

PART III

Allen and His Sisters

Cultural Critiques

“Here . . . It’s Not Their Cup of Tea”

Woody Allen’s Melodramatic Tendencies in *Interiors*, *September*, *Another Woman*, and *Alice*

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When Woody Allen first ventured into serious drama with *Interiors* (1978), *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby warned audiences that the film would be a “culture shock” (1978: 1). On the heels of *Annie Hall* (1977) and followed by *Manhattan* (1979), both critically acclaimed, *Interiors* – a brooding film about failed marriage, thwarted ambitions, and frustrated desire – appeared anomalous. Not widely acknowledged at the time beyond Canby, however, *Interiors* brings to the surface the same dark undercurrents of betrayal and despair, and the longing for things lost and a time impossible to regain running through *Manhattan* and *Annie Hall*, respectively – although in those films significantly leavened with humor. *Interiors* is as drained of humor as its characters are drained of vibrancy – all are gazing inward and finding little there to comfort or console, all “emotionally and psychically disconnected from themselves and from one another,” as Canby pointed out (1978: 1).

Commenting on the critical and popular reception of that film and several of his other less than successful dramas, Woody Allen has said of *Interiors*, “it’s not the kind of drama Americans like, particularly”; of *September* (1987), “here in America, it’s not their cup of tea”; and of *Another Woman* (1988) it is “a kind of film which just isn’t popular here” (Björkman 1993: 95, 172, 194). A certain artistic cachet, of course, attaches to work perceived as more appreciated in Europe, with

its implicitly superior sensibilities – an attitude Allen does not shy away from embracing, having remarked, as others have, upon the influence of Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman and of Russian playwright Anton Chekhov on this work. While these influences are certainly worthy of consideration, the powerful presence of melodrama often is mentioned only in passing. Whether or not Allen consciously chose to incorporate, reference, and comment upon aspects of Hollywood melodrama of the past – including the 1930s and 1940s woman’s film and the 1950s domestic melodrama, generic strains he likely absorbed during his own youthful moviegoing – an examination of these underappreciated Allen films through the lens of melodrama and the scholarly work devoted to it opens them to enriched and nuanced readings. With the mainstream cinema demographic defined as decidedly male and creeping ever downward in age (now roughly between the ages of 10 and 25), it seems fair to argue as well that, in their intensive interiority, such strains of melodrama have been less popular in the last three or four decades than they had been with the primarily adult female audiences of their day. To reformulate Allen’s assessment, then, movies of this kind just aren’t that popular *now*.

While scholars and critics have noted Allen’s frequent attention to female characters, placing his work in a coherent feminist framework has proven difficult given his tendency to bracket female desire and ambition within an overarching trajectory of male desire (and angst) – something true of *Annie Hall*, *Manhattan*, *Stardust Memories* (1980), and *Husbands and Wives* (1992), to name a few of the most obvious examples. By contrast, however, *Interiors*, *September*, *Another Woman*, and *Alice* (1990) – the last of which Allen describes as “the comedy version of *Another Woman*” (Björkman 1993: 228) – while all acknowledging that men are an important part of the mix, provide an unwavering and nearly exclusive access to female subjectivity. Like many of his films, these four draw attention to their own construction and theatricality, with Allen’s reflexivity taking on not only a psychological but also a political dimension when viewed in the context of melodrama and its female-specific subcycles. Although critics often characterize Allen as an apolitical filmmaker, his melodramatic tendencies open a portal to the complex interplay of dominant and mildly subversive elements in his work, insofar as women and their positioning within the culture and the cinema are concerned – something we will explore in all four films, with particular attention to *Interiors*.

Woody’s Melodramatic Tendencies

Although the stability of patriarchal authority is a more urgent concern in melodrama of the post-World War II era (with *Mildred Pierce* [1945] as one key example),¹

it plays in equally interesting ways around the edges of all four Allen films. The women in these films are thrown into crises involving identity, whether in the personal, professional, or sexual fulfillment realms. These crises are rooted in “the assumed right of patriarchal authority to confer social and sexual identity” and “the difficulty of subjugating and channeling feminine sexuality according to the passive functions which patriarchy has defined for it; that is, heterosexual monogamy and maternity,” issues David Rodowick identifies as central to 1950s domestic melodrama (1987: 272). Whether through deep-focus shot composition, choreographed long takes, a tracking camera that draws attention to its presence as it scrutinizes or encircles characters, or various elements of mise-en-scène, including occasional stylized performances, Allen’s films ponder the very process of observing and assessing.² Not unlike female characters in the paranoid woman’s film (see Doane 1987a: 123–154), the women in Allen’s films are exceedingly, if not excessively, self-aware, with the mobile camera simultaneously standing in for and offering critical commentary on the gaze of appraisal women are subjected to and can be said to internalize as they negotiate their roles in a largely male-dominated world – and cinema practice. Moreover, momentary departures from reality or from realism in style or substance in the films express the “‘condensation’ of motivation into metaphoric images” that Thomas Elsaesser associates with the family melodrama, which “often works . . . by a displaced emphasis, by substitute acts, by parallel situations and metaphoric connections.” In their focus on middle class American families and in keeping with Freudian dream-work, Allen’s films, like the domestic melodrama, place “stereotyped situations in strange configurations, provoking clashes and ruptures which not only open up new associations but also redistribute . . . emotional energies” (Elsaesser 1987: 59–60). In these films and most reflexively in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), Allen represents what Jeanine Basinger identifies as the paradox of the woman’s film that both “held women in social bondage and released them into a dream of potency and freedom.” In so doing, the films offer commentary on the overall function of the woman’s film, which, according to Basinger, “drew women in with images of what was lacking in their own lives and sent them home reassured that their own lives were the right thing after all” (1993: 6).

Allen does not necessarily offer reassurance. Even when his endings appear to be “happy,” as in *Alice*, to offer resolution as in *Another Woman*, or some degree of closure as in *September* and *Interiors*, rich ambiguities remain that tap into those of the earlier film cycles. At the same time, the ambiguities in Allen’s films undermine or expose the “function” the earlier films may have served (or were intended to serve) within their historical time and place. Allen’s shot composition, for instance, illustrates this double-edged approach. In refraining from intensive use of the close-up, particularly in the context of conventional point of view sequences that are designed to invite viewer identification and empathy, Allen places the viewer at something of an observational, if not an alienating distance. (In this

he probably is correct in his assessment that “here” this sort of approach may not appeal.) While we do become engaged with his characters – their emotional dissatisfactions or distress, their psychological uncertainties or instability, their creative accomplishments or frustrations, their philosophical angst – Allen refrains from positioning viewers in the emotional thrall of these experiences as 1940s “weepies” do, preferring instead to adopt the paradoxical approach of more generalized melodramatic forms that simultaneously distance as they draw in.³

In the ensemble films *Interiors* and *September*, especially, Allen invites viewer identification with multiple points of view, as characteristic of female forms like the soap opera (Williams 1987: 315). The interplay of these multiple perspectives allows both empathy and distance as true of the domestic melodrama, which focuses on “the victim,” but “present[s] all the characters convincingly as victims . . . by emphasizing . . . an emotional dynamic whose correlative is a network of external forces directed oppressively inward,” as Elsaesser observes of Douglas Sirk and Vincente Minnelli (1987: 64). Also like Sirk, Allen creates situations in which “alienation is recognised as a basic condition, fate is secularized into the prison of social conformity and psychological neurosis” – in Allen’s case, the issue often is intellectual conformity – “and the linear trajectory of self-fulfillment so potent in American ideology is twisted into the downward spiral of a self-destructive urge seemingly possessing a whole social class” (Elsaesser 1987: 64–65). Allen’s ensemble narratives are structured around parallel longings and frustrations, “a series of mirror-reflections,” as Elsaesser (1987: 63) describes Minnelli’s 1960 film, *Home from the Hill*, a structure operating, as well, in *Another Woman* and *Alice*, though these films focus more exclusively on a single character.

At the same time, insularity and interiority are defining qualities of Allen’s characters and the worlds they inhabit, as in the family melodrama in which characters

regardless of attempts to break free, constantly look inwards. . . . The characters are, so to speak, each others’ sole referent, there is no world outside to be acted on, no reality that could be defined or assumed unambiguously (Elsaesser 1987: 56).

