AN ANALYSIS OF WOODY ALLEN'S *MIGHTY APHRODITE* BY MEANS OF RELEVANCE THEORY

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Abstract: Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory is a cognitive approach to pragmatics that envisages inference as the central element responsible for bridging the gap between encoded meaning and utterance interpretation within a context. The present study attempts to suggest the applicability of the Relevance theoretical framework for analyzing and interpreting Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite.* Findings seem to corroborate that Relevance Theory is an insightful pragmatic resource for recovering an author's intentions, offering plausible explanations of how communicative meaning is mentally processed by the viewers. Implications of the findings are also proposed.
Key words: Relevance Theory; inference; pragmatics; cognition.

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics, as opposed to semantics and syntax, is a branch of semiotics that deals with the relation between signs or linguistic expressions and their users. According to Yule (2003), pragmatics is the study of speakers´ meaning inside a given context, invariably leading to more being communicated than actually said.

In accordance with Relevance Theory, communication should be envisaged as a process of inferential recognition of the communicator's intentions. By pursuing reasoning devices that allow the compilation of newer pieces of information through the combination of existing ones, the inferential process in natural language understanding makes it possible to explain how to bridge the gap between encoded meaning and utterance interpretation within a context.

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Once it is proposed that the interpretive output of communication is realized by means of the inferential processing of concepts and assumptions, it seems paramount to trace back the onsets of the Relevance theoretical framework and describe the sort of cognitive processes that account for the way information is represented and stored in the mind, as well as the form by which it is inferentially processed.

Such a cognitive approach to pragmatics will then be applicable to cinematic language, departing from the premise that films are also texts, and explaining what features are responsible for enabling the inferential process to take shape in a narrative film, helping viewers to reconstruct the communicative meaning intended by a given director.

The assimilation of the cognitive and communicative principles underlying Relevance Theory remains the key element for the development of the present article, which attempts to evince that the more moviegoers predict and relate; i.e. the more lexical, encyclopedic and logic entries are called forth in a given contextual situation, the more recovery of both explicit and implicit communicative intentions of a film director there is, reducing the effort required to process such scraps of information, thus maximizing comprehension.

The complexity of different motifs and characters' insights present in Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite*, combined with the pragmatic context, the setting and the inferred purposes of the verbal exchanges, turn this comedy into a sagacious cinematic text to be analyzed under the prism of Relevance, aiming at asserting its successfulness as an analytical tool that may actually demonstrate how viewers may succeed or fail in recovering the writer and director's intentions.

Findings may also imply that, depending on how big the effort to grasp the interpretive outcome is, it may directly influence viewers on their appraisal about Woody Allen's work, casting new possibilities on why the films of 'the most European of the American filmmakers' do not get popular acclaims from the general American and Latin American moviegoing audience.

1. RELEVANCE THEORY – ANTECEDENTS AND THEORETICAL SCOPE

According to Yule (2003), pragmatics is the area of linguistics that is concerned with the study of meaning by a speaker/writer and its interpretation by a listener/reader.

For several linguists, the work of the philosopher Paul Grice, who developed the concepts of 'cooperative principle', 'maxims of conversation' and the notion of 'implicatures' remains an essential cornerstone of pragmatics, attempting to explain the linguistic phenomenon that enables listeners/readers to decode the intended additional meaning conveyed by speaker's utterances and writer's sentences, at the same time it aims at distinguishing when to make use of strictly logical procedures for language analysis.

Taking into account that data exchange is the ultimate purpose of conversation, Grice (1975) proposes a theoretical rational scheme that accounts for cooperative ends in conversation. Such a theoretical model states that in conversation, people do not merely utter sentences in a haphazard fashion; rather, they abide by certain conventional as well as conversational principles. These principles seem to be subconsciously accepted and followed by speakers/writers. The definition of Grice's cooperative principle may be stated as follows: contribute what is required by the accepted purpose of the verbal exchange.

Grice (1989) claims that the cooperative principle stands for the set of specific logical assumptions about the cooperative nature of ordinary verbal interaction, and such a cooperative nature intrinsically implies that speakers should use language sincerely (maxim of quality), perspicuously (maxim of manner) and relevantly (maxim of relevance), while providing sufficient information (maxim of quantity) in order to converse in an efficient, rational, cooperative way.

Grice (1975) also states that people may follow the cooperation principle in at least two different ways, depending on how speakers relate themselves to the conversation maxims: (1) Speakers may rely on the addressee to amplify what they say by means of unequivocal inferences denominated 'generalized conversational implicatures' and 'conventional implicatures', which are not necessarily dependent on the conversational context, and are respectively thought to take into account the logical standard meaning presented by speakers´ utterances or explicit presuppositions derived from the use of certain lexical items. (2) Speakers may deliberately and ostensibly flout some of the maxims in order to explore them for communicative purposes, making use of inductive inferences within the context, which are entitled 'particularized conversational implicatures´ or simply 'implicatures´. Grice (1989:30) predicates that "when people flout the maxims, we have implicatures". Such floutings or exploitations

of the maxims may generate many figures of speech such as irony and metaphor, which in turn will lead listeners on to a broader range of distinct deductive inferences.

In *Studies of the Way of Words* (1989), Grice argues that for figuring out the additional conveyed meaning of a given implicature, the listener will rely on the following evidences: (1) the conventional meaning of the words uttered, (2) the cooperative principle and the maxims, (3) the linguistic context of the utterance, (4) one's background knowledge (culturally pre-existing knowledge structures that are used to interpret new experiences), and (5) the fact that all these previous relevant items are part of both speaker and addressee's mutual knowledge.

According to Levinson (1983), there are several kinds of pragmatic inferences outside the organization of language, which may impact greatly on the structure of language, and thus provide some straightforward account of how it is possible to mean more than what is directly expressed by the conventional sense of the linguistic expressions uttered.

Sperber and Wilson (1986) suggest in their Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) a model for information processing that is essentially inferential and non-demonstrative, and spontaneously ignited by all human beings. In such a model, communication is a cognitive process in which "a communicator provides evidence of (their) intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by (their) audience on the basis of the evidence provided" (Wilson and Sperber, 2004:1).

One of the central goals in RT is developing one of Grice's main objectives: "that the expression and recognition of intentions is an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal" (Grice 1989: Essays 1-7,14,18; Retrospective Epilogue). Sperber and Wilson (henceforth S&W) also accept the Gricean conceptions of cooperative principle and implicatures, but unlike him, they profess the preponderance of relevance over the other maxims of conversation, dismissing them as being somewhat immaterial for already being comprised within relevance.

In accordance with S&W (1995), their RT provides an elementary assumption about human communication, that each and every one of us will ultimately pay attention to what seems most relevant to us at a certain moment. Lamb (2004) paraphrasing S&W (1987) says that "every act of communication is a claim for other's attention, generating an expectation of relevance".

RT starts from a detailed account of relevance and its role in cognition. Relevance is defined as a property of inputs (whether external stimuli, which can be perceived and attended to, or internal representations, which can be stored, recalled, or used as premises in inference). An input is relevant to an individual when it connects with available contextual assumptions to yield Positive Cognitive Effects: for example, true contextual implications, or warranted strengthenings or revisions of existing assumptions. (S&W, 2005:8)

Therefore, to better understand the role of relevance in RT, it seems important to delineate the fundamental elements comprised in its theoretical scope: ostensive stimuli, cognitive environment, and contextual effects.

