

Edited By Martin R. Hall

Women in the Work of Woody Allen

Amsterdam
University
Press

Women in the Work of Woody Allen



Amsterdam
University
Press

Transgressive Media Culture

Transgressive Media Culture publishes original monographs and exceptional edited collections that examine what is conceived to be beyond the limit, especially work that takes issue with this paradigm. From human trafficking and child sexual abuse, to conspiracy theories and cults, to the works of Lars Von Trier and other ground-breaking filmmakers, discourse on transgression dominates media culture, making this series necessary. While the focus is on transgressive media culture, this series engages fully with interdisciplinary areas and methodologies, including those drawn from sociology, psychology, philosophy and anthropology, producing original work by and for film and media scholars and beyond. The global scope of this work, with a transnational focus, is also key to its significance and contemporary relevance.

Series Editors

Jason Lee, De Montfort University, UK

Editorial Board

James Tangen, De Montfort University, UK

Stuart Price, De Montfort University, UK

Advisory Board

Feona Attwood, University of Middlesex

Juan José Cruz, Universidad de La Laguna

Mark Griffiths, Nottingham Trent University

James Kincaid, University of Southern California

Xavier Mendik, Birmingham City University

Balan Muthurajah, independent

David Nash, Oxford Brookes University

Atte Oksanen, University of Tampere

Nycole Prowse, University of the Sunshine Coast

David Punter, University of Bristol

Will Self, Brunel University

Ellen Wright, De Montfort University



Amsterdam
University
Press

Women in the work of Woody Allen

Edited by
Martin R. Hall

Amsterdam University Press



Amsterdam
University
Press

Cover illustration: Cannes, France – May 15, 2015: Emma Stone, Parker Posey & director Woody Allen at the gala premiere for their movie Irrational Man at the 68th Festival de Cannes © Jaguar Photo Services

Cover design: Coördesign

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 292 6

e-ISBN 978 90 4855 029 6 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789463722926

NUR 670

© Martin R. Hall / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2022

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
'I'm interested in the relationships that women have with other women'	
<i>Martin Hall</i>	
Part 1 Temptation, Destruction and Collapse	
1 'The Woman Destroyed' in <i>Blue Jasmine</i>	17
<i>Sophie Belot</i>	
2 'New York Was His Town, and It Always Would Be...'	33
Narrative Storytelling and the Vexing Role of Women in <i>Manhattan</i>	
<i>John D. Ayres</i>	
Part 2 Art and the Family	
3 Hannah and Her Father	55
Decoding the Eternal Feminine	
<i>Dianah Wynter</i>	
4 <i>Vicky Cristina Barcelona</i> and the Politics of Toxic Female Friendship	79
<i>Lauren Stephenson</i>	
5 'A Particularly Cruel Business for a Woman'	99
Nineteenth-Century Opera as Feminist Voice in <i>Match Point</i>	
<i>Christopher Booth</i>	
Part 3 Intertextuality	
6 I Gotta Be Me	119
The Remade Woman and Replaying the Woman's Part in Woody Allen's Movies	
<i>Michael Newton</i>	



- 7 Negotiating 'Dis-ease' 139
Jewish Women in the Work of Woody Allen
Roberta Mock

Part 4 Sound and Body

- 8 The Silent (Film) Woman 167
Sweet and Lowdown's Mute Muse
Steven Rawle
- 9 'Some Nights It's the Only Game in Town' 185
The Prostitute in Woody Allen's Oeuvre
Klara Stephanie Szlezák

Part 5 The Muse and Inspiration

- 10 Too Much, Too Young? 205
Woody Allen's Life, Work and Women in the #MeToo Era
Jason Lee
- 11 'She's a Genius, and I Don't Use That Word Casually' 225
Elaine May's Collaborative Relationship with Woody Allen
Martin Hall
- 12 Keaton and Allen 243
Collaboration and the Screwball Couple in *Annie Hall* and
Manhattan Murder Mystery
Claire Mortimer

- Index 263



Introduction

'I'm interested in the relationships that women have with other women'

Martin R. Hall

One could say that, over the past ten years, women have created an entire field within film studies which is now producing some of the most stimulating, intelligent and exciting work going on and which has dramatically influenced the criticism of male writers as well.

– Ann E. Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*

Ann E. Kaplan's influential book, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, makes some profound points and was a major driver of this edited volume looking critically at the work of one male filmmaker. Responding to the astute observations of authors such as Kaplan – who further suggested that 'few books on film, whether written by men or by women, can now ignore issues of female representation' (1983: iix) – this volume seeks to address the significant role of women in the work of Woody Allen. We specifically use the term 'work' as, in addition to Allen's large body of films, his plays, stand-up and television work are considered here.