Allen’s films simultaneously employ a reflexive overlay. While insularity and interiority are very much present, his characters are (or become) hyperaware of their conditions, which they consciously and continuously contemplate yet seem unable to correct or control (at least initially), intensifying the “downward spiral” into deeper levels of entrapping self-involvement. The title of *Interiors* could not be more explicit in announcing this condition. As in the family melodrama (and its literary precursors), Allen’s films present “distinct overtones of spiritual crisis,” with an “emphasis on . . . fissures and ruptures in the fabric of experience” (Elsaesser 1987: 49, 48), a condition also present in the maternal melodrama, another cycle of melodrama that Allen fruitfully references and re-envisions.

Motherhood, Family, and Its Complications: Inscriptions and Revisions of the Family and Maternal Melodramas in *Interiors* and *September*

A woman in her early sixties, Eve (Geraldine Page) is a successful interior decorator (another dimension of the title *Interiors*) who has suffered a breakdown for reasons unnamed. Her husband Arthur (E.G. Marshall) in voiceover explains, “out of nowhere an enormous abyss opened up, and I was staring into a face I didn’t recognize.” The initial breakdown occurred years earlier, and Eve has been in and out of hospitals ever since, the most recent episode prompted by Arthur’s desire for a “trial separation.” As in the family melodrama, “the feeling that there is always more to tell than can be said” permeates *Interiors*, resulting, similarly, in a “consciously elliptical narrative, proceeding often by visually condensing the characters’ motivation into sequences of images which do not seem to advance the plot” (Elsaesser 1987: 53) – a tendency Allen reflexively foregrounds in an opening montage of static images of the family’s Long Island beachfront home that Eve has decorated to perfection.

The elliptical quality of both the film’s content and structure heightens the feeling of a disjointed, not quite real world governed by the “reality of the psyche,” as true of the family melodrama (Elsaesser 1987: 48) – here, the collective psyche of the family: Eve, Arthur, and their three daughters Renata (Diane Keaton) (a successful poet now suffering from writer’s block), Joey (Mary Beth Hurt) (an intelligent woman floundering for self-expression through work that will give her life meaning), and Flynn (Kristin Griffith) (an actress, mainly for television, whose career keeps her away for long periods). Also part of the family are Renata’s husband Frederick (Richard Jordan) (a novelist whose writing fails to earn the critical acclaim Renata’s does, resulting in marital tensions) and Joey’s partner Michael (Sam Waterston) (a political filmmaker whom we first encounter dictating his thoughts on Marx into a tape recorder, with some irony on Allen’s part, given Michael’s bourgeois surroundings in a perfectly designed New York apartment, the creation of Eve as part of her recovery effort – this time from the imbalance Arthur’s departure has caused). The film’s title evokes the insular fabric Eve has woven around her family – the perfectly designed interiors, all spare, cool, and elegantly simple, “an ice palace,” as Arthur describes their world. Perfection in Eve’s art, in her interiors – and the control she exerts over others through it – has eclipsed emotional intimacy and warmth, a condition her daughters now also struggle to negotiate or overcome. The interiors she designs and inhabits are expressive of her “spiritual crisis,” a sickness of spirit arising from her deep-rooted fears (of loss? of abandonment?) – fears with social/ideological roots in the expectations and position demanded of middle class women of Eve’s generation.

September presents us, similarly, with an insular world, though less intensively so – a country home in Vermont, where family, neighbors, and friends gather just before summer’s end, with crisscrossing patterns of desire resulting in “fissure and ruptures” along with “sudden change, reversal and excess,” as true of domestic melodrama (Elsaesser 1987: 48) – all elements present in *Interiors*, as well. Such ruptures in *September* also work to convey the “inevitable mistiming or disphasure constitutive of feminine sexuality in a patriarchal culture” that Mary Ann Doane associates with the woman’s film (1987a: 92) – a situation also present in *Another Woman* and *Alice*. In *September* it is the daughter, not the mother, who has suffered a breakdown. While recovering in Vermont, Lane (Mia Farrow) grows close to her neighbor Howard (Denholm Elliott), a much older widower who falls in love with her. She falls in love with her tenant Peter (Sam Waterston), while Peter falls in love with Lane’s married friend Stephanie (Dianne Wiest), who is there to sort out her feeling that “I just started going through the motions of my life” in regard to both her marriage and her children. Although structured around parallel longings and frustrations, the same “series of mirror-reflections” as in *Interiors*, *September* is more unified in temporality, with strictly linear narrative events that transpire over a period of several days.

Like Joey in *Interiors*, Lane is searching for meaningful work and, also like Joey, she seems completely adrift, having no clear notion about what that work might be. When Howard asks what she will do, Lane replies, “I don’t know. Maybe my photography again. Or, um, sometimes I think about writing. I don’t know. It’s awful, isn’t it, at my age to be floundering around so? I just don’t know what I want.” Lane’s mother Diane (Elaine Stritch), a former actress with a colorful past, including marriage to a gangster and a tabloid murder case to go with it, sparks Peter’s interest in writing her biography – a book that, in theory, anyway, seems easier than the novel based on his father’s life that he has spent all summer struggling to create. Peter’s interest in her mother ignites Lane’s resentment and surprise that he would find Diane’s “frivolous existence” so fascinating. To her, Diane’s memoir threatens to exploit both a painful and “ugly” situation. Although Diane is vibrant and vivacious – on the surface completely unlike Eve in *Interiors* – she is precisely like Eve in her all-consuming self-involvement. Yet both films, drawing upon the tropes of melodrama, invite an understanding of the contingencies shaping the lives of these women.

As is often true of melodrama, a family secret will emerge. At a moment of deep emotional distress for Lane – she has just walked in on Peter and Stephanie passionately kissing, and Diane has temporarily derailed her plans to sell the house and start anew – Lane reveals that Diane pulled the trigger killing her gangster husband who was beating her, when for years in the press and among family and friends, Diane has allowed Lane to take the blame. As a child, Lane confessed to the shooting, following the instructions of lawyers invested in protecting Diane and her image. As is typical of Sirkian melodrama, this scene of heightened emotional trauma expresses the “principles of continuity and discontinuity,” with plot

rhythms building “to an evidently catastrophic collision of counter-running sentiments” (Elsaesser 1987: 60). Diane has been content to live out the deception, willfully ignoring the damage it has caused her daughter and refusing to acknowledge her own sickness of spirit as a result – something that surfaces only when she’s been drinking and alone with a Ouija board, invoking the spirit of Lane’s father to explain why Lane dislikes her so. In contrast with the fluid long take style of so much of the film, Allen adopts a percussive editing rhythm, dramatically heightening the moment of Lane’s revelation. At the same time, Diane’s responses here and throughout the film work to deflate the emotional excess considered typical of melodrama. In response to Lane’s ongoing psychological stress, Diane offhandedly remarks, “You have to learn to put the past behind you. What’s done is done,” an attitude defining her as “a survivor,” in Peter’s eyes.

As Mary Ann Doane explains, the maternal melodrama “bring[s] into play the contradictory position of the mother within a patriarchal society – a position that she focus desire on the child and the subsequent demand to give up the child to the social order” (1987a: 74). Diane and Eve are women, like those in the maternal melodrama, who are permitted “no access to a comfortable position of moderation” (82). They are either too excessively present or too egregiously absent. At the same time, through structure and visual design, Allen provides critical “markers” that draw attention to the contradictory demands placed on these women.

