also nominated for Best Original Screenplay for [Match Point](#) (2005).

[Cate Blanchett](#) studied the "60 Minutes" interview with Ruth Madoff, the wife of disgraced Wall Street swindler Bernie Madoff, to emulate certain vocal inflections

and body language that Ruth displayed in order to capture the essence of a woman whose once wealthy and privileged world comes crumbling down around her.

Cost around US\$18 million. Made US\$33 million domestic. (Generally this is doubled for world-wide gross – Thus probably took total US\$66 million. That’s why Allen keeps making movies. Generally they make money!

In her review of *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) the late film critic Pauline Kael suggests that the reason New York critics love Woody Allen is that “they’re applauding their fantasy of themselves”

## Analysis

Good site for Woody Allen info:

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/allen/>

Woody Allen & the Woman in his work (Book review)

Tom Shone, Guardian – 4 Sept 2015

Woody’s women arrive behind the director in a big bustling caravan – a noisy train of flakes and nymphs, art snobs, academics and intellectuals, hookers, healers and harpies. Allen’s own nebbish persona aside, women are easily the most recognisable roles to come out of his films: Annie, Hannah, Jasmine. Female actors in his films have won no fewer than six Oscars. At the same time, few directors have drawn as much fire for the typology of female characters they have established onscreen. “Increasingly, the women in his movies can be divided up between menopausal nuts and coltish sluts,” noted James Wolcott in *Vanity Fair* in 1998, after *Celebrity* completed a trio of films, beginning with *Mighty Aphrodite*, and continuing with *Deconstructing Harry*, in which obscene language, hookers and fellatio all featured prominently. “The balance of power has shifted. Now when a woman opens her mouth in a Woody Allen movie, it isn’t because speech is required.”

Allen is so vilified by some these days, it may be hard to remember the time when he was seen as feminism’s friend, the non-threatening alternative to John Wayne machismo in bra-burning, post-Vietnam America. “It’s a comedy of sexual inadequacy,” observed Pauline Kael of his act. “What makes it hip rather than masochistic and awful is that he thinks women want the media macho ideal, and we in the audience are cued to suspect, as he secretly does, that that’s the real inadequacy. Woody Allen is a closet case of potency; he knows he’s potent but he’s afraid to tell the world.” The release of a new [Woody Allen](#) film is therefore always something of a puzzle. Which Woody are we getting? The sotto voce confidante of the female inner chamber? Or the condescending connoisseur of dimbulb Lolitas? The trailers for his new film, [Irrational Man](#), frame it as another of the May-

December romances that have so irked his feminist critics, this time between Joaquin Phoenix's dissolute philosophy professor and the bright-eyed student, played by Emma Stone, who sits adoringly at his feet lapping up his romantic-tragic world-view. "He's so damn fascinating and so vulnerable," she swoons. The plot of the movie, however, takes an unadvertised leftward turn towards murder – the great preoccupation of late Allen films – and the relationship between teacher and student is turned on its head. The balance of power shifts back.

In many ways, Allen has been working and reworking this reversal since [Annie Hall](#) and [Sleeper](#), the romantic plot of both films essentially retellings of Shaw's Pygmalion. "Do you think I'm stupid?" asks Luna (Diane Keaton) in *Sleeper*, before transforming herself with books of Marxist theory into a khaki-clad revolutionary; "she's read a few books and suddenly she's an intellectual," complains Allen's Miles. In *Annie Hall*, Alvy Singer introduces Annie to adult education classes, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, and therapy. "You're the reason I got out of my room, and was able to sing and get in touch with my feelings and all that crap," she says at the end, by which time she has fallen in love with the teacher of her class on existential motifs in Russian literature. Like Miles, Alvy is hoist by his own petard. In *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Michael Caine woos Hannah away from her artist-lover Max Von Sydow with a book of poems by EE Cummings, only to see her leave him, in turn, for her literature professor. In each case, the man, assuming a position of intellectual superiority, establishes himself as the woman's tutor-lover, only to lose her once she grows confident enough to leave him. The problem with entwining romance is that education has an end in sight: graduation.

Allen's sympathy for the self-discovery of insecure young women – *Annie Hall*, or Barbara Hershey's character, Lee, in [Hannah and Her Sisters](#) – is more than just that of a romantic machiavel looking for an "in". It came in part from his own experience. He didn't start reading until he was in his late teens, regarding it "a chore", but after marrying first wife Harlene Rosen, the daughter of a shoe-shop owner he had met through the Flatbush Jewish social clubs, and a student of philosophy at Hunter College, he arranged for a tutor at Columbia to guide him through a course of great books – Plato, Aristotle, Dante, Joyce. At four every afternoon, he would walk the four blocks from his apartment to the Metropolitan museum on East 78th Street and spend half an hour studying a different exhibit until he had worked his way around the whole museum. "They weren't interested in me because I was a lowlife culturally and intellectually," Allen once said of his first attempts to date women. "I used to take them out and they'd say, 'Where I'd really like to go tonight is to hear Andrés Segovia' and I'd say, 'Who?' Or they'd say, 'Did you read this Faulkner novel?' and I'd say, 'I read comic books.'"