Ostensive stimuli are external inputs such as sight, sound and utterances originated from physical acts, being able to attract the attention of an addressee as for the communicative intention of the agent who produced them. In this sense, an ostensive stimulus is a physical phenomenon that can provoke disturbance in a certain environment. Souza (2005) asserts that such environmental disturbances aim at attracting the listener's attention as to the intentness comprised within the stimulus.

An individual's cognitive environment consists of an open list of internal representations taken to be factual or plausible suppositions such as thoughts, memories, assumptions, or conclusions of inferences, which can be stored, recalled, or used as premises in new inferences. Consequently, an individual's cognitive environment is composed of a building up context, which includes per se all the set of information that is accessible to someone such as socio cultural, historical and situational data, beliefs, desires, intuitions, etc., constituting an individual's world knowledge. In addition to that, the cognitive environment does also include the cognitive abilities of inferring and deducing as well as cognitive devices such as data processing mechanisms.

According to Carston (2002), a contextual effect is the cognitive outcome of a relevant interaction between a disturbing stimulus produced by an agent and a set of pre-existing suppositions in the addressee's mind. Schröder and Perna (2006:4) say that "an input is relevant to an individual when it connects with some background information available that will enable worthwhile conclusions to be derived, i.e., when this individual's representation of the world is altered". In accordance with Ibaños (2005), contextual effects may be attained in three different ways: 1- by addition (when the interaction of new bits of information with preexisting ones generates a newer contextual implication, that is supposedly concluded to be right); 2- by strengthening

(when new pieces of information supply a higher degree of evidence about pre-existing ones); 3- by elimination (when new data supply contrary evidence against the old ones).

In order to amplify (add), strengthen or eliminate contextual assumptions, one makes use of their encyclopedic knowledge (entries for events), lexical knowledge (entries for words, their meanings, and their syntactical and phonological features) and logical knowledge (entries for deductive rules), which are stored at and retrieved from both their long term memory (according to Escandell-Vidal (2004), it is the sort of memory whose task consists on building and updating a database of the set of representations that are kept in memory store) as well as their working memory (Escandell-Vidal (2004) asserts it is the on-line memory responsible for accessing internalized assumptions available at a given moment, imposing adjustments to the input/output conditions of the inferential system).

Since it is a human cognitive tendency to pay attention to what seems to be most relevant in a given piece of information (cognitive principle of relevance), and process these bits of relevant data in a way to attain positive cognitive effects, communicators attempt to maximize their intentions by producing stimuli which will draw their addressee's attention, incite the retrieval of some contextual assumptions, and lead them towards an expected conclusion. Such a way of communicating is referred to as 'Ostensive-Inferential' and it constitutes the communicative principle of relevance stated by S&W (1995:158): "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance".

S&W (1995) say that communication may be achieved in two supplementary manners: 1) coding and decoding (the code model), 2) supplying evidence for an intended inference deductible from the probable informative intention of a given speaker (the inferential model).

In the decoding phase, a linguistic encoded form is contextually enriched, and used as inferential input to build up a hypothesis about the communicator's informative intention. In the inferential phase, pieces of information obtained from linguistic decoding are combined with other contextual assumptions to yield new information. Therefore, inference is a processing device that operates on mental representations taken from linguistic and extra linguistic sources, accounting for the phenomenon that linguistic structure and background knowledge do actually interact with the purpose of promoting comprehension.

For this reason, it may be asserted that interpretation is an inferential process deductible from both the processing of linguistic decoded inputs and contextual assumptions, which in turn, will generate possible new interpretive outputs, and such a cognitive process implies that the more listeners/readers predict and relate, the more recovery of a speaker/writer's intentions there is, and the more positive cognitive effects.

Macagnan (2000) points out that RT account claims the pragmatic-cognitive processes to be of capital significance in the interpretation of communicative acts and their cognitive effects, for they help to reconstruct explicit and implicit propositional content, retrieve illocutionary force, and unravel problems of figurative interpretations and ambiguity among others. Such cognitive effects are highly context dependent, since different contextual assumptions might yield a diversified range of pragmatic interpretations.

Grounded on these indications, a relevance-guided axiom proposed by S&W (2004) is proposed: a) pursue the course of least effort in establishing an utterance interpretation (especially in determining ambiguities and referential indeterminacies, in surpassing conventional linguistic meaning, in supplying contextual assumptions, figuring out implicatures, etc.); b) stop when your anticipations of relevance have been appeased.

There are some haphazard subtasks a hearer/reader must perform to recover the speaker/writer's intended meaning: the linguistic decoding of logical forms, the development of these logical forms by inferential processes (explicature), and the construction of implicit premises and conclusions, which will lead to the generation of assumptions about the communicator's intentions (implicature).

According to Silveira and Feltes (1997), decoding is the construction of "an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content" making use of one's deductive rules of logical linguistic forms.

Ex: A: Whose funeral is it?

   B: Juanita stabbed Esteban badly and burned his house.

Decoding of Logical forms: Juanita (subject = noun) stabbed (base form of the verb stab + inflectional suffix 'ed' – denoting past tense) Esteban (direct object = noun) badly (adverb of manner formed by the adjective bad + the derivational suffix 'ly') and

(connector) burned (base form of the verb burn + inflectional suffix 'ed' – denoting past tense) his (possessive adjective preceding a noun and referring to the direct object of the sentence = Esteban's) house (noun). Such an utterance is formed by a noun phrase (Juanita) followed by a verbal phrase (stabbed Esteban badly), then there is a connector (and) that introduces a second verbal phrase (burned his house) that is made up of a regular past verb form (stabbed) + the noun phrase (his house).

Explicature is the development of a logical form by inferential processes of pragmatic nature, leading to the understanding of the explicit content of an utterance proposition. Silveira and Feltes (1997) put it between linguistic decoding and contextual implication.

Explicature: (A woman called) Juanita stabbed (pierced or wound with a pointed weapon) Esteban (a name which refers to a man) badly (to a great degree) and (then – denoting a sequential event) burned (set fire on) his (Esteban's) house (an indoor place surrounded by walls, where one lives).

In accordance with S&W (1995:182), an implicature is "a proposition communicated by an utterance, but not explicitly. Schröder and Perna (2006) state that the construction of hypotheses about the implicit content of an utterance unfolds into implicated premises (appropriate hypotheses about the intended contextual assumptions, being likely to be recovered by logical, encyclopedic and lexical entries) and implicated conclusions (appropriate hypotheses about the intended contextual implications).

Some possible implicatures: 1- Esteban is dead; 2- Juanita is possibly responsible for it; 3- Esteban's body is possibly carbonized; 4- Esteban's house is possibly badly damaged; 5- Juanita possibly hated Esteban; 6- Juanita may possibly have acted in a fit of rage; 7- Juanita might be mentally deranged; 8- Juanita might be an arsonist; 9- Esteban may have done something terrible to Juanita; 10- Juanita will probably be arrested; 11- Esteban either died from the wounds or from the fire, perhaps a combination of both; 12- There might be witnesses who may actually prove that Juanita killed Esteban; 13- Juanita might be a terribly emotional woman.