In order to understand just how and to what extent Allen engages with themes of the maternal melodrama, we must take an unlikely though brief detour to Alfred Hitchcock and *The Birds* (1963). A horror/domestic melodrama hybrid, *The Birds* presents us with the near hysteria of Lydia, a mother who attempts to substitute her adult son Mitch for her deceased husband, whether by joining him in weekend chores with the easy intimacy of a spouse, or in subtly undermining his romantic relationships. While writings on the film offer a range of theories about the seemingly random bird attacks, one of particular interest holds that the attacks are an expression of maternal rage and excess, directed mainly at children and at Melanie – the woman Mitch has invited for dinner so that he, and his mother, can get to know her better. Mitch and Melanie discuss their mothers – his too present and hers completely absent, each one embodying one half of the contradiction that Allen explores through Eve and Diane, figures simultaneously too present and too absent in the past and present lives of their daughters. Cold, distant, and controlling, like Eve, Lydia is not a particularly sympathetic character, yet Hitchcock invites us to understand her. In a scene with Melanie after a horrifying attack on Lydia’s neighbor, Lydia confides her feelings of purposelessness and inadequacy now that her husband has died. In this scene, Hitchcock inscribes a critique of the patriarchal order that has shaped and deformed women like Lydia, whose identities are grounded entirely in their husbands and families. Left without her husband and with the threat of losing her son to another woman, Lydia is high-strung, helplessly passive, and a clinging, smothering presence. As birds gather outside to attack, Lydia cowers beneath the looming portrait of her husband, to

whom Mitch bears a striking resemblance. This visual inscription of the absent father speaks volumes about the state in which Lydia lives, and it provides access to an understanding of her contradictory position and confinement within the patriarchal order.

Like Hitchcock, Allen in *Interiors*, especially, provides visual and narrative details that allow for an understanding of Eve's condition as a function, in part, of her role as wife, mother, and woman of talent and aspiration conforming to demands of a patriarchal order. Also like Hitchcock, he complicates our understanding of her position while avoiding the pathos typically associated with the traditional maternal melodrama.

Interiors, as noted, opens with images of the Long Island beach house. Five empty vases, all pale in color, line the mantle; the deserted dining room and table, where Arthur announces his plan to separate, is shot through a doorway, creating a rigid sense of confinement. These images provide no clear temporal anchor, even on multiple viewings; they appear frozen in time. This absence of temporality infuses the opening with a vague, though undeniable tone of crisis. Is what we're seeing linked to a time after Eve's suicide, to a time immediately before, or to the years before her death with the multiple breakdowns that led up to it? Reflected in the glass covering of a picture frame is the ghostly movement of a figure that turns out to be the adult Joey, the daughter most conflictingly tied to her mother both psychologically and emotionally. Joey moves toward the staircase and, once upstairs, gazes out of a window that opens to a view of the beach and ocean below. We enter her point of view as she sees three young girls playing on the sand. The very faint sound of the ocean heightens a sense of the atemporal. It is only a bit later when this image is repeated during Arthur's narration that we recognize it as a flashback – a subjective vision of Joey's own childhood.⁴ To borrow Doane's perfectly apt words in reference to the 1944 maternal melodrama, *Since You Went Away*: "The scene activates the construction of a loss which haunts the entire narrative" (1987a: 80).

A cut to Renata, also standing at a window and pressing her hand against the pane, is followed by a jarring shift in location as Arthur faces the window of his Manhattan law office, his back to the camera, with the cityscape spread out before him. We hear his words in voiceover, though he never does turn to face the camera. This detail and the film's structure, placing this single narrational moment against the more extended narration of Renata as she faces the camera when speaking to an offscreen therapist – like those small moments in *The Birds* – provides an underlying critique of Arthur's sense of privilege and entitlement, even as he casts himself as something of Eve's victim.

While it is tempting to take Arthur's words at face value, Allen's visual and structural choices tell a different story – or a more complicated one. Arthur says that when he met Eve, he had "dropped out of law school," implying some level of sacrifice. He never acknowledges that, in fact, Eve put him through law school and financed the start of his practice – something Renata's monologue reveals.

Arthur goes on to say of Eve that, "she created a world around us that we existed in," again implying his own passive acquiescence as someone acted upon within the "ice palace" she had constructed. Far from feminizing Arthur as might be expected, his words, narrated from a position of power and privilege made literal by the image, are stilted and drained of emotion, as if self-consciously chosen to evade the complete truth and the culpability potentially attached to it. Arthur's elision (or denial) of Eve's significant role in what would become his successful career speaks powerfully in a manner typical of Allen's writing, which often invites reading between the lines – a quality Roger Ebert praises in *September*, saying that, "by the precise words that they do or don't use, his characters are able to convey exactly how much of what they say is sincere, and how much is polite" (1987: 2).

Here, what Arthur chooses *not* to say implies his view that Eve's very real sacrifice was something to be expected – so much so that he feels no need to remark upon it (and for his generation it was not unusual for a woman to give up her education to finance her husband's professional studies). In providing this information, Renata says, "in a sense it was like he was her creation" – words that resonate powerfully in the context of the maternal melodrama. Unlike Lydia in *The Birds*, who interchanges or misrecognizes her son as husband – a trope common to earlier mother/son melodramas – Eve, to some degree, misrecognizes her husband as son. If one accepts a blending of Freudian and Lacanian theories, this misrecognition is, perhaps, her means of gaining access to the phallic power a son would appear to confer. Implicitly claiming his success entirely as his own – as a post-Oedipal son would – Arthur relegates Eve to silence and marginality. Moreover, in presenting himself in several scenes as the one who "foots the bills," Arthur assumes that through his position as patriarch, alone, he has more than made up for whatever Eve may have sacrificed (a sacrifice, once again, that the film brings to our attention but that he fails to acknowledge). This detail, along with a scene in which Joey offhandedly though pointedly refers to Arthur's affairs during times when Eve was hospitalized, provides access to another view of Eve – and of Arthur.

The medical theme so common in the woman's film, which places the female body and psyche as objects of institutional interrogation, also allows access to a more sympathetic understanding of Eve, especially when Renata explains that Eve was subjected to a series of electric shock treatments. The two scenes in which Arthur disentangles himself from Eve are particularly telling in this regard. When, over breakfast, he announces his desire to separate, he does so in the formalized language of the boardroom, with Renata and Joey present, denying all respect for Eve as his wife, as a human being deserving the bonds of privacy and intimacy accorded in marriage:

I feel for my own self, I must come to this decision, though I don't take it lightly. I feel that I've been a dedicated husband, and a responsible father, and I haven't regretted anything that I've been called upon to do. Now, I feel I'd like to be by myself for a while, and consequently, I've decided to move out of the house.

Through Arthur's language, Allen suggests that the ice palace may not have been entirely of Eve's construction, something Renata also implies when she says (again, rather offhandedly) that as kids they would spend "some time with Dad, mostly Mom's Sunday breakfasts," thus hinting at the impact of her father's physical and emotional absence from their lives. Arthur's passive voice construction when referring to "anything I've been called upon to do," as well as the curt formality of his presentation creates the image of an emotionally distant husband and generally absent father – an absence compounded for the daughters by Eve's hospitalizations during which time they were "shuffled around to aunts and cousins," as Renata explains.

Later, announcing his intention to remarry, Arthur's words again are quite telling. When he says of Eve, "She's such a fragile thing," Joey replies, "She's not a thing. We all treat her like a patient in a hospital – she's a human being." Meeting with Eve to talk about finalizing their divorce, Arthur offers humiliation in the guise of concern: "I talked with your doctor; he feels you can handle this." Eve, of course, is mortified at his having spoken to her doctor without her permission. Arthur's reply, "Not behind your back, discreetly," is a form of equivocation we find among other men in Allen's films, most notably the husband in *Another Woman* who says calmly, "I accept your condemnation," when his ex-wife painfully confronts him with his infidelities and again when his current wife questions their lack of sexual intimacy (which we later learn is connected with yet another infidelity). When Joey several times says of Eve, "she's a sick woman," she does so as an appeal for acknowledgement of her humanity, not as a license to patronize her.

It is through these small but telling details that Allen offers "a picture of woman's ambivalent position under patriarchy," as Linda Williams argues maternal melodramas often do (1987: 320). Eve's entire sense of identity and stability is tied to Arthur ("her creation"), despite her own career success, which seems to count for little in the face of losing her husband – a further expression of this ambivalence. Arthur's evocation of Eve's excess of control – in his opening narration and when he says of his plans to remarry, "I just want to relax" – elides his own absence from the family, a normative condition in a world (as it is in the maternal melodrama) where men exert agency in the public sphere and remain above reproach, as long as they "foot the bills." Eve and Arthur's mutual misrecognition of the husband/son positions presents the "maternal as the site of the collapse of all oppositions and the confusion of identity" (Doane 1987a: 82), a position the film to some degree adopts. At the same time, however, the film exposes the cruel irony of Eve's having secured for Arthur literal access to "paternal law as the site of separation, division, differentiation" (Doane 1987a: 82) and thus having unknowingly contributed to her own marginalized position.