So education and romance were bound from the beginning. So, too, was his sympathy for women characters. He was raised "the only male in a family of many, many women" – a slight exaggeration, for he had his father around – but the loudest and most powerful voices belonged to his mother and many aunts, yelling at each other in a mixture of Yiddish, German and English. "It was a madhouse all the time,"

said Allen – the perfect training for farce, you might think, and also the root of his fascination with sisters: his mother’s, but also Keaton’s (the inspiration for [Annie Hall](#) and the trio of sisters in *Interiors*), and later Mia Farrow’s, in *Hannah and Her Sisters*. “While we walked, worked, ate, slept and lived out lives, the story of Hannah was fleshed out, detail by familiar detail,” wrote Farrow after they split, with a strong hint that Allen had simply transcribed his dialogue directly from real life.

More reliable, perhaps, is Keaton’s account of the writing of *Annie Hall*, which grew from Allen’s fascination with Keaton, her mother and sisters. “I was constantly complaining about things and constantly had this low self-esteem and had a tendency toward crying and worrying about why I wasn’t good enough, and he took it,” [Keaton told the New York Times recently](#). “We can all feel it and understand it, but we cannot write other people’s sounds,” said Keaton. “*Annie Hall*, flumping around, trying to find a sentence. That’s just remarkable, what he did for me.” You have only to look at an earlier Allen script, *Play it Again Sam*, written before he had met Keaton, to hear how Allen’s ear developed. In the earlier film, the Keaton character is a mere dupe, left hanging doe-eyed while Allen takes dating tips from Bogart and mugs for the camera (“she bought it!”). He could not yet write well for women. By the time of *Love and Death*, Keaton was enjoying to-camera asides – she and Allen get simultaneous, duelling soliloquies, comic equals – and in *Annie Hall* she eclipses him altogether.

“As far as *Annie Hall* goes, the question you raise about it being my first film to be centered on a character not played by me raises a point I’ve always made about the enormity [sic] of Diane Keaton’s talent and screen presence,” he said earlier this year. “Like a number of movies that I have done with her, the films were designed to be about me and while I wouldn’t go so far as to say she wipes me off the screen, the movies turned out to be hers. I’m happy to replace myself in movies because it opens up more possibilities.”

What’s most interesting about the career that followed is how often Allen chose to replace himself with female and not male characters. Of all his characters, it is Mia Farrow’s mousy cinephile in [The Purple Rose of Cairo](#) that best represents him, he has said, and through the late 80s and early 90s, it was Farrow who most often played the “Woody Allen role” – giving voice to the director’s neuroses, fears, and midlife crises. The problem with some of the films that followed their break-up – from *Mighty Aphrodite* through *Deconstructing Harry* – is not that they subscribed to too male a point of view, but that Allen was trying on male attitudes almost for the first time – he sounded like a teenager making blowjob jokes – and the resulting callowness cut him off from the streak of creative androgyny that is the source of his best work: *Annie Hall*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Hannah*, *Blue Jasmine*. There’s a reason Allen performed the Blanche Dubois role in *Sleeper* and even considered taking the Elaine Strich role in *September*. His best female characters are the ones in which he sees the most of himself.

“You know, you could have played this role,” Cate Blanchett observed during the shooting of [Blue Jasmine](#). Allen thought about it for a while, then replied, “No, it would have been too comic.” That was the only reason, note. Not “because I’m a

man". Finally, Allen's secret is out. The reason he writes women so well? He would have made a very good one himself. The reason he occasionally writes them badly? Because he cannot see in them enough of himself.

Tom Shone's book *Woody Allen: A Retrospective* is published by Thames & Hudson.

## Reviews:

### **Woody's Sharply Rendered Update of "Streetcar" Anchored by Blanchett's Brilliant Blanche-Like Turn**

3 August 2013 | by [Ed Uyeshima](#)

If you want to see this year's master class in screen acting, you need to watch Cate Blanchett's mesmerizing performance as Jasmine French, a delusional Park Avenue socialite wife in Woody Allen's 45th directorial effort, a sly, bicoastal update of Tennessee Williams' classic "A Streetcar Named Desire". As the film opens, her impeccably dressed character has hit rock bottom after her financial wizard of a husband is arrested and her assets are liquidated. In the throes of a nervous breakdown, she arrives in San Francisco and moves in with her kind-hearted sister Ginger who lives a modest, blue-collar life in a tiny apartment on the edge of the Mission – on South Van Ness near 14th Street to be exact - with her two hyperactive sons. You can tell Jasmine is not only out of her element but quite judgmental about how her sister's life has turned out. The irony of Jasmine's patronizing attitude is that she is a habitual liar who is so angry about her destitute circumstances that she frequently talks to herself. The story follows the basic outline of "Streetcar" but takes some interesting turns, for instance, when she tries to better herself by taking computer classes while working as a receptionist at a dental office.