Hence, in searching for the best positive cognitive effects, listeners/readers retrieve determinate contextual assumptions, which will guide them to conclusions that satisfy their expectation of relevance and give rise to a new set of representations (the deducible interpretive output), which at a certain time, might be a novel source of input to be retrieved and inferentially processed for figuring out newer suppositions.

Since utterances and texts may provide a plethora of possible interpretations, it seems important to emphasize that comprehension is a non-demonstrative inferential process, and that communication may fail even under the most auspicious conditions.

Silveira and Feltes (1997) express that the effort that hearers/readers engage themselves in searching for the optimal relevance of an utterance proposition may vary considerably: while one might need to search further, other might be pleased sooner. Therefore, it appears significant to point out that although this 'least effort strategy' represents a reliable means of attaining a speaker/writer's meaning, it is by no means foolproof. A more elucidative proposal to take into account is that this least effort trail listeners/readers choose to undertake may generate a diversified scope of reasonably similar meanings to what was originally intended by the speaker/writer to convey. In this sense, there is no guarantee of forestalling where exactly the developing of logical encoded meanings intended by a speaker/writer will lead listeners/readers to, and how similar, dissimilar or identical the thoughts and assumptions derived may be, but the more encyclopedic, lexical and deductive entries are called forth, i.e. the more listeners/readers can predict and relate in a certain contextual situation, the larger the number of cognitive effects and the more accessible the interpretative outcome will apparently seem to be.

2. INFERENCING IN CINEMATIC TEXTS

In accordance with Mast (1982), films just like texts are capable of persuading, informing or moving, for they equally comprise a meaningful system that attempts to make them comprehensible to their target audience. Both texts and narrative films ("narrative" being equated with fictional storytelling) may be defined as communicative structures that ignite cognitive and constructive processes on the readers/viewers´ minds, striving at recovering a writer/director's intended conveyed meanings.

One of the main features of cinematic texts is that they usually handle communicative meaning by especially focusing the viewers´ attention on the filmed image itself. Mast (1982:298) claims that "film is spoken only formally and by a few to the many, whose activity consists not in making new utterances but in making sense of the utterances that have been previously constructed".

In films, the smallest unit of cinematic meaning is the shot that is far more significant than a word. Metz (1974) states that a shot is at least comparable to a sentence, if not an entire paragraph, for it comprises a series of possible different elements such as physical setting, music, spoken words, patterns of light and shadows, among other components. Except for written or spoken words that allow both denotative (specific or literal) and connotative (figurative or implicit) meanings, the other codes encompassed in a movie shot can only express connotative meaning, making it really hard to account for the innumerous mental activities that enable viewers to make sense of the profusion of imagery and sound perceptions included within a cinematic text.

Silveira (2005) mentions that one of the advantages of a text composed by images is its universality, since it may overcome the language barrier, being able to be understood by viewers of different cultures, who may speak a myriad of different languages. Another advantage of images, if compared to written texts, is that they are more attractive because they speed up the conveyance of meaning, not to mention that the more an onlooker is exposed to image texts, the more developed and intensified their sense of sight and observation may be.

Narrative films, just like literary texts, may convey not only a well structured, absorbing tale but also,

> a probing of the depth of the characters´ souls, the author's offering perceptive social and psychological insight, manipulating a literary style both lucidly communicative and richly evocative, and, finally, creating a complex vision of human experience that we infer from the work as a whole. Mast (1982:283)

Persson (1998) states that "although verbal and visual comprehension overlap to a considerable degree, an empirical investigation into cinematic comprehension has to be sensitive to the specificity of text and background knowledge".

According to Persson (1998), the most important sources of input influencing inference generation in narrative text comprehension are: a) text (phonological and morphological rules, syntactical relationships); b) specific background knowledge such as memory, particular experiences of other texts, and of previous excerpts within the same text; c) generic background knowledge including schemata[2], cultural models,

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[2] Schema is a pre-existing knowledge structure in memory depicting the usual expected patterns of things.

scripts[3] and stereotypes and d) pragmatic context (the author, setting, the purpose of the verbal exchange).

In cinematic texts, all these elements are crucial as well, although their nature may be somewhat dissimilar. The text may also involve a greater deal of extra linguistic elements such as colors, contrasts, objects, and soundtrack. Background knowledge in both verbal and visual comprehension varies considerably, including not merely everyday knowledge but also knowledge associated with the medium and narrative conventions. For instance, there appears to be some sort of expected schema involved in understanding and appreciating genre films such as westerns and detective stories. In motion pictures, the pragmatic context may guide and constrain inferential processes if the viewers are exposed to the reasons why a given director chose to make a certain film (perhaps by means of movie previews and interviews).

Other factors that may be responsible for generating inferences in both narrative texts and cinematic ones are: the goals and purposes of the readers/viewers, coherence, discourse analysis which entails the construction of mental representations (though in movies, processes of perceptual psychology may be of crucial relevance for inferring the facial expression of a character and spatial relations between objects within the frame), and situational models manifesting characters´ mental states such as perceptions, desires, emotions, thoughts, and reactions (despite the fact that in cinema, the ability for inferring bodily cues and gestures may be greatly desirable).

3 *MIGHTY APHRODITE:* AN OVERVIEW

Mighty Aphrodite[4] is a pleasant fable about the celebration of existence. The cinematic text leads viewers to infer that life, instead of being a tragedy impregnated by impending catastrophes, is far more like a comedy, focused on the hilarious paths one pursues to fulfill their own desires.

The film opens in an amphitheater in Greece (actually the scene was shot in a Greek-like theater in Taormina, Sicily), with an appropriately dressed Greek chorus evoking the tragic fates of Achilles, Oedipus and Medea. Then, unexpectedly, the

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[3] Script is a pre-existing knowledge structure for interpreting sequences of specific events.
[4] *Mighty Aphrodite*, written and directed by Woody Allen. Miramax and Sweetland Films, USA, 1995.

masked chorus decides to switch to the tale of Lenny Weinrib (Woody Allen), a sports journalist whose name offers no connections to classical Greek mythology.

The story begins with Lenny and his wife Amanda Sloan (Helena Bonham Carter) discussing adoption. Lenny does not want a child, but Amanda does, in spite of her unwillingness in taking a year off from her work to have a baby the normal way. Eventually, Amanda manages to make her will prevail and the couple adopts a healthy male infant, whom they name Max. As the child (Jimmy McQuaid) grows and Amanda becomes more involved in her attempts to succeed at her own art gallery (even by allowing the advantageous romantic advances of Jerry Bender (Peter Weller) to progress), Lenny, apparently inspired by his son's wittiness and brilliance and, possibly, subconsciously moved by the knowledge that his wife is drifting away from him, decides to find out more about Max's biological mother. After perpetrating the illegal action of sneaking a peek at classified information from the adoption agency files, and making use of the underworld connections entitled by his job, he ends up meeting the multi-pseudonymous Linda Ash (Mira Sorvino). To his amazement, the mother of his son turns out to be a porn actress and hustler, whose lack of sexual inhibitions and bird-brained limitations make him feel appalled and apprehensive. Hence, he is determined to rehabilitate Linda by changing her life. In the process, he becomes the young woman's tutor (guiding and showing her the possibilities of a better life), professional counselor (instigating her to follow a hairdressing career), unintended protector (by freeing her from the binding influence of her pimp - Dan Moran), matchmaker (by introducing a dopey boxer named Kevin - Michael Rapaport), and, for once, her bed partner (unknowingly impregnating her).