The film's representation of the relationship between Eve and Joey taps into and offers commentary on aspects of the maternal melodrama in even more interesting ways. Joey is the middle daughter who "can't stand" her mother, according to Renata, and who tries to cover the guilt attached to those feelings by

catering to Eve's every need. Complaining of being stuck with all the "dirty work" as the daughter who lives closest to Eve in Manhattan, Joey responds in disbelief at Renata's assessment of her feelings. "I can't believe this," Joey says, "For the longest time, I wanted to *be* her." Renata's rejoinder – "Well, for a while you were her, weren't you? . . . All those headaches when she was coming home from the hospital. You never wanted her to come home" – reflects the condition of the daughter who feels entrapped and "doomed to assume the mother's place, to repeat the configuration in relation to her own daughter" (Doane 1987a: 82). Joey expresses this fear (and desire) in terms of having children of her own. While she claims possibly to want a child, she terminates a pregnancy, terrified that she will never find her own sense of self or meaningful work in her life – a conflict central to so many maternal melodramas that either praise maternal sacrifice, as in *Stella Dallas* (1937), or condemn maternal ambitions directed outside the home (often read in terms of unmitigated selfishness), as in *Mildred Pierce* (1945). Yet, as noted, it is within the cracks and fissures of these narratives that one can locate interesting ambiguities in tone concerning the role that women are relegated to play.

In a fascinating moment, *Interiors* reimagines the final scene of *Stella Dallas* in which Stella, alone on the street, watches through a window as her daughter Laurel is married – having sacrificed Laurel and Laurel's love to ensure her daughter's future happiness. Shortly after his divorce from Eve is finalized, Arthur weds Pearl (Maureen Stapleton) – an earthy, unaffected woman much the opposite of Eve – at the Long Island beach house. That night, Eve appears at the house, first as a disembodied presence and later as a ghostly figure cast in deep shadow, with only pinpoints of light illuminating her eyes. Unlike in *Stella Dallas*, where we share Stella's point of view and her emotions as she watches and reacts, heartbroken yet proud as her daughter is married, we never see Eve as she stands outside the house – only in retrospect do we recognize the inscription of her presence there. As Pearl dances (and accidentally shatters one of Eve's vases), she circles by the window momentarily and gazes out, looking directly at the camera searchingly, as if aware of something or someone she cannot quite make out. The camera is positioned outside the window, strongly inscribing an unseen presence in the night. In these few eerie seconds, we come to realize that when Pearl stares into the camera, she is locking eyes with Eve – the woman she is replacing. The gaze of the camera is the gaze of the present Eve who remains absent from the frame, thus perfectly literalizing the maternal contradiction that is central to the position of the mother in patriarchy. As the woman who has in part "created" Arthur, she does, in one way, stand in a position similar to Stella's but for very different reasons and evoking a very different emotional register. Whereas Stella's self-effacing presence is an affirmation of love and sacrifice so common to the maternal melodrama, Eve's is a claim for *acknowledgement* of sacrifice and of the contradictory, if not impossible, position to which she is assigned. Her suicide that follows is a claim on the guilt and duty of others. Her presence, then,

is a bid for recognition. In a doubly ironic move, the camera embodies her subjectivity while erasing her from the frame – thus also literalizing the enforced obliteration of the mother as theorized by the Lacanian mirror: “The mother . . . grants an image to the child” as Jacqueline Rose points out, “which her presence instantly deflects” (1985: 30). Hence Mulvey’s penetrating observation that woman is “the bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning” (2009: 712). Allen captures this condition of Eve’s nonidentity by denying access to her face, her pain, her longing as she stands on the far margins of the family and the home she has created.

In this small moment and in a longer scene in which Eve actually appears to Joey and to the viewer, Allen presents a further paradox of the maternal: through physically giving her daughters life and sustenance, the mother also threatens to subsume them. “In overinvesting her desire in the child,” or in the husband, I would add, “the mother becomes herself the perverse subject of the oral drive – the agent of an engulfing or devouring process which threatens to annihilate the subjectivity of her child,” as Doane points out (1987a: 83). Cloaked in black and shot in extremely deep shadow, almost vampiric in appearance, the completely silent Eve embodies what Julia Kristeva defines as the abject maternal – “the focus of a combined horror and fascination, hence subject to a range of taboos designed to control” (Doane 1987a: 83). The “horror of nondifferentiation,” that Doane, following Kristeva, sees as the “problem” of motherhood in the context of patriarchy, is that it “automatically throws into question ideas concerning the self, boundaries between self and other, identity” (1987a: 83). The film would seem to address the notion of maternal abjection as Joey sits alone in darkness after the wedding celebration has ended. Her words – “Mother? Is that you? You shouldn’t be here. Not tonight” – at first take on the quality of an internal monologue or dreamlike fantasy in the absence of a reverse shot. In this visually and verbally eloquent sequence, Joey’s words intersect with those of Luce Irigaray in “And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other,” a meditation on the positioning of mother and daughter in both the psychoanalytic and patriarchal contexts. Irigaray’s opening lines – “With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen” (1981: 60) – find uncanny expression (right down to diction) in so much of *Interiors*. Even the “paralysis” Joey, in particular, experiences echoes Irigaray’s language – a word Renata also uses to describe her difficulty in writing that has set in, it seems, after Arthur has announced his desire to separate.

Imagining the paradoxical circularity of her connection with her mother and what her growing up and leaving will mean to her mother’s life, the daughter who narrates Irigaray’s monologue reflects:

you’ve lost the place where proof of your subsistence once appeared to you . . . You wanted me to grow up, to walk, to run in order to vanquish your own infirmity. . . . Imprisoned by your desire for a reflection, I became a statue, an image of your mobility (1981: 64).

Joey expresses a similar circularity when she says to Eve (also in the form of a dramatic monologue, given Eve's silence),

I feel like we're in a dream together. Please don't look so sad. It makes me feel so guilty. I'm so consumed with guilt. It's ironic because, uh, I've cared for you so, and you have nothing but disdain for me, and yet I feel guilty.

It is when Joey speaks of her guilt that we first see an image of Eve, engulfed in darkness, hugging the wall – personifying the very concept of the abject maternal. Again, Irigaray's words resonate within this image of Eve, silent and entrapped, facing her daughter who feels equally entrapped:

And I can no longer race toward what I love. And the more I love, the more I become captive, held back by a weightiness that immobilizes me . . . I want out of this prison. But what prison? . . . I see nothing confining me. The prison is within myself . . . (1981: 60).

With words strikingly evocative of Irigaray's in their mixture of sadness, loss, and anger, Joey says to her mother,

I think you're really too perfect to live in this world. I mean all the beautifully furnished rooms, the carefully designed interiors – everything's so controlled. There wasn't any room for any real feelings – none, between any of us, except Renata, who never gave you the time of day. You worship Renata; you worship talent. Well, what happens to those of us who can't create? What do we do, what do I do, when I'm overwhelmed with feelings about life? How do I get them out?

Fearful that as a woman she is destined to share in her mother's abjection, the daughter in Irigaray – like Joey, whom we learn was her father's favorite – embraces the word and law of the father in order to escape, without realizing that this ultimately relegates her to an even deeper state of abjection:

I'll turn to my father. I'll leave you for someone who seems more alive than you. . . . He leaves the house, I follow in his steps. . . . I shall never become your likeness (1981: 62).

Looking through the eyes of patriarchy and its institutions, Irigaray's daughter defines the maternal as a "disorder," now addressing her mother from a position of alignment with her father:

Aren't I good now? A nearly perfect girl? . . . I'm beginning to look like what's expected of me. One more effort, a little more anger against you . . . and I'll step out of the dream. Out of my disorder. Out of you in me, me in you (1981: 62–63).

Joey's words of anger toward Eve take on an even richer resonance when considered in light of Irigaray, powerfully expressing the impossible position of the daughter and the mother:

I feel such rage toward you. Oh, mother, don't you see? You're not just a sick woman. That would be too easy. The truth is, there's been perverseness, and willfulness of attitude in many of the things you've done. At the center of a sick psyche, there's a sick spirit.