The perspectives of a diverse group of authors have been brought together in these pages, authors who variously interrogate and analyze the multifaceted representations of women in these texts and in so doing for the first time evaluate the contributions made by women to the work of a problematic filmmaker. A critical reassessment of Allen's output is needed, prompted by the recently resurfaced child abuse allegations regarding Woody Allen's adopted daughter Dylan Farrow and a broader awareness as well as growing consciousness of issues surrounding gendered power structures in society.

The subject of men writing women is an area of film studies that is largely on the periphery of scholarship, despite the fact that, as Sarah S.G. Frantz

Hall, Martin R. (ed.), *Women in the Work of Woody Allen*. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press 2022

DOI: 10.5117/9789463722926_INTRO



Amsterdam
University
Press

and Katharina Rennhak have pointed out, borrowing a phrase from Virginia Woolf, there are ‘innumerable books written by men about “the most discussed animal in the universe” [woman]’ (2010: 1). There are scholars who have written about the construction of women by male authors in both literature and the theatre but very little indeed in the world of cinema. In her book *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights and the Modern Stage*, Gay Gibson Cima has suggested that ‘feminists herald Beckett’s genius at investigating the complexities of womanhood’ (1996: 215). This edited volume on women in the work of Woody Allen seeks to question to what extent this could be true for Allen’s work too. If, as Cima proposes, ‘male playwrights of genius can transcend gender boundaries and write “universal” women characters into their scripts’ (1996:1), we set out to interrogate whether there is any evidence for this authorship in the body of Woody Allen’s screen and stage work. Just as Cima’s book sought to reinstate the contributions of female actors within the modern theatre, this book attempts to emphasize the importance and significance of the women in the texts that follow.

In addressing the distinct absence of work on men writing about women, it is important to consider those academic volumes that have considered the work of women writing about men. For example, there is Janet Todd’s book exploring female authors and male characters in literature, *Men by Women* (1981), wherein she suggests that:

examining the ways in which female authors construct, manipulate, ignore, or experiment with the representation of the actions, emotions, and inner life of their male characters exposes the different but equally vital and telling perspectives of the construction of gender from that revealed by similar consideration of their female characters. (1981: 3)

Indeed, male authors over time have themselves constructed specific, and at times damaging, representations of women within literature, and this male perspective on the construction of gender is heavily scrutinized by the authors of this edited volume. Frantz and Rennhak reinforce this notion, referring to these male-authored female figures as ‘ideal femininity, thereby more often than not helping to form and strengthen the binary, patriarchal, gendered order’ (2010: 2). This, certainly, is something seen in the work of Woody Allen, but the question at hand is what variance there is and what differing range of examples there may be in the copious examples of women and women’s relationships in the texts that follow. Virginia Woolf



also engaged with the convoluted question of looking at women in fiction by delving into what exactly was meant by it:

The title 'women and fiction' might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like; or it might mean women and the fiction that they write; or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean that somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. (1929: 9)

The subject of women and their relationships is a regular motif in Allen's work. He himself has pointed out that 'it became fun for me to write from the female point of view [...] it was fresh' (Allen quoted in Lahr 1996: 156). From mothers and daughters in *Interiors* (1978) and siblings in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986) to wives, best friends, girlfriends, mothers, sex workers, evil queens and even the Devil's mistress, some of the most influential and commanding actresses of stage and screen have worked alongside Allen: Diane Keaton, Mia Farrow, Mariel Hemingway, Meryl Streep, Goldie Hawn, Dianne Wiest, Madonna, Scarlett Johansson, Christina Ricci, Cate Blanchett, Dame Eileen Atkins and Emma Stone, to name but a few. This book puts the work of Woody Allen under academic scrutiny in the context of the current climate of the treatment of women in Hollywood. Following the Harvey Weinstein case, many male celebrities are being brought forward on charges of sexual harassment, including Woody Allen, who has again appeared in the press in relation to historic charges of molestation.

Well within the #MeToo era, this edited volume brings together researchers to consider how women are represented further in the broader sphere of Hollywood cinema, to examine the notion of the male perspective on writing about women, and to explore the various approaches to relationships with and between women on screen. Through the lens of the work of Woody Allen, often probing the problematic consideration of the autobiographical nature of filmmaking, this book examines the role and representation of women in the broad works of Woody Allen, considering his films, plays, stand-up comedy and other writings. With more recent industrial attention towards the production of his work, notably Amazon Studios refusing to distribute the completed *A Rainy Day in New York* (2019), leading to Allen's 'breach of contract' suit against the studio, an out-of-court settlement and a 2020 US release for the film, the work of Woody Allen is markedly problematic. But these films, of course, demand interrogation.