The storyline takes place in Manhattan in contemporary times. The most original element of *Mighty Aphrodite* is undoubtedly the use of the Greek chorus led by F. Murray Abraham, who provides the voice narration. Apart from the narrative, the role of the chorus is to comment on the plot without ever directly entering it. Bailey (2001) asserts that the role of the chorus in Greek tragedy is to meditate on humanity itself, so that great truths from human experience may be derived and lessons of wisdom may be imparted. Thus, the chorus members comprising figures not only borrowed from *Oedipus King*, but also taken from *Agamemnon*, keep on making pithy remarks, admonishing Lenny Weinrib against his tragic downfall, if he dares persevere on his obsessively hubristic endeavor of altering Linda's fate. According to Bailey (2001:218), the presence of the chorus provides evidence that "Lenny's Greek

interlocutors are projections of his own incipient fatalism". Instead of being tragic admonitions foreseen by divine oracles, both Cassandra (Danielle Ferland) and Tiresias´ (Jack Warden) warnings work as the voices of Lenny's psyche. Similarly, the choral leader stands for an expression of Lenny's heart and mind, either functioning as the character's consciousness of the morality involved in his acts and motives, or gradually acquiescing to his innermost desires by providing more reasonable alternatives of action.

Lenny is clearly evinced as a prototypical personification of Woody Allen. According to Fox (1996), the character "reverts, to some extent, to the archetypal 'loser' figure of Allen's earliest comedies: the blustering yet unconfident romantic, the little man with great hopes but undefined aspirations, modest in stature and with ineffably middle brow tastes". Lee (2002) argues that Lenny is a man who feels more at home with the characters he meets in a gym than when surrounded by the artsy wealthy crowd that Amanda gets herself wrapped up with. Such proletarian tastes are probably a reminiscence of Allen's middle class upbringing in Brooklyn. In *Mighty Aphrodite*, just like in many of his movies, the character portrayed by Woody Allen is devoted into improving the intellectual pursuits of his female counterpart. Although the theme of Pygmalion is somewhat appropriate as far as Linda is concerned, it is not applicable to Lenny's wife Amanda. Bailey (2001) professes that Lenny is clearly upset by Amanda's superior growth, which invariably leads her to drift away from him. In accordance with Lee (2002), it appears that Lenny's motivation to remold Linda actually springs from his desire to regain control of his world by dominating someone who is intellectually, socially and economically inferior to him; someone that poses no threat to his inherent superiority. Fox (1996:255) says that, on the whole, Lenny Weinrib stands for "a Woody Allen in familiar guise, the comic counterbalance of erudition, romanticism, self-deflation, proudly worn neuroses and generosity of spirit".

Bailey (2001:219) asserts that "Amanda is certainly depicted as one of the least sympathetic wives of an Allen protagonist". She is self-centered, secretive and success-oriented. She is usually shot wearing dark outfits, with her hair obscuring her face, so that her visual image may incite viewers to intuit the secretiveness and concealment that lie behind her real motivations. Stassinopoulos and Beny (1983) point out that such sort of women are personifications of Athena, living out the Greek goddess´ dark side. Such women, totally dominated by their heads, turn their generous love feelings into coldness, aloofness and self-righteousness. By being stubbornly self-sufficient, they run

away from any relationship that threatens to disturb their boundaries and aspirations. In *The Gods of Greece* (1983), the authors predicate that the recognition of the psychological forces personified in the Greek gods may represent universal images that compel us to attune to the 'mythic' unity: the pattern and wholeness underlying the fragmentary moments, decisions and events of everyday life. They also suggest that the myths of the gods, through the conflicts and resolutions that they portray, may cast an added dimension of depth and significance to our experiences.

Following this line, Linda is depicted in the movie as the living personification of the goddess Aphrodite. Stassinopoulos and Beny (1983:78) declare that Aphrodite "stirs yearnings more visceral and more consuming than any other god". She embodies sexuality free of ambivalence, anxieties and self-consciousness. In this sense, Linda Ash is just like the goddess of love and passion; she relishes her sexuality with neither shame nor regret, being proud of holding exclusive rights to the name '*Judy Cum*' and participating in evocative film productions such as '*Snatch Happy*' and '*The Enchanted Pussy*'. In spite of Linda's strong erotic presence, she possesses very little in the way of intellect, talent or class. She repeatedly misconstrues what the others say, and the combination of her high-pitched, flatly uninflected voice with her skin-tight dresses and sweaters, from which she is imminently ready to erupt, help to account for many of the hilarious moments that are found throughout her scenes.

A diversified range of themes may be spotted in this cinematic text:

(1) The issue of free will versus determinism. Lee (2002) asserts that the presence of the Greek chorus, commonly used in classical tragedy, insinuates that the story will follow a predetermined path in which fate will punish those who have dared to commit hubris, but in the end, happiness prevails.

(2) The human capacity for changing. Linda Ash ends up rehabilitated and happy; Lenny's relationship with Amanda is finally reinvigorated; the chorus winds up changing from bearers of tragic knowledge into a lively singing and dancing team.

(3) Irony of life. Linda does not have the slightest clue that Lenny's adopted son is in fact her own, while Lenny is unaware that the girl he finds Linda with at FAO Schwartz years later, is his daughter.

(4) Heredity is not a determinant of character or innate characteristics. Max is endowed with great intelligence in spite of his biological mother's stupidity. Linda's good character goes against the 'slugs and lowlifes' that make up her ancestry. Linda's daughter is beautiful despite the fact Lenny is not.

(5) Dealing with other people's problems is easier than dealing with our own. Lenny feels better prepared to help Linda change her life than he feels able to resolve his marital problems with Amanda.

In addition to all the previous elements present in this cinematic text, there is a significant number of Allenesque allusions comprised in it, referring to a diversified range of specific background knowledge such as:

(1) Psychoanalytic theory: Oedipus complex, implying that the Greek family acted out of their psychic necessities and the title *Mighty Aphrodite,* referring to the stereotyped psychological force that drives Linda Ash's character.

(2) Mythology: alluding to Achilles, Oedipus, Zeus, Aphrodite, inter alia.

(3) Music: allusions to Cole Porter and Django Reinhardt.

(4) American Cinema: the Marx Brothers, famous comedians of the 1930s and 40s (especially Groucho and Harpo). Broderick Crawford, an American actor specialized in playing tough characters in the 1940s and 50s.

(5) Sports: the Nicks (a famous New York baseball team). Sugar Ray Leonard (a well-known American boxer).

(6) American trivia: Chanel (referring to the famous fashion store in 5th Avenue, Manhattan). FAO Schwartz (the largest and most sophisticated toy store in New York City).