In response to these words, Eve turns toward the camera, her terrified face now even more obscured by shadow. Allen cuts back to Joey, as she speaks her final words – words that Eve presumably does not hear, that are spoken after she has begun moving toward the churning sea. (Her death, in recalling Virginia Woolf's, also inscribes a feminist awareness of the condition of woman in a male-dominated world.) Joey's words, "But I love you, and we have no other choice but to forgive each other," followed by Eve's suicide, resound strongly in light of Irigaray's closing:

When one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground. When one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive (1981: 67).

In *Eve*, Allen presents us with an image of the abject maternal. He admits that she is one of the characters in his work with whom he most strongly identifies (Bailey 2001: 80), yet he also describes Arthur as "the poor man who has been living with her for years" and Joey as "a victim of this terrible mother" (Björkman 1993: 98), thus, in some ways corroborating her abject state. His representation captures the very contradictions haunting feminist theory. On the one hand, feminist works exposing the abject maternal as defined by patriarchy and its institutions can have the effect of "reclaim[ing] misogynistic depictions of women as abject." On the other hand, such works may unwittingly adopt attitudes that "reproduce rather than challenge the cultural production of woman as abject," as Imogen Tyler argues (2009: 82, 84). Some reviews and essays on the film, including Pauline Kael's review at the time, tend to confirm Tyler's point. They pass judgment on Eve as abject without acknowledging the film's exposure of those conditions that shape and define her as such.⁵ The problem in this film, as in *The Birds*, may be linked also, in part, to the narrative centrality and powerful performances of Geraldine Page as Eve and Jessica Tandy as Lydia, which tend to eclipse the critical "markers" of patriarchal molding and negation of the maternal figure.

By contrast, on the surface at least, Diane in *September* refuses to efface her own identity or to embrace the demands that Eve has seemed to absorb. Yet, as in *Interiors*, the film wavers in tone – inviting viewers both to appreciate her vibrant

defiance of patriarchal demands and at the same time to regard her as simultaneously too present and too absent in her role as mother, thus defining her, to some degree, as abject. Allen articulates this contradiction when he says that he “wanted the mother in *September* to be a character who is shallow and selfish, egotistical. But even at her age, she dresses and thinks of herself as beautiful and feminine and sexy” (Björkman 1993: 180). On the one hand, Diane embodies what Irigaray’s daughter wishes for: a mother who, at the same time as giving life to her daughter, remains very much alive herself. On the other hand, this life-affirming mother, in her vivacious excess, threatens to annihilate her daughter, bringing Irigaray’s daughter again to mind: “You feed me/ yourself. But you feed me/ yourself too much, as if you wanted to fill me up completely with your offering. You put yourself in my mouth and I suffocate” (1981: 60). The first words Lane speaks in the film are about her mother and express a similar sense of suffocation: “God, I can’t believe my mother. She’s out there; she’s made friends with Peter and she’s trying to get him to write her biography. Her stupid life, ‘as told to . . .’”

Lane feels overwhelmed by Diane’s vibrancy, against which she sometimes protests, sometimes retreats. Indirectly echoing the sentiments of Irigaray’s daughter, Lane complains of her mother’s extended stay in the Vermont house, “Time passes and she’s still here.” In a scene between mother and daughter as Diane dresses for the evening – often distracted by the details of her own appearance – her words seem to waver between genuine concern for her daughter and barbed belittling. Diane’s concern for Lane, though real, is framed by narcissism, recalling aspects of Irigaray’s meditation. She says to Lane, while gazing at her own image in the mirror,

You were such a promising young girl, so bright. You had my looks. You had better bone structure than I did. You lacked my height. You had your father’s intelligence. You’ve got to do something about all that. I mean, you’re young; you’re lovely. Of course, you dress like a Polish refugee.

To which Lane replies, “Well, I don’t feel so attractive these days.” In apparent encouragement, she advises Lane in regard to Peter:

You have to be cool about it. The one thing you shouldn’t do is let your desperation show. . . . I always thought there was a fatal element of hunger in your last affair. . . . I don’t think Jeff would have run quite so quickly back to his wife if he didn’t feel a certain pressure. . . . You’re probably doing something to stand in your own way.

At this point Lane, defeated, visibly appears to shrink into herself: “I probably am.”

Diane demoralizes Lane – sometimes without thinking, sometimes purposefully, sometimes in the process of trying to express concern – which raises unsettling questions. Is she simply insensitive or does she consciously mean to undermine Lane? She offhandedly says to Peter of her daughter,

I hadn't seen her, ya know, since she took the pills. God, that had to be six, eight months ago. Boy, what some people will do for love, or the lack of it. Of course, I understand; I understand. If you've never had something, then you experience it, and it's taken away, wow! Poor kid.

As she glances downward and fiddles with the pieces on a backgammon board, there is something disingenuous, not merely indiscreet in her words and actions, which editing patterns corroborate through close-ups of Peter and Diane's husband Lloyd (Jack Warden) that reveal their discomfort. Although in Allen's own view Diane "doesn't act maliciously. She just does what she does because she doesn't know better" (Björkman 1993: 180), the film itself adopts a more ambivalent attitude.

In divorcing Lane's father, Diane plunges her daughter into a situation in which (following Lacan) the law of the (good) father and truth about the shooting of the (bad) "substitute" father has been distorted. Diane acts in self-interest, and in this sense is excessive in her maternal absence. In describing Diane as shallow, selfish, and egotistical, Allen aligns her with the pre-Oedipal Imaginary. Her actions, by extension, seem aimed at preventing Lane's entry into the Symbolic realm that the father represents – associated with language, law, and rational thought. Viewed in this light, one that the maternal melodrama often adopts, Lane's inability to find herself and to find something meaningful to do with her life is a manifestation of arrested psychological development rooted in the absence of the father, as well as both the excessive presence *and* excessive absence of the mother.

Dreamscapes and Realities: Paranoid Spaces and Female Agency/Passivity

Female passivity in the family melodrama and woman's film is expressed and contained by "the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home" (Elsaesser 1987: 62), the space to which women traditionally have been consigned and confined. In *Interiors* and *September*, especially, the literal space of the home stands in metonymically for Eve and Lane who, as emotionally fragile, suicidal figures, create or escape to these spaces for refuge. As a space that each one, but Eve especially, has "constructed" to the measure of her own desire, to borrow Laura Mulvey's now famous observation about conventional cinema as shaped by male desire (1975), the home becomes a kind of stage or performance space over which Eve, Lane, and Diane attempt to assert their agency. The homes in both films stand in many ways as characters or works of art expressing multiple ironies and contradictions. Eve decorates her home for visual consumption, in some ways substituting it for her own body as an object of desire. Lane hopes to acquire

agency and control by selling the Vermont house to start anew, now that it has served its purpose as a refuge during her recovery. Diane, as former actress, commandingly occupies the space of the house with her bold entrances and assertive physical and vocal presence that threaten to upstage Lane in her bid for Peter's attention and "unstage" Lane in her claim on the home as economic asset. Yet these acts of agency centered on the home make clear the complications women as narrative agents must confront, not unlike those of the paranoid woman's film in which the protagonist, in asserting agency when investigating the space of the home ("as the one for whom the 'secret beyond the door' is really at stake") exposes herself to potential harm and reveals "the potential danger of the female look" (Doane 1987b: 286, 287).

Eve approaches an unsuccessful suicide attempt – an ironic act of agency with the goal of self-annihilation – in her New York apartment as if an actress occupying her space on the stage, ceremoniously positioning herself on a couch to breathe in the gas she has turned on after methodically sealing the doors and windows. In a reflexive touch, Allen implies that Eve herself may have seen too many woman's films, that she has internalized the image of a decorous death and the alluring, diaphanous female passivity it represents. And even Diane's seemingly lighthearted entrance into the living room in *September* – "How do I look? Don't anyone say old and fat" – resonates darkly with her lines spoken earlier to Lane while sitting before a mirror:

It's hell getting older, especially when you feel twenty-one inside. All the strengths that sustain you all your life just vanish one by one. And you study your face in the mirror and you notice something's missing. And then you realize it's your future.

Such instances offer reflexive commentary on the complications of female agency, reinforced, in *September*, by the *mise-en-scène* of the aging actress sitting before the mirror, making clear the more forceful cultural impact of aging on women – both in life and on the screen.