Owing to the timeliness of this new book, given the contemporary issues with sexual harassment in the Hollywood system and with representations



– both positive and negative – of women on screen, the contributors have been able to analyze and share new and diverse perspectives on a prolific filmmaker and to uniformly present a hitherto unexplored perspective on Woody Allen's work with actresses and collaborators. Building upon Claire Dederer's 2017 assertion in the *Paris Review* that 'the film *Manhattan* is disrupted by our knowledge of Soon-Yi; but it's also kinda gross in its own right; and it's also got a lot of things about it that are pretty great. All these things can be true at once', this work seeks to rationalize how indeed we can deal with the work of these problematic filmmakers and address the male auteur post-#MeToo. One of our aims, in recognizing the importance of perspectives addressing our engagement with the male auteur post-#MeToo, is to make accessible to students and non-specialists our recent critical and theoretical engagement with the women in the films and plays of Woody Allen. It has been the editor's intention to develop new and important research and to make this information accessible to broader audiences.

It has been noteworthy to see how authors have considered the roles of women behind the camera, with Woody Allen as a particularly compelling example. It has been said that there are many contemporary male filmmakers 'who consciously seek out women editors citing the need for, and value of, a female perspective in the cutting room' – including, of course, Woody Allen, 'who has worked with women editors on every one of his films since *Manhattan* in 1979' (Meuel 2016: 18–19). In fact, it can be argued, as many of the following chapters astutely do, that women actively augment and improve the work of an occasionally somewhat flawed director. Susan E. Morse arguably became a significant part of Allen's signature itself owing to just how many of his films she worked on. For 20 years, Morse worked on the films of Woody Allen, even receiving nominations for the Academy Award for Best Film Editing for *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), *Radio Days* (1987) and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989). David Meuel has written specifically of the balance that an editor like Morse can bring to the work of a filmmaker, pointing out that:

Part of Morse's great contribution to Allen's work during all that time was, as film writer Ally Acker has noted, providing 'rhythm and cohesion' to a director's style that is essentially 'anecdotal and digressive'. (2016: 191)

The subject of women and their relationships is a consistent theme in Allen's work. This provides a catalyst for discussing the roles of women and their treatment beyond the work of this one director, leading to research of a



wide-ranging impact for many divergent research areas. It has been suggested that ‘In Hollywood films [...] women are ultimately refused a voice, a discourse, and their desire is subjected to male desire’ (Kaplan 1983: 70). The following chapters seek to identify the voices that are to be found in Allen’s work, from collaboration and muse to intertextuality and artistry.

The inherent conferring and sharing involved in producing this volume have ensured a coherence and quality across the collection. The editor has used a particularly light touch to edit the chapters in order to respect and reflect these vitally distinct works written from a wide range of important perspectives.

The book comprises five distinct sections which in turn address key approaches to assessing the roles of women in Allen’s work from differing critical perspectives. The first section considers the notions of temptation, destruction and collapse, engaging with the question of whether the central presence of women in Allen’s films is a sign of his being sensitive to their needs and desires. The second section approaches Allen’s work through the lens of art and familial relationships, focusing on siblings and friendships and problematizing Allen’s female characters. The volume then moves on to the rich area of intertextuality in Allen’s work – from remaking the films of others to re-writing women and the broader view of the positioning of women within their overarching star texts throughout Hollywood. The fourth section considers more physical and physiological characteristics that hold metaphorical resonance for the women in these films – from body to sound, or lack thereof. Finally, the work culminates in a section considering women as muse and inspiration in both content and context for Allen’s films and plays – from inspiration and competition to ageing collaborators.

Chapter 1 by Sophie Belot poses the significant question of whether the central presence of women in Allen’s films is a sign of his being sensitive to their needs and desires. With a focus on *Blue Jasmine* (2013), Belot suggests that the fragmented personality of Jasmine/Janine French could be read as a reflection of – and on – her objective/subjective subordination through a first masculine/feminine point of view. The second chapter then looks specifically at *Manhattan*. Here John Ayres suggests that, given the ubiquity of female characters in Allen’s work, it might be expected that authorial agency would be commonplace. Yet the situation is significantly more complicated, particularly in terms of the narrative aims for which female voiceover and narration – when present – are employed. Chapter 3, by D.E. Wynter, interrogates the philosophical masquerade of *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), analyzing the film through the lens of ‘The Metaphor of

Woman as Truth in Nietzsche' and Riviere's theories of feminine masquerade, problematizing Allen's titular women characters, and questioning whether Hannah and her sisters are overt archetypes of the Eternal Feminine or resistive performative masquerades. Lauren Stephenson then analyzes the politics of toxic female friendship in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008). Stephenson discusses the terms under which the film chooses to explore friendship between women, regarding toxicity and competition as integral parts of its representation.