The complexity of all the previously mentioned motifs and characters´ insights present in this comedy, allied with the pragmatic context specified by Woody Allen, the setting and the purpose of the verbal exchanges, will model the analysis of *Mighty Aphrodite* by means of Relevance Theory in the ensuing section.

4 THE ANALYSIS OF *MIGHTY APHRODITE*

For carrying out the current analysis, a synthesized version of the cinematic text is going to be reported in accordance with the chapter division comprised in its DVD form, struggling to preserve all the necessary elements that account for the original pragmatic context specified by Woody Allen. Concurrently, relevant sentences are going to be literally transcribed and scrutinized by means of a sketchy application of the Relevance Theory, so that their explicit and/or implicit contents might be more

thoroughly perceived and attended to, aiming at recovering the possible intended meaning conveyed by the author.

Chapter I - The movie opens in a Greek-like theater where a chorus comes up and starts evoking the tragic fates of Achilles, Oedipus and Medea. Then, the leader of the chorus utters: '*for to understand the ways of the heart is to grasp as clearly the malice or ineptitude of the gods who, in their vain and clumsy labors to create a flawless surrogate, have left mankind but dazed and incomplete*'. The linguistic decoding of this sentence inside the given context may lead viewers to infer that the deities on the Olympus did a bad job in basing the creation of man upon their divine image and similitude, without granting these poor substitutes the power to appease or subdue all of their innermost desires. Hence, this sentence implies the understanding that man's desires are usually in contradiction with the moral parameters dictated by their consciences, leaving mankind confused and imperfect, for not being able to fully deal with this conflicting dichotomy.

Then, the chorus switches the conversation to the tale of a sportswriter named Lenny Weinrib, asserting it is '*a story as Greek and timeless as fate itself*'. Such a remark may intentionally lead the viewers to ignite their encyclopedic knowledge as to the events typically depicted in Greek tragedy, and presuppose that Lenny's story will end up as disastrously as those classical tales did. On the other hand, if viewers are aware the cinematic text is a comedy, the sort of schema involved in the genre will probably constrain them to make such tragic presuppositions.

Next scene shows Lenny and his wife Amanda having dinner with their friends Bud (Steven Randazzo) and his pregnant wife Ellie (J. Smith-Cameron). Amanda, who works in an art gallery, mentions she would like to have a baby in spite of Lenny's objections. Lenny utters: '*when we first met, she didn´t like the beach; she hated the Hamptons; she didn´t want to have kids, and she loved the Upper East Side; suddenly, she's making noise about having a kid and moving to Tribeca*'. The combination of linguistic decoding with the context will guide viewers to explicitly infer that Amanda's tastes and desires have changed since she initially met Lenny. Specific background knowledge may be required to trigger the implied contextual clues that the story takes place in Manhattan, that the Hamptons is an amalgam of trendy seaside resorts not very far from the city; that the Upper East Side refers to a respectable residential area

uptown, and that Tribeca is a fashionable artsy neighborhood located downtown, Manhattan.

The conversation progresses and Amanda says she is not willing to take a year off from her work, suggesting the two of them should adopt a baby. To that, Bud replies: *'I´d be afraid that I might get a bad seed'*. The linguistic decoding within the context makes viewers infer that Bud thinks an adopted baby might carry bad genes that, on the long run, may predispose this individual into becoming a dangerous person such as a killer, implicitly hinting the theory that heredity determines a person's personality.

Next scene shows the Greek chorus united once again, with Laius briefly recounting the tragedy that befell upon his wife Jocasta and himself, for not getting rid of their son Oedipus once and for all. The Sophoclean tragedy of *Oedipus King* may incite viewers to infer that the tragic fate of Laius (being murdered by his son Oedipus) may be somehow related to the fate of Lenny Weinrib, if he agrees on adopting a child. Later on, after the viewers have had access to the fact that Lenny Weinrib is the only character who actually sees and interacts with the chorus, they may infer that the Greek chorus is actually a projection of Lenny's psyche; a projection of his own straightforward fatalism.

Soon after that, the chorus utters: *'And why a child now, out of left field? One hopes it's not to fill some growing void in their marriage'*. The ostensive stimuli comprised in these utterances make viewers pay attention to the lexical choice 'out of left field', denoting a baseball move; and connoting an action or idea that apparently seems to pop up out of nowhere. By linguistically decoding the utterances and igniting inferential processes of pragmatic nature, viewers may come to the conclusion that there may be something wrong in Lenny and Amanda's marriage. Right after that, the chorus utters that *'children are serious stuff'*, reminding the viewers that Oedipus killed his father and slept with his mother. To this remark, Jocasta utters: *'I hate to tell you what they call my son in Harlem'*. The purpose of this utterance is to be amusing; viewers may grasp the double entendre implicitly comprised within it: the derogatory slang expression 'motherfucker', commonly used by the Afro-American community (expounding the reference to Harlem), though not exclusively, connoting a despicable person, and its literal meaning that indicates a man who fornicates with his own mother.

The chapter ends with Lenny talking to Amanda on the phone. Amanda tells him she has found a healthy boy, who is one-day old. She wants them to adopt him right away, but Lenny says he has got to put his foot down and say no.

Chapter II – The first scene starts with Lenny drooling over his adopted son, leading viewers to infer that Amanda usually manages to get what she is after. Then, the couple decides to come up with a suitable name for the boy. Lenny says he would like to name him after one of his heroes, and in the process, he proposes several names such as Groucho, Django, Sugar Ray, Cole, Harpo, Earl the Pearl, Shane and Thelonius, while Amanda suggests the names Phineas and Holden before contemplating the name Max, which both of them agree upon. For unadvised viewers, making sense of the allusions comprised in the previously mentioned scene may not represent an impediment that hinders the comprehension process, for the scene clearly activates a script depicting parents choosing an appropriate name for a baby that reflects their own personal preferences. Nevertheless, for the viewers who are familiar with Allen's work, new contextual implications may be attained if they are able to connect their previous knowledge to the situational one comprised in the context. Thus, by knowing that the names Groucho and Harpo allude to the Marx Brothers, Sugar Ray to the boxer Sugar Ray Leonard, Earl the Pearl to the worshipped American basketball player Earl "the pearl" Monroe, Cole to the American composer Cole Porter, Django to the guitar player Django Reinhardt, Thelonius to the jazz composer and pianist Thelonius Sphere Monk, and Shane to the classical western *Shane* (1953), with Alan Ladd on the title role, portraying a weary gunfighter (thus providing a sensible explanation for Amanda's utterance: *'you wouldn´t want a supreme court justice called Shane'*), viewers may infer that Lenny has more middle brow tastes, predominantly related to pop culture. On the other hand, Amanda's tastes reflect a higher intellectual pursuit, being more closely connected to erudition, here represented by the names Holden, a direct allusion to Holden Caulfield, the main character in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and the name Phineas, referring to Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, one of the founders of the XIX century philosophical movement entitled *New Thought*. Such a contrast in terms of Lenny's and Amanda's tastes, may also lead viewers to infer new motives that can account for a possible void in their marriage.