Her seaside family home and the New York apartment Eve occupies after Arthur's separation are neutral in color, spare and painstakingly balanced in decor, a feature given further emphasis by the balanced compositional frame of Allen's images. Both spaces express Eve's obsession with order and her need to gain or to assert control. The static camera and the editing patterns used to present interior images of Eve's Long Island home in the film's opening convey a sense of space "frozen" in time – the "ice palace" Arthur refers to in his narration. And, just as she projects her needs onto her surroundings, Eve uses her art to "freeze" the lives of others – as if in doing so, *they* will remain static, unchanging, and always within her possession, in keeping with a "characteristic attempt of the bourgeois household [in melodrama] to make time stand still, immobilize life and fix forever domestic property relations as the model of social life and a bulwark against the more disturbing sides of human nature" (Elsaesser 1987: 61–62). As

Arthur further says in voiceover about Eve and their surroundings, “she created a world around us that we existed in, where everything had its place, where there was always a kind of harmony, great dignity.”

As in the 1950s domestic melodrama, in *Interiors* “objects . . . invade . . . personalities, take them over, stand for them, become more real than the human relations or emotions they were intended to symbolize” (Elsaesser 1987: 61–62). In *Interiors*, however, these objects do not create the “clutter” Elsaesser identifies with the family melodrama but rather its absence – the few carefully placed vases on her mantle and the \$400 vase Eve wishes to place in Joey and Michael’s foyer communicate an inert artistry devoid of uncertainty or human volatility. The implication of Eve’s always-empty vases could not be more obvious. The lone vase that contains a single white rose, Eve’s favorite flower, is the same vase that Pearl shatters when dancing at the seaside home during her wedding celebration with Arthur. In her desire for stasis, Eve is very different from Pearl or from the “warm and vital” Diane, as Lloyd describes her in *September*. Much as Diane wishes she could remain young forever, she does not attempt to stem the flow of time. “There are things that I probably would do differently if I had them to do over,” Diane says, “but I don’t” – a paradoxical expression of agency. While her words suggest a life affirming if resigned sense of realism, they are spoken at the moment Lane reveals Diane’s role in pulling the trigger on her gangster husband. Her words, then, also reveal a form of solipsism not unlike Eve’s.

Eve and her daughters frequently stand at windows or are framed by windows or doorways, a visual trope in *Interiors* adopted from the woman’s film and domestic melodrama, where they convey the “enforced passivity of women – women waiting at home, standing by the window in a world of objects into which they are expected to invest their feelings” (Elsaesser 1987: 62). The women, figuratively entrapped, gaze longingly beyond that realm for something more in their lives. Whether a conscious intervention or not, Allen presents us, in *Eve*, with a woman who genuinely *has* invested the objects of her home and her art with her deepest feelings – and he reveals just how damaging this has been for her and for her daughters. While we hear that Eve is recognized as an accomplished interior decorator, this public dimension of success, it would seem, poses a problem, with her breakdowns as both the manifestation and the solution. When hospitalized, she is relieved from the pressure of embracing an active, creative role – even though she claims this is what she wants and loves; when recovering, she says she is reluctant to jump back into her career full-force because “I’m not going to accept anything until I’m sure I can maintain the level I expect of myself.” Viewed in the light of the woman’s film, her perfectionism, centered on home and family, is a contradictory expression of agency and also a capitulation to culturally enforced female passivity.⁶

In *September* the country home belongs, legally, to the mother – Diane and Lane’s father owned it, but Diane hasn’t been there in years until she visits with Lloyd. Just as she has left Lane with the public mark of guilt in the shooting of

her gangster husband (for whom she divorced Lane's father), Diane leaves Lane with the responsibility of the home – its upkeep and expenses – tacitly implying that it is Lane's place to do with what she chooses. It becomes the contested space where mother and daughter vie for agency. In contrast to the house in *Interiors*, with its spare, stark artistry that reflects Eve's ill, empty spirit, the house in *September*, with warm colors in mostly sunlit rooms, signals Lane's recovery. A mobile camera explores the space in long takes as the film opens, in contrast to the static camera and staccato editing rhythms at the start of *Interiors*. Compositions emphasizing rooms and spaces yet to be explored in *September*, however, also imply a paradoxical interplay of agency and paralysis, with an openness that promises hope and opportunity for Lane's future but also that suggests her unanchored state, with no concrete plans and a longing for meaningful work that she is unable to define.

While not a claustrophobic space as in the family melodrama (Allen in fact says that he wanted the cinematographer to "provide . . . sufficient angles, so that you wouldn't get bored with the house, or claustrophobic": qtd. in Björkman 1993: 174), the house nevertheless does have its claustrophobic dimension. In his review of the film, Ebert cleverly captures the effect, saying that, "each character moves restlessly from room to room, trying to arrange to be alone with the object of their love – and away from the person obsessed with them" (1987: 1). The house, moreover, functions somewhat as houses do in the female gothic or paranoid woman's film. With "sufficient angles," shots are composed to expose portions of rooms not fully visible. Though neither threatening nor gothic in architectural style, the space nevertheless captures a certain paranoia Lane experiences, whether in regard to her mother's intentions, which she perceives as bearing some ill will through careless abandon, in regard to Peter's sudden, inexplicable distance from her after they had been quite close, or in regard to her own uncertain future. The home of the paranoid woman's film, as Doane explains, "is yoked to dread, and to a crisis of vision . . . it asserts divisions, gaps . . . There are places which elude the eye" (1987a: 134), something most palpable in terms of Lane's sexual angst – illustrated both in a small moment when she enters her mother's bedroom, interrupting her mother and Lloyd's affectionate embrace and the more dramatic moment when she enters the kitchen pantry to find Peter and Stephanie kissing.

Because "paranoia demands a split between the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen" (Doane 1987a: 134), it finds expression in the spaces of *Interiors* and *September*, as well as in *Another Woman*, in which the walls seem to "speak" the protagonist's submerged fears. Echoing Diane, who believes simply that, "You have to put the past behind you," Marion (Gena Rowlands) in *Another Woman*, says simply in voiceover, "If something seems to be working, leave it alone." A philosophy professor on sabbatical in order to write a book, she sub-leases a one-room studio to "shut myself off from everything." Her insularity at this moment reflects a larger pattern in her life – her avoidance of passion and desire, her fear of the vulnerabilities and unpredictability those feelings may incite.



Figure 11.1 Shot composition contradicts Marion's assertion of agency in *Another Woman*. (Producer: Robert Greenhut)

Much like Eve in *Interiors*, she prefers an orderly “exterior” surface to an emotionally cluttered, complicated interior. As the film opens, Marion in voiceover confidently proclaims, “If somebody had asked me when I reached my fifties to assess my life, I would have said that I had achieved a decent measure of fulfillment, both personally and professionally.” As we hear these words, Marion appears at the end of a long, narrow hallway, fractured by several doorframes – a claustrophobic space and visual frame that work in ironic opposition to her words. Embedded in her assertion of agency is a paradoxical attitude of willful denial that the space reinforces as she continues: “Beyond that I would say that I don’t choose to delve.” What she primarily wishes to “leave alone” is something the female protagonist in the paranoid woman’s film also wishes to deny – emotional need and sexual desire that will render her vulnerable (see Figure 11.1).

In his review of the film, Roger Ebert describes Marion as “fearsomely self-contained, well-organized, sane, efficient and intelligent,” adding that she has made “the emotional compromises . . . to earn that description” (1988: 1). Marion begins to acknowledge these compromises only when she hears the voice of a young woman filtering through the ventilation duct of her workspace, an apartment next to a psychiatrist’s office. The woman (Mia Farrow), unnamed in the narrative but listed as “Hope” in the closing credits, pours out her misgivings and

self-doubt, the very feelings Marion willfully has submerged in her own life but no longer can deny. The woman confides,

I began having troubling thoughts about my life. There was something about it not real, full of deceptions, and these, these deceptions had become so many and so much a part of me now, that I couldn't even tell who I really was. . . . It was if a curtain had parted and I could see myself clearly, and I was afraid of what I saw. And what I had to look forward to. And I wondered, I wondered about ending everything.

The words haunt Marion, pushing her toward her own state of crisis.