Topher Booth, in Chapter 5, addresses nineteenth-century opera as feminist voice in 2005's *Match Point* (2005), considering the unique ability of pre-existing music to manipulate film. Booth suggests that while on the surface the film questions socially grounded notions of divine justice, its quasi-Romantic narration criticizes normative tropes of masculinity in popular culture. In Chapter 6, Michael Newton turns his attention to Woody Allen's conscious staging of female identity and the relations between men and women by remaking comedies that impressed and influenced the filmmaker in his youth, considering how Allen's twenty-first-century take on the woman's experience and his understanding of femininity are deeply rooted in the cinematic past. Roberta Mock then tackles the particularly autobiographical nature of Allen's work by scrutinizing the star texts of Jewish actors in Allen's films. This chapter focuses primarily on Julie Kavner and Scarlett Johansson and the ways in which their representation as Jewish women in Allen's movies might be positioned within their overarching star texts throughout Hollywood. The chapter deals with the ease – or in this case, 'dis-ease' – of 'dealing with' the work of Woody Allen.

Next, Steve Rawle interrogates the absence of the female voice and Samantha Morton's nostalgic performance style to explore the ways in which the character Hattie in *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999) is at once a problematic inclusion in Allen's cinema and a romanticization of the female performances of silent cinema. Rawle considers Morton's performance as a lead female character who does not speak as an anomaly in Allen's oeuvre. In Chapter 9, Klara Szlezak examines the diverse kinds and roles of prostitute characters in Allen's work. This chapter investigates the various perspectives on the image of 'the fallen woman' that Allen's writing provides. Taking into account the frequency with which prostitutes make an appearance in Allen's writings, the chapter investigates such diverse issues as the use of stereotypes, the reconciliation of the serious and problematic with the humoristic, and the gender constellations in scenarios in which love and sex are for sale. Chapter 10 sees Jason Lee delve into the work of Woody Allen in the explicit context of the accusations of child abuse and

paedophilia levelled against the filmmaker. Many of Allen's best-known works have the central character, played by Allen, in a relationship with a much younger woman. In these roles, the filmmaker self-consciously asks questions about the legitimacy of such relationships and thus publicly engages with these questions through artistic methods. In Chapter 11, Martin Hall analyzes the evident and powerful influence that Elaine May has had on the work of Woody Allen. Some of the most influential and commanding actresses of stage and screen have worked alongside Allen, yet what is often overlooked is the presence and influence of Elaine May both on stage and on screen as influence and collaborator. In Chapter 12, Claire Mortimer examines the fertile relationship between Allen and Diane Keaton, questioning her status as a 'muse' and analyzing how her performance style and creative involvement in their films together evolved over a quarter of a century.

The intention behind the curation of this collection was to make a significant contribution to the field of independent American cinema studies and the exploration of the screen through critical perspectives on gender, feminism and sexuality fundamentally fuelled by a post-#MeToo awareness. As yet, no extensive scholarly work has been conducted on the roles of women in the films of Woody Allen in particular, and as such, the book intends to develop a novel angle on an already well-studied filmmaker. There is indeed a timeliness that further makes this work particularly necessary in that it dials into the current critical discourse and acknowledges current socio-cultural trends and discussions within academia and within society at large.

Bibliography

- Dederer, Claire. (2017). What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men? *Paris Review*, 20 November 2017: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/20/art-monstrous-men/>
- Cima, G.G. (1996). *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights and the Modern Stage*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Franz, S. and Rennhak, K. (eds.) (2010). *Women Constructing Men: Female Novelists and Their Male Characters, 1750–2000*. London: Lexington Books.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. (1983). *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*. London: Routledge.
- Lahr, John. (1996). The Imperfectionist. In Robert Kapsis and Kathie Coblentz (Eds.), *Woody Allen: Interviews* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi).



- Meuel, D. (2016). *Women Film Editors: Unseen Artists of American Cinema*. New York: McFarland.
- Todd, J. (1989). *Men by Women*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Woolf, V. (2020) [1929]. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Renard Press Limited.

About the Author

Martin Hall is a Senior Lecturer and the Course Leader for Film Studies and Media & Communication for the School of Humanities, Religion and Philosophy at York St. John University. He has published widely on the work of Woody Allen and has published on many other aspects of the American cinema with a focus on the 1960s and 1970s.