Chapter III – Time moves on and it is Max's second birthday. Amanda and her parents (Donald Symington and Claire Bloom) are amazed at Max's developed abilities, possibly directing viewers to infer that the name Max alludes to the noun and adjective 'maximum'. Then, Lenny comes in and showers the boy with presents, inducing viewers to draw inferences as to the appropriateness of such gifts to a two-year old child as well as to the sort of pampering father that Lenny has become.

In the ensuing scene, Max, who is about five years old, is playing basketball with Lenny. When Lenny asks him if he has ever thought about what he wants to be when he grows up, the boy purposefully shocks his father by saying he would like to be an interior decorator. Such a reply may incite viewers to presuppose Max is really witty and implicitly infer that Lenny's shock is derived from the common stereotyped notion that decorating interiors is a profession that is usually appealing to gay men.

Later on, when the Weinrib family has just moved to Tribeca, Max wonders who is the boss between his father and mother. Lenny retorts he is the boss by saying: *'I´m the boss; mommy is only the decision maker, there is a difference, you know! Mommy says what we do, and I have control of the channel changer'*. Such an ironic answer will guide viewers to explicitly infer that Amanda's will always prevails in all the important decisions, at the same time it provides implicit indications that suggest their marital relationship is no bed of roses.

This chapter concludes when Amanda cancels going out to a theater play with Lenny because she has made other arrangements to have dinner with a wealthy couple that may possibly sponsor her own art gallery.

Chapter IV – In this chapter, Amanda is clearly depicted as a self-centered, career-oriented sort of woman who will not allow her husband to stand in her way. By following up the cinematic text included in this chapter, viewers will explicitly infer that Amanda is getting more and more wrapped up in her attempts to play a major role in the lavish artsy world she so much admires, leaving her husband purposefully behind. There is even a scene, which ostensibly evinces that their sex life is undergoing a dry spell, inducing viewers to implicitly infer that Amanda does not enjoy her husband's touch any longer.

Later on, while Lenny is talking to his pal Bud, he remembers seeing a young couple walking down the streets of Manhattan, whom reminded him of those bygone times when he was happy with Amanda. He also mentions that it was the first time that

any of those thoughts had made him feel nervous. All these contextual indications will invariably lead viewers to implicitly infer that Lenny's marriage is about to reach rock bottom, and that he is gradually becoming aware of it.

The chapter ends with Lenny beginning to wonder about the kind of terrific woman that Max's biological mother must be, influencing viewers to anticipate that the storyline will unfold into a newer direction.

Chapter V – The chapter starts with the sound of a menacing thunder that will presumably lead the viewers to infer it as an omen forestalling disaster. Right after that, Lenny appears before the chorus in the Greek-like amphitheater, where these projections of Lenny's mind advise him to let sleeping dogs lie.

Next scene shows Lenny at the adoption agency, trying to persuade the lady in charge to let him know who Max's mother is. By taking advantage of a brief moment when the lady has to leave her office, Lenny manages to sneak a peak at the classified files and finds out the name and address of Max's actual mother. Then, he follows the woman's trail to Pennsylvania just to discover that she has changed her name from Leslie Wright to Leslie St. James and has moved back to New York. Aided by the underworld connections that his job entitles him to, Lenny finally gets to know that Max's mom is currently working as a porn actress and hustler, under the name of Linda Ash.

Chapter VI – This chapter starts with Lenny and Amanda driving to the Hamptons where they are expected by their host Jerry Bender. Lenny feels very uncomfortable about going to Bender's, categorically stating that he keeps on staring at Amanda, mentally undressing her. To his remark, Amanda replies: *'your paranoia is rivaled in history only by Joseph Stalin'*. Such an utterance may incite viewers to activate their encyclopedic knowledge and infer that Lenny might just be as obsessed about making mountains out of molehills as Stalin was determined in preventing capitalism from infiltrating the Soviet Union.

Next scene shows Jerry Bender ogling at Amanda, followed by a close shot focusing on Lenny's apoplectic face. Such a facial expression will foment viewers to infer how discomfited Lenny is about being a guest at Bender's place. Then, as soon as Lenny leaves to make a phone call, Jerry starts to hit on Amanda in a very forward fashion, without her showing any signs of discouragement or embarrassment to such

insidious advances. The aforementioned contextual clues may incline viewers to infer that Amanda is actually fostering Jerry's advances to proceed, though it is not apparent whether she likes him or not, leading viewers to conjecture about her potential motivations.

Meanwhile, Lenny discovers Linda's whereabouts and starts having serious thoughts about meeting her.

Chapter VII – Lenny calls Linda and proposes to meet her at the Plaza, on 59th street, to what the choral leader intervenes, suggesting a more discrete place. Such interference may also guide the viewers to assume that the leader of the chorus may de facto represent a projection of Lenny's mind, a type of superego or conscience that instills Lenny to act carefully. Additionally, by knowing the Plaza is a first-rate hotel in Manhattan and that Linda is a prostitute, viewers may automatically infer the social inappropriateness of such a rendezvous, let alone for a married man. Thereupon, after telling her that his name is Lenny Guildersleeve (a probable allusion to an Australian footballer, virtually unknown in America, apart from sports enthusiasts), he sets a date at her place.

In the next scene, viewers are introduced to Linda's cheesy apartment, fully ornate with artifacts directly alluding to intercourse. Lenny clearly feels startled and horrified by realizing how thickheaded Linda is and how inaccurate his expectations about her had been. Later on, after being questioned about his health, Lenny mentions he does not work out religiously, to what Linda replies *'Oh, I´m not religious either. Mostly my folks were Episcopalian'*. Such a funny remark will direct viewers to infer how intellectually limited Linda is, by explicitly manifesting her misunderstanding about the figurative meaning of the lexical item 'religiously', contextually referring to sports practice rather than devotion creeds.

Their conversation moves on and Lenny is able to further his knowledge about Linda's unrepressed sexuality and her equivocal aspiration of becoming a Broadway star. Then, due to his precocious attempt to show her how she is wasting her life away, and by tacitly reproaching her way of life, Linda gets annoyed at his intrusive observations and turns him away.

Chapter VIII – After a series of unfortunate efforts to regain Linda's trust, Lenny finally persuades her to have lunch with him at a restaurant in Times Square.

In the restaurant, Linda starts telling him about the joyless tales of her past. Lenny gets to know that Linda's father was a drug pusher, car thief and pickpocket who had finally been arrested for mail fraud. She also tells him about an uncle who was sentenced to life imprisonment for being a serial rapist, and that the rest of her family was mostly composed of slugs and lowlifes. Such evidences will also corroborate the assumption that heredity does not determine an individual's personality, and will possibly guide the viewers to infer that the environment in which Linda was brought up may have mustered a highly influential effect in narrowing down her options for a better life.

After telling Lenny about her woeful family, Linda goes on disclosing facts about her unlucky life, and how she ended up in sex movies. By then she utters: *'So there I am on the first day, on the set, and there is this guy fucking me from behind, and there's these two huge guys dressed like cops in my mouth at the same time, and I remember thinking to myself, I like acting. I want to study'*. These utterances will drive the viewers to pay attention at the character's lexical choices and the sort of hard-core imagery her statements generate in one's mind. Such ostensive stimuli will disturb the viewers´ cognitive environments, triggering assumptions as to the bizarre conclusion the character got to. In the process, a great number of feasible inferences may be drawn as to the insights into the character's mind: 1) the shocking naturalness Linda depicts the scene; (2) her lack of sexual inhibitions; (3) her incongruent capacity of removing her thoughts from the physical performance and directing them to the art of acting, (4) her unawareness of the biased opinions her statement may entail on others, among several other possibilities.