Marion revisits her past, confronting realities she has failed to acknowledge: the core of resentment her brother Paul (Harris Yulin) bears, having sacrificed his own future to help finance her college education at the insistence of their father (John Houseman), and that of her former friend Claire (Sandy Dennis) over a years-earlier stolen boyfriend. Marion's crisis takes on a symbolic quality consistent with melodrama through an ongoing pattern of seemingly chance encounters, confrontations, and dreams in which she is told directly or overhears the impression of others who conclude that she is emotionally cold, distant, judgmental – revelations coming from her stepdaughter, her sister-in-law, and her husband's friend Larry (Gene Hackman), a novelist who confesses his love for her. These encounters and the disembodied voice of the young woman with her therapist evoke the dreamlike displacement, the “substitute acts,” the “clashes and ruptures” Elsaesser associates with melodrama (Elsaesser 1987: 59).

Although Marion occupies the narrative center of *Another Woman* in a way that no single character does in *Interiors* or *September*, the film nevertheless extends its concerns to those around her, in keeping with the “myth-making function” of melodrama (Elsaesser 1987: 66). Here and less directly in *September*, for instance, Allen gives some attention to father/son relationships. Sons of college professors, Peter and Marion's brother, Paul, admire their fathers but feel weakened or intimidated by their fathers' accomplishments. In *September*, even in his desire to pay tribute to the memory of his deeply admired, blacklisted father, Peter is blocked. The circumstances in *Another Woman*, especially, echo those of 1950s family melodramas, like *East of Eden*, that feature powerful patriarchs. Although Allen adopts a less judgmental tone, he explores the damaging effect of a father who has relentlessly disparaged Paul as less motivated and less intelligent than Marion.

Marion is close to her father, having been the child in whom he invested his strongest interest. Like her father, Marion is a professor; her work is the defining feature of her identity and her life. She has embraced the Symbolic world of the father, with seemingly little comfortable access to the Imaginary maternal world of emotional plenitude, something signaled by costuming – she consistently wears suits of heavy, wooly fabrics with her hair pulled back from her face (in one scene, in fact, she and her husband appear costumed almost identically). Marion

feels the presence of her recently deceased mother most strongly through her mother's favorite book of poetry, a collection by Rainer Maria Rilke. Through Rilke, Allen inscribes an understanding of the mother who lived in a household rigidly dominated by the father. Although she doesn't quote lines from Rilke's "The Panther," Marion does, in voiceover, mention the image of the panther staring from its cage, an image that flashes in one of her dreams. (The poem reads: "It seems to him there are/ a thousand bars; and behind the bars no world.") After speaking the final lines of her mother's favorite Rilke poem, "Archaic Torso of Apollo," in voiceover – "for here there is no place/ that does not see you. You must change your life" – Marion observes, "There were stains on the page which, I believe, were her tears." Although she has lived her life in the footsteps of her father, as Irigaray's daughter at one moment asserts that she will do, the film presents Marion with another view both through the voice of the psychiatrist's patient, who is about to become a mother, and through the unrequited longing of her own absent mother, as captured in the poem and in her tears. Both women, physically absent yet highly charged in their emotional presence, seem to admonish Marion: "You must change your life."

While Marion's psychological state is of central narrative concern, it is the action she takes in response to her crisis that matters. This is true even more so of *Alice*, a lighthearted version of *Another Woman*, but a film that nevertheless reflects the serious concerns of the domestic melodrama. Alice's insularity is largely a product of her wealth – or the wealth she has married into: she lives in a lavish New York penthouse; she employs nannies, cooks, personal trainers, and chauffeurs; she sends her two young children to an expensive private school. Yet, like Eve and Joey in *Interiors* and Lane in *September*, Alice (Mia Farrow) feels a sense of malaise – a vaguely defined dissatisfaction and the longing for something more meaningful and expressive in her life. She experiences physical aches and pains, strongly reflecting the medical discourse present in the woman's film, as we have seen (see Doane 1987a: 38–69; Elsaesser 1987: 59, 65–66). Alice's ills are more directly related to sexual angst than are those of Eve, Lane, Marion, or of Hope, the psychiatrist's patient in *Another Woman*, although this is an underlying issue in their lives as well. Whether identified as the "paranoid woman's film" (Doane 1987a), the "female gothic" (Modleski 1982, 1988), or the "Freudian feminist melodrama" (Elsaesser 1987), "the projection of sexual anxiety and its mechanisms of displacement and transfer" central to that subgenre also are present in Allen's films, especially in *Alice*. Those films often cull suspense from uncertainty about possible "murderous designs" of the female protagonist's husband (Elsaesser 1987: 58). Although the husbands of Alice, Eve, and Marion hardly have murderous designs, their serial infidelities – even if initially unbeknownst to their wives – have had damaging effects, and the revelation of an affair serves as the narrative turning point for both Alice and Marion. Only when she visits a Chinatown acupuncturist who hypnotizes her does Alice confront the possibility that her sickness lies within her spirit, or as Dr. Yang (Keye Luke) says, "problem is not back, problem is here

[pointing to his head] and here [pointing to his heart]." Much as Marion is prompted by the voice of the young woman, so Alice is prompted by Dr. Yang to examine a life "full of deceptions."

Like Marion, Alice fails to acknowledge the emotional distance that has crept into her marriage, in which daily routines, social plans, and material purchases form the focus of conversation and existence. Alice's stockbroker husband Doug (William Hurt) is as self-sufficiently distant as Marion's husband Ken (Ian Holm), but, like Ken, he adopts the guise of caring solicitousness. Ebert's apt description of Ken as "a man who must have a wife so that he can be unfaithful to her" applies equally to Doug (1988: 2). Also like Marion when confronted by Larry's declaration of love, Alice is thrown into emotional crisis mere moments after crossing paths with a man she desires – a divorced father she briefly encounters when taking her children to school. The depth of Alice's angst is made clear when Joe (Joe Mantegna) simply hands her a book she has dropped while walking her children up the stairs to their classroom – an act that instantaneously sparks thoughts of infidelity and intense feelings of desire she never has experienced in her marriage, though she has been afraid to admit it. Alice's emotional tizzy is played in part for comic effect, heightened by her world of insular innocence. Her difficulties are less the result of willful blindness, as in Marion's case (though there is a degree of that), and more the result of a certain naive (or sheltered) trust in her husband and faith in the stability of her privileged world – itself a form of denial, signaled in part by her Catholicism. It seems no accident that Mia Farrow's physical appearance as Alice oddly echoes her signature role in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), in which she also played a Catholic whose faith and trust are manifested in a maddening passivity – the same "victimization and enforced passivity" central to the family melodrama (Elsaesser 1987: 62) – that itself becomes a subject of the film's interrogation. Whereas Roman Polanski's film is a female gothic firmly grounded in the domestic melodrama, Allen's film is a comic melodrama with strong inflections of the female gothic.

Low-key lighting, a stylistic marker of the female gothic or paranoid woman's film, also adds resonance to several important scenes in all four films. In *Interiors* on the night that Arthur first introduces Pearl to his daughters in Renata's home, he, Joey, and Renata argue about his intentions in an upstairs bedroom where chiaroscuro lighting obscures faces and creates enormous, grotesque shadows. Joey rejects her father's wishes to marry Pearl, calling her a "vulgarian" and saying that his marriage "is going to sink mother." Renata, whose shadow is particularly jarring, offers her best wishes, though this is the same disingenuous strategy of least resistance she often chooses, appeasing others rather than honestly leveling with them (whether with her husband about his writing, Joey about her photography, Flynn about her acting, or Eve about the chances of a reconciliation with Arthur). Lighting here conveys that unpleasant truths remain submerged beneath her words – truths she has neither the courage nor depth of commitment to others to articulate. Lighting also implies the "hidden" text of Arthur's past. For the first

time, we learn he has had a series of affairs – “We knew about your affairs when mother was in the hospital,” Joey says, “but your choices were a little more discreet.” Visual style underscores the darkness of patriarchal entitlement looming over the daughters and the absent Eve in the form of this family secret. This moment recalls the damaging, potentially murderous husbands in the paranoid woman’s film. The destructive dimension of male entitlement spills out and over here, the narrative barely able to contain it.