Allen has crafted his film into a clever juxtaposition of current and past events that feels jarring at first since it reflects Jasmine's precarious mental state but then melds into a dramatic arc which resonates far more than a straightforward chronology could have allowed. As a writer, he has become more vociferous in his dialogue without losing his wit. He doesn't pull punches when he showcases confrontations between his characters, whether it's between the two sisters, men and women, or people from different classes. Hostility can come in flammable torrents or in thinly veiled remarks. That Allen moves so dexterously in tone is a testament to his sharp ability in drawing out the truth in his actors. Blanchett is a wonder in this regard because there is something intensely fearless in her approach. Unafraid to lose audience sympathy for her character, she finds an innate sadness in Jasmine that makes us want to know what happens to her next. She also mines the sharp, class-based humor in Jasmine's struggles with one highlight a hilariously executed scene in a pizza restaurant where she explains to her confused nephews to "Tip big, boys".

The rest of the cast manage effective turns. Alec Baldwin plays Jasmine's swindler husband with almost effortless aplomb. Sally Hawkins brings a wonderful looseness

to Ginger, Stella to Blanchett's Blanche, and finds a level of poignancy in her character's constant victimization at the hands of her sister as well as her brutish, blue-collar boyfriend Chili, played with comic fierceness by Bobby Cannavale in the Stanley Kowalski role. In a conveniently conceived role, Peter Sarsgaard gets uncharacteristically breezy as Dwight, a wealthy, erudite, and matrimonially available State Department diplomat who appears to be the answer to Jasmine's prayers, while Allen casts two unlikely comics in about-face roles – Andrew Dice Clay as Ginger's defeated ex-husband Augie and Louis C.K. as Al, an amorous suitor who brings Ginger a few moments of romantic salvation. Allen's European sojourn appears to have freed him up with the movement of characters in scenes and Javier Aguirresarobe's ("Vicky Cristina Barcelona") camera-work complies nicely. The San Francisco locations bring a nice geographic change to Allen's storytelling, and he only uses the Golden Gate Bridge in a long shot once from the Marin side. This is Allen's best work in quite a while, and Blanchett is the ideal muse for his tale.

***"Woody Allen's best film since 1994's 'Bullets Over Broadway.'"***

David Ehrlich. 22 July 2013. Film.com

Though Woody Allen has limited his on-screen performances in recent years (he's only cast himself once since 2006's "Scoop"), it's never been more obvious that the bespectacled iconoclast appears in all of his films. For Allen, the movies are not a place to escape but rather a place to reflect and refract, his characters offering a kaleidoscopic window into their creator's kvetching soul.

Over the course of Allen's 50-year career, he's evinced a remarkable, Zelig-like capacity to bend any genre to his will – the only thing less believable than the fact that "Sleeper" and "Crimes and Misdemeanors" were made by the same man would be the idea that they weren't.

It's true that the best of Allen's recent films – namely "Vicky Christina Barcelona" and "Match Point" – ostensibly seem to resist betraying the identity of their maker, his authorial presence muted by the reverb of intriguing foreign locations and uncharacteristically earnest depictions of beautiful people having perfect sex. And yet, in some respects, the period that began with 2004's "Melinda and Melinda" has been Allen's most fixedly auteuristic, the famously prolific filmmaker churning out ten consecutive stories that are each in some way consumed by thoughts of double lives and second chances. It seems that the Bronx Bumbler, so reverent of Bergman, has in his twilight years become enchanted by Kieslowski – his life story all but told save for the epilogue, Woody Allen has naturally begun to look back and consider what might have been. In a [recent interview with the L.A. Times](#), Allen conceded: "I never trust people who say, 'I have no regrets. If I lived my life again, I'd do it exactly the same way.' I wouldn't."

And so we arrive at "[Blue Jasmine](#)," perhaps Woody Allen's best film since 1994's "Bullets Over Broadway," which opens with such a transparently fake computer-generated shot of a plane shooting West across the sky that the airliner might as

well be flying into Mordor (you can see the shot for yourself early in the trailer). It would be silly to argue that the digital flourish is deliberately shoddy (more likely it's just a particularly glaring symptom of the supreme functionality that allows Allen to maintain his pace), but it nevertheless immediately imbues this story with a patina of unreality that erodes as the eponymous Jasmine (Cate Blanchett, delivering the best performance of her film career) swerves around San Francisco in an effort to manifest her destiny.