Then, Lenny invites her to join him on a work assignment and they go to the horse races. While in the hippodrome, Linda bets on a horse and gets upset when it loses, stating that she never wins anything in her life, and that she would like to have impressed Lenny. To her frustrating remark, he tranquilizes her by flattering her. He mentions she is attractive and vigorous, and is obviously a state-of-the-art fellatrix. Lenny's last choice of lexical items may induce the viewers to wonder whether he is actually praising or insulting her, for Linda, manifestly, does not understand those words. Such a sarcastic use of lexical choices shrouds the actual meaning intended by the character, but by taking into account the contextual setting and the purpose of the verbal exchange, viewers may get to the conclusion that Lenny really likes her, in spite of thinking she is doing something really stupid with her life.

The scene advances and they end up having a great time together. When Lenny finally drops Linda home she tells him: *'I feel I owe you a great fuck'*. The contextual decoding of this utterance may conduct viewers to infer that this is the only compensating way Linda can conceive of for the wonderful time she has had with him. This indication may also guide the viewers to assume Linda really likes Lenny and anticipate that a love affair is on the rise.

Chapter IX - The chapter commences with a party celebrating Amanda's parents´ 35th wedding anniversary, where Lenny accidentally learns from Amanda's mother that his wife is opening her own art gallery. From such evident lack of communication between husband and wife, viewers will strengthen their supposition about the deteriorating status of their connubial relationship.

Later on, Lenny intensifies his attempts into improving Linda's life by instigating her to take up a hairdressing career and find a decent guy to start a family with. Such pieces of evidences may induce viewers to rule out the assumption about a possible romantic involvement between the two of them.

Then, unexpectedly, Linda admits that she did have a son once. She goes on telling him how sorry she feels about giving him up for adoption, and by mentioning her son's father could have been anyone out of a hundred different men, she recounts the financial and emotional motives that had led her into making this decision. After pouring out her heart to Lenny, she asks him to show her a picture of Max. Through the association of the situational knowledge comprised within the context, viewers may speculate whether Linda will wind up discovering that Max is actually her own son, or if she will somehow be reunited with him again.

Next scene, the chorus comes up declaring that what Lenny is trying to do with Linda makes up hubris, warning him to repent, while Cassandra prophesizes physical danger coming up his way. By activating their encyclopedic knowledge about Greek mythology, viewers might be reminded that Cassandra's prophesies (as Apollo's punishment) were never to be taken seriously by the mortals. Consequently, viewers may predict that Lenny is going to disregard her warnings and get involved in some kind of perilous yet comic situation.

Chapter X - The chapter begins with Linda going to Lenny's office to plead for help. She tells him that Ricky, her business manager, has been threatening to kill both

of them if she walks out on being a hooker. Despite Lenny's dismay, he ends up agreeing on trying to convince Ricky to let her go.

Next scene takes place at Ricky's joint, where Lenny feels rather intimidated by the thought of confronting him. Their conversation proceeds badly and Ricky utterly asserts he is unwilling to allow Linda to go. After being physically menaced by Ricky, Lenny manages to make a deal by offering him hard to get courtside seats to the Knicks´ game. Such an easy way to settle down the matter once and for all may lead the viewers to trigger a cultural model that evinces how passionate New Yorkers may be on their worship about the Knicks (the most famous baseball team in New York).

The chapter concludes with Lenny dropping by for a visit at Linda's. She thanks him for freeing her from Ricky and gives him a bright-colored tie. By paying attention at Lenny's facial response while gazing at the tie as well as his sober way of dressing, viewers may infer how inappropriate Linda's gift is and how Linda's tastes reflect a lack of refinement.

Chapter XI - This chapter deals with Lenny's hubristic endeavors of finding a suitable mate for Linda. While talking to a boxing trainer, Lenny is introduced to Kevin, a blockhead boxer who aspires to quit boxing and move upstate to become an onion farmer. Lenny also learns that Kevin has recently had his heart broken by a girl who had ripped him off of all his dough.

Later on, Lenny manages to ignite Kevin's interest in Linda by telling him she is a beautiful girl with strict moral standards, who would really enjoy meeting him. At the same time, he persuades Linda to meet Kevin and to omit the details about her formerly recent life. Lenny does also convince Linda to have her hair done in a distinct style and takes her shopping at Chanel's, so that she may cause a really good impression on Kevin. Such ostensive lies might guide the viewers to foresee that sooner or later Kevin will end up finding out the truth about Linda, and draw inferences as to the probable reactions he will have when exposed to it.

Next scene takes place at Central Park, where Lenny finally introduces Kevin to Linda. Then, before leaving, he dismisses Kevin and Linda's claims for the three of them to go out somewhere by mentioning he is completely superfluous. To Lenny's remark, Kevin wonders if he is not feeling good, inducing Lenny to explain to him that being superfluous means being unnecessary. The linguistic decoding of Lenny's utterance, intertwined with the context, will lead viewers to explicitly infer that Kevin

has problems grasping the meaning of what the others say, and strengthen the supposition about his limited intellectual abilities.

Then, after Lenny is gone, Kevin and Linda start strolling around while the chorus appears on the background and begins to sing Cole Porter's romantic song *'You do something to me'*. As a consequence, the mood generated by the cinematic context is meant to guide the viewers to infer that Kevin and Linda's affectionate involvement may develop, being especially corroborated by the fact that their rather restricted intellects are surprisingly compatible.

The couple goes to a restaurant where they get to know more about one another. Kevin tells her that he would like to meet an old-fashioned girl who devotes her life to him, whereas Linda tells him she would like to find a nice guy who treats her nicely and takes good care of her. Then, Kevin talks about his dream: *'I´m in a field and, like, this hawk comes, and picks me up in its beak, and then flies me like all over the world, right? So I see everything! And then like it flies me out of the country, and like we got up to the North Pole and it drops me in the snow; I´m just lying there naked'*. Kevin's utterances might instill viewers who are familiar with Greek mythology to activate their encyclopedic knowledge and connect his strange dream with the myth of the harpies (monstrous bird-like women who seized people and things on their claws, and flew them away for later devouring them). By means of associating previous information (Kevin's heart was broken by a girl who had ripped him off of his money) with newer ones (the harpies´ myth entailed by his dream), viewers may be enlightened with psychological inferences that may support an assumption about Kevin feeling unconsciously attracted to predatory women, who will invariably lead him to feel defenseless and lost. Moreover, by following up this psychological way of reasoning, and combining it with the contextual clues, viewers may also infer that Kevin will wind up having his heart broken by Linda.

The chapter closes with Kevin telling Linda he would like to see her again.