A long sequence in *September*, when a nighttime thunderstorm rages and the electricity fails, recalls the female gothic in visual effect and theme, if not in content and mood, with action taking place in candlelit rooms. Perhaps Elsaesser’s “Freudian feminist melodrama” is the most appropriate term to describe this sequence, which stages parallel scenes of unrequited desire, and, in the case of Stephanie, like Marion, desire that elicits her fear of no longer knowing or feeling like herself. “I just long to hear certain things said to me again,” she confesses to Peter, “I long so much to respond, but I can only run.” The female protagonist in the paranoid woman’s film often discovers a secret hidden within a labyrinthine gothic space, her investigation ultimately one of self-revelation that stabilizes her sense of fractured, divided identity. Here a similar situation plays itself out in Stephanie’s journey away from her family to the Vermont home, where she confronts powerful emotions for Peter, as well as in Lane’s dual struggle for Peter’s love and for legal control of the home as her own.

Marion and Alice embark on nighttime journeys in the city – part real, part dream – in which they also must face and seek to repair their sudden sense of fractured identity. In flashbacks as well as in dreams, Marion is shown as literally divided from herself as she observes others who take on her identity in actual or fantasized moments from her past. In a dream, she watches as imagined and real moments of her life are acted out on stage. Certain scenes gain even greater resonance when Marion’s role is divided between two actors – Gena Rowlands, who plays the present-day Marion in her fifties, and Margaret Marx, who plays Marion in her early twenties. As Marion looks through old family photos and describes them to her stepdaughter Laura (Martha Plimpton), it is the older Marion who returns in flashbacks to her teenage years, while her father, brother Paul, and friend Claire are played by much younger actors. In a pivotal flashback to a moment with her first husband Sam (Philip Bosco), her former professor some years older than she, Marion confesses that she was pregnant and has had an abortion without consulting him, inciting his rage and presumably ending their marriage. Marx as Marion begins and ends the scene in silent tableaux, yet it is Rowlands as Marion in the main part of the scene who speaks: “I’m just starting out, I want to make something of myself.” This splitting of Marion echoes the Imaginary/Symbolic division of identity, following Lacan, as expressed in the paranoid woman’s film, in which the young protagonist paradoxically stabilizes her identity under the gaze of patriarchal approval (see Modleski 1988: 43–55). Although Marion’s choice of self over Sam and motherhood would seem to override the need for patriarchal approval, there remains an element of wistful regret

as she observes and reenacts this scene. This splitting of the self, further intensified when Marion overhears her own submerged fears and longings articulated by the psychiatrist's patient, expresses "a woman's desire to be something else," a trope common to the woman's film (Basinger 1993: 105).

Alice takes a different approach but with similar effect. Mia Farrow's costuming, hair, makeup, and manner combine to evoke her much earlier role in *Rosemary's Baby*, as noted, in which Rosemary pours her energies and desire into becoming pregnant and decorating her new apartment in an imposing gothic New York apartment building. Alice shares Rosemary's childlike trust, particularly in regard to her husband Doug (see Figures 11.2a and 11.2b). Although Doug hardly prostitutes his wife to Satan, as Rosemary's husband Guy does, his patronizing manner, like Guy's, is his duplicitous means of controlling her actions and desires. On Alice's first visit to Dr. Yang, she reveals her feelings about Doug while under hypnosis: "I love him but . . . I want to be more." Doug appears in her hypnotic dream as lawgiver: "But you have children to raise." In their real lives, Doug subtly undermines Alice's desire to "be more," especially her desire to write. He questions her ability, suggesting that, instead, she should help out in the boutique a friend has opened. As in the paranoid woman's film, "marriage and violence are both associated with an intensification of anxiety linked to the muteness of the woman, her exclusion from language" (Doane 1987a: 148) – something evident in Alice's frustrated attempts to write, in the physically violent argument between Marion and Sam, framed by the mute, younger Marion, and in *Interiors* when Eve appears as a mute, spectral figure in the scene preceding her suicide. Alice's words at the conclusion of her first visit to Dr. Yang – "I'm at a crossroads. I'm lost, lost" – could just as well be spoken by Eve, Joey, Lane, Stephanie, Marion, or the psychiatrist's patient – all women caught within the contradiction of living in a world dominated by men.

Like the voice of the psychiatrist's patient who reveals the truths of Marion's life in *Another Woman*, the magical mixture of herbs prescribed by Dr. Yang gives Alice the courage to act on her desire for Joe and later the power to become invisible – to enter spaces where she sees and hears the truth about her husband's infidelity, Joe's continuing desire for his ex-wife, and her friends' opinions of her. This power granted both Alice and Marion – to voyeuristically eavesdrop and look into the lives of others as a means of finding themselves – confers an agency that ultimately defeats an imposed or embraced passivity, yet not without ambiguity. Marion ultimately finds confirmation of her own passionate nature only by reading Larry's novel and his assessment of the character she has inspired; Alice has left Doug, lives in a modest apartment, and takes care of her children by herself, having just returned from India where she has worked with Mother Teresa. Both women are liberated yet continue to exist within the same inescapable ideological/cultural context as before. Perhaps this is why Allen says of Alice, "now that she's changed she will lead, I think, a more fulfilling life. But that life will change." Referring to the fact that she will age and her children will eventually grow up to lead their own lives, Allen says, "at some point she's going to be



Figures 11.2a and 11.2b Mia Farrow's appearance in *Alice* (a) recalls her childlike passivity and absence of power in her earlier role in *Rosemary's Baby* (b). (*Alice* (1991) Producer: Robert Greenhut; *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) Producer: William Castle)

faced with a very, very bleak end . . .” (Björkman 1993: 231). In this, he captures quite clearly the state of the abject maternal, echoing Doane’s words concerning the position of the mother in patriarchy – she must sublimate her desires and identity for the sake of her children but also must give up her children to the “social order” in the end.

Throughout *Interiors*, *September*, *Another Woman*, and *Alice*, Allen selectively invokes many of the thematic and visual tropes so common to the domestic melodrama and variations of the woman’s film – both challenging and reproducing the

patriarchal unconscious that informs them. It is, of course, a question of degree. Viewing these films through the lens of melodrama and its female-specific subcycles allows greater access to the cues in dialogue, structure, characterization, and visual composition that, I contend, place the films more firmly on the side of exposing the ways in which patriarchal entitlement and its imperatives have shaped and distorted the lives of his female characters, whose talents, frustrations, longings, and feelings of fractured identity, Allen entreats us to experience and understand.

Notes

- 1 See Mary Ann Doane (1987a) and Janet Walker (1987) for discussion of additional films of the period that negotiate issues of patriarchal authority and stability.
- 2 See Sam B. Girgus (2002) on Allen's reflexivity (especially 11, 33–37, 89–107).
- 3 Speaking about his departure from Bergman, for instance, who makes frequent, powerful use of the close-up – though most certainly not in the manner of the Hollywood woman's film – Allen explains: "Bergman developed a grammar, a vocabulary, to express . . . inner conflicts very brilliantly. And part of this grammar was the use of the close-up in a way that it really hadn't been used before. Very close and very long, long, long static close-ups." In his own work, Allen claims to use close-ups "very sparingly," saying that, "there's almost an artificial quality about them." He admits to feeling "less at ease with the close-up," observing that in films other than Bergman's "the enormous use of the close-up can be barbaric" (Björkman 1993: 196–197).
- 4 On multiple viewings one looks for clues – in costuming, for example – to determine whether these opening shots "bookend" the closing image of the three sisters immediately after Eve's funeral. Costuming of Joey and Renata is not consistent in these sets of images. We must assume, then, that the opening shots are set at some other undefined time; they do, therefore, in a sense, stand outside of time.
- 5 In reference to the film's final image – with the three daughters posed in front of a window, echoing the opening images of Joey and then Renata standing at windows – Pauline Kael concludes: "After the life-affirming stepmother has come into the three daughters' lives and their mother is gone, they still, in the end, close ranks in the frieze-like formation. Their life-negating mother has got them forever" (qtd. in Bailey 2001: 82–83).
- 6 Peter Bailey takes a different approach to the film's reflexivity, viewing Eve's perfectionism as parallel with that of Allen, himself, as a "committed artist . . . chronically dissatisfied with his cinematic achievements who routinely subordinates human relationships to that work" (2001: 80).

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