

INFLUENCE

Bishop, Lowell, sure, but also
Mingus, Hawking, Jung,
and then, too, I heard Woody Allen
this morning confess to this
interior debate he's had for years

about two types of films and which
is more satisfying: movies
that tackle existential questions –
God: *where?* Suffering: *why?*
– or those pure escapist flicks

(*Everyone Says I Love You*, maybe,
or certainly *Bananas*), and Allen says
the former, because they are,
in the critical eye, respectable,
are often a serious *temptation* –

his word – which I, half listening,
daydream-hitched to Eve
and the apple and thought
how language molds us in its image.
Not that I've read much Derrida,

though I confess to stamping
his imprimatur on a few earnest rants
ten years back when, like Foucault's,
his name was ubiquitous as patchouli
and, like patchouli, was almost

always misused. Think *Comedy is tragedy plus time*, Allen Alda's suspect line from *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the masterpiece of Woody Allen's mid-career. There, when Martin Landau's

ophthalmologist-killer stares into the fire (by way of Raskalnikov and Cain), don't we sense what hangs in the balance is what remains unsayable, what waits? Small wonder

most cling to the B-plot: Allen's humbly bumbling documentarian losing Mia Farrow to big wig Alda's unctuous charm. A manageable grief. Funny, even. And this morning,

eighteen years on, Allen said he's come to see that comedy may serve the greater good, if only since — his words — *like air conditioning*, it gives us all a break before we face it.