Chapter XII - The chapter begins with Tiresias, the blind seer of Thebes (according to Sophocles´ tragedy), taking on the updated guise of a blind bummer on the streets of Manhattan. Lenny walks by and he informs him that Amanda is undoubtedly having an affair with Jerry Bender, supplying him with an accurate description of all the sordid details. Then, Tiresias utters: *'Something you don´t want to know, but you had to be blind not to see'*. From the linguistic decoding of this ironic

utterance, along with the context, viewers may infer that Tiresias´ warnings are indeed insights from Lenny's psyche that tell him to do something about his marriage, before it gets too late. This view may be endorsed subsequently when Lenny goes home and confronts his wife.

At home, Amanda confesses she has cheated on her husband, telling him things have changed between them, and she also adds she does not know whether she is in love with Jerry. After listening to what his wife has just told him, Lenny decides to go out.

On his way to Linda's apartment, Lenny bumps into Kevin who is obviously feeling upset. He tells Lenny that he has just hit Linda, after finding out everything about her past. Then, before leaving, he reveals his displeasure by asking Lenny why he had set him up with a prostitute. Kevin's remarks instigate viewers to infer that he is unable to let go of Linda's past, setting grounds for an evident assumption about his biased way of thinking.

The chapter concludes with Lenny and Linda coming to the conclusion they are a couple of losers, just before they end up making love. Viewers may be inclined to infer that their lovemaking was motivated out of the development of the latest unlucky events as well as their utmost feeling of loneliness.

Chapter XIII - This final chapter begins with Lenny talking to the masked chorus and telling them he misses Amanda. Suddenly his wife appears and the chorus switches their tragic masks to their comic ones. It is a clear sign that will lead the viewers to infer that something good is about to happen.

Right after that, Amanda tells Lenny that she loves him and that she is really sorry for having hurt him so much. Meanwhile, the camera focuses on Linda's sad face, as she is driving back from Kevin's hometown (she went there to ask him to take her back, but to no avail). Then, out of the blue, she sees a helicopter pilot in trouble descending near her. She gives him a ride and they fall in love. Linda's happy end may lead the viewers to presuppose a deus ex machina intervening favorably over the fates of the chosen ones. Such divine intervention may also induce the viewers to wonder about how predetermined life may appear to be.

Then, before the film reaches its end, Tiresias discloses to the chorus that on the night Lenny and Linda made love, she ended up conceiving a baby girl, and for not wanting to mess up Lenny's life with Amanda, she decided never to reveal it. Tiresias

also mentions that Lenny had never seen Linda again until, one fall day in New York, they happened to meet at FAO Schwartz with their children. It was a brief moment, but they were really happy to see one another. To this, the chorus utters: *'Isn´t life ironic?'* and the choral leader replies: *'Life is unbelievable, miraculous, sad, wonderful'*. And then, the chorus starts to sing *'When you´re smiling, the whole world smiles with you'*, *'When you´re laughing, the sun keeps shining through'*, *'But when you´re crying, you bring on the rain'*, *'So stop your sighing'*, *'be happy again, keep on smiling'*, *'Cause when you´re smiling, the whole world smiles with you'*. Such an epilogue will possibly predispose the viewers to infer that besides the ironic theme, the cinematic text intends to convey the message that life is always worth celebrating, independently of how sad or comic it may appear to be.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present research has tried to evince that the inferential model encompassed in RT appears to furnish rational means for explaining how contextual indications and the encoded meaning of utterances are woven together to yield pragmatic-cognitive processes that seem to be paramount in the comprehension of communicative acts.

Relevance has been defined as a property of inputs connected to contextual information in the addressee's mind (through the activation of their encyclopedic, lexical and logical knowledge), so that feasible assumptions may be inferred as to the communicator's informative intentions. Such inferential paradigm, described as a data processing mechanism that handles both linguistic and extra linguistic sources, seems to take place whenever ostensive inputs from the communicator are able to capture the addressee's attention, inciting them to make use of the least effort strategy in deciding what the probable intended meaning is. As a consequence, the more a hearer/reader can predict and relate, the smaller the effort to recover information is, hence optimizing comprehension.

Then, after outlining the scope of RT, an attempt to establish the similarity between literary texts and cinematic ones took its course by specifying the most crucial elements that foment inference generation in both types of texts. As a conclusion, linguistic constituents of the text as well as their morpho-syntactical relationships,

specific and generic background knowledge, and the pragmatic context appeared to be the most influential factors to be taken into account.

Eventually, the guiding principles of RT were determined as the analytical tool for interpreting *Mighty Aphrodite*, written and directed by Woody Allen. In its analysis, the wide range of different stimuli subsumed in the text, the setting and the purpose of the verbal exchanges were submitted as the input database for attaining its optimal relevance. In the process, the sequencing of events depicted in the movie as well as the scrutinizing of some of its linguistic excerpts have led to the generation of a plethora of inferences, that may account for a logical interpretation of the intended meaning proposed by the author, concurrently demonstrating how dependent the overall comic effect is on the appropriate decoding patterns the viewers are likely to make.

Unfortunately, to assert the full recovery of Woody Allen's intentions, in writing and directing *Mighty Aphrodite*, would seem to be pretentious as well as untrue, since the duplication of thoughts between the viewers and the author goes beyond the scope of RT. In fact, a thorough retrieval of the author's intentions would imply the capacity of reading his mind, something that our scientific means cannot conceive of. A more coherent alternative would be to propose that the current analysis has indicated that the more moviegoers are able to connect new information with previous ones, the smaller their effort to attain comprehension will be, independently of how identical, similar or dissimilar to the director's intentions such interpretations may be.

The film analysis has also suggested that the viewers´ interpretation process may be hindered, or at least curtailed, if they are either unable to make sense out of the subtle indications implied by the contextual model proposed by Woody Allen, or if they are unfamiliar with his unique way of presenting his views about the role and pursues of man in the world. In this way, the effort required from the viewers might be too strenuous or frustrating to yield positive cognitive effects, setting grounds for a reasonable explanation of why Woody Allen's movies are usually labeled as box office poison, influencing American and Latin American audiences to appraise them negatively, or even avoid watching the work of this most European of American filmmakers.

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Abstract: Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory is a cognitive approach to pragmatics that envisages inference as the central element responsible for bridging the gap between encoded meaning and utterance interpretation within a context. The present study attempts to suggest the applicability of the Relevance theoretical framework for analyzing and interpreting Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite.* Findings seem to corroborate that Relevance Theory is an insightful pragmatic resource for recovering an author's intentions, offering plausible explanations of how communicative meaning is mentally processed by the viewers. Implications of the findings are also proposed.
Key words: Relevance Theory; inference; pragmatics; cognition.

Resumo: A Teoria da Relevância de Sperber e Wilson constitui uma abordagem cognitiva à pragmática que considera as inferências como os elementos fundamentais para possibilitar a interação entre o significado codificado e a interpretação de uma sentença contextualizada. O presente estudo sugere a aplicabilidade do arcabouço teórico da Relevância para a análise e interpretação de *Poderosa Afrodite* de Woody Allen. Os resultados parecem corroborar que a Teoria da Relevância seja um recurso pragmático sagaz no tocante à recuperação das intenções de um autor, oferecendo explicações plausíveis sobre como o significado comunicativo é mentalmente processado pelos expectadores. Implicações dos resultados também são propostas.
Palavras chave: Teoria da Relevância; inferência; pragmática; cognição.