To know Jasmine is to wish you didn't. A youthfully tenacious riff on Ruth Madoff, Jasmine arrives in the Bay area like she was just written off of Bravo's *The Real Housewives of Ponzi Schemes*. Spoiled, serpentine and vaguely schizophrenic, she's a tragic shadow of the socialite she used to be before her mega-banker husband Hal (Alec Baldwin, natch) was pinched by the feds for some underhanded business dealings. The fraud turned untold millions of good dollars bad, exposing the rot at the heart of Jasmine's persona and causing irreparable harm to those she had seduced with it.

The worst of the collateral damage has fallen upon Jasmine's salt of the earth sister Ginger (Sally Hawkins, whose suffocated English accent somehow helps to sell the idea that both of the girls were adopted at birth). Once married to a lovable lug named Augie (Andrew Dice Clay in a small but surprising performance that oozes blue-collar brioche), Ginger's relationship was doomed the moment the couple invested their life savings in one of Hal's crooked ventures. Jasmine likes to see herself as a victim in all of this, and naturally sees nothing wrong with flying across the country to crash in the apartment Ginger shares with her new boyfriend Chili, (Bobby Cannavale), which is where she's headed when the film begins.

What sounds like a premise ripe for a network sitcom soon reveals itself to be another one of Allen's didactic origami chatterboxes, the story unfolding away from the broadly bitter comedy of Jasmine's new life as a fish out of water in order to reveal who she was before the collapse. Rather than revel in the schadenfreude of its heroine's riches to rags downfall, Allen cuts between the past and the present in order to unravel Jasmine's history like a contrapuntal canon, skittering back and forth from Jasmine's new life in San Francisco to her old life atop Manhattan's society scene and squeezing the years between like a untuned accordion.

Although "Blue Jasmine" shares the light structural didacticism endemic to Allen's later work, the likes of "Match Point" and "Vicky Christina Barcelona" were steered by curiosity and happenstance, whereas this film ultimately resolves as a bleak response to his usual "what if?" stories. The film's individual episodes are largely too broad to leave much of an impression, but Jasmine lands on San Francisco with the kind of destructive force that puts even category-five Kaijus to shame, Blanchett's possessed performance made all the more compelling by the ho-hum world it bulldozes through, and the deceptively unremarkable way in which Allen frames it (he's still shooting everything in hyper-functional medium-wide long-takes, but his compositions reliably split the difference between calm and chaos).

While it's tempting to reduce Jasmine to a modern-day Blanche DuBois (a character on whom Blanchett left a revelatory imprint at BAM in 2009), it's the differences between the two women that prove most illuminating. Tennessee Williams' iconic loon lived in a constant state of horror about her fading beauty, whereas Jasmine is fully aware of her relatively haggard appearance, how her face has sunken inwards over the years as if her cheekbones were being sucked concave by a black hole between her lungs. She depends (or insists) on the kindness of strangers, but her nervous breakdown isn't a retreat into a swooningly romantic fantasy life, it's an ugly tumble into a hall of broken mirrors. Jasmine's nervous collapse isn't predicated upon maintaining the delusions of her past – she struggles with the logistics of her precipitous fall down the socioeconomic ladder, instinctively flying first class despite being dead broke – but she's selectively transparent about her misfortunes, at least in the beginning. Jasmine's problem isn't separating the past from the present, it's separating herself from her circumstances.

Jasmine (who changed her name from the less fragrant "Jeanette" after college), was a woman of enormous wealth, and the film perceptively observes how being stripped of her money did little to change that. People are often defined less by what they have than they are by the sum of what they've lost, and – more resonantly than any of Allen's recent features – "Blue Jasmine" understands how every choice is remembered for the dead weight of the alternate futures it denied. As Jasmine begins a flirtation with a local widow (Peter Sarsgaard), she struggles with how the phases of her life aren't sequential, but stacked. Jasmine didn't replace Jeanette, she just started living on top of her, and the foundation is riddled with stress fractures.

Blanchett's possessed performance allows Jasmine's unraveling to become less about privilege than it is about pathos, and if everything around her feels comparatively colorless, it does all the more to help align us with Jasmine's self-perpetuated exceptionalism (Louis C.K.'s much-discussed subplot is wonderful window dressing). When Allen conceives of a character this great, it's hard not to wish for him to slow down and maybe write that extra draft to refine his creation, but Blanchett – at once both repellent and eminently relatable – uses the casual tone to her advantage, the same way that monster movies use miniatures for scale. It's brilliant work, delicately exposing the rot at the heart of Jasmine's regrets until there's only one left. To quote something Woody Allen once said in the epigraph of an old biography: "My one regret in life is that I'm not someone else."