The Spanish Annie Hall: Pedro Almodóvar's Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios(1st)

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Ana María Sánchez-Arce

> Pepa overuses high heels and miniskirts.[1] The truth is that they become her, but force her to walk in a way that Sontag [...] considers inappropriate for an independent, modern woman. I understand and agree with Sontag when she objects to the polarisation of the sexes, but this is not Pepa's concern. A woman must be free even to choose her outfits. I respect the imitator of Barbie dolls as much as the woman who dresses like Charlie Chaplin, such as Sontag's compatriot Annie Hall.
>
> (n.p.; my translation)[2]

In the pressbook for *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1988), Pedro Almodóvar alludes directly to Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), specifically the character of Annie (Diane Keaton). Almodóvar's allusion speaks to the international impact of *Annie Hall*, released eleven years before *Mujeres* ... and the conflation of Annie the character with Keaton the actor. The link between public and private selves is also reinforced by the fact that, as I discuss later, Annie is styled like Keaton.[3] Keaton is famous for wearing masculine clothes and her performance as Annie Hall has been credited with 'turn[ing] the trouser-suit into a high fashion item' (O'Toole 2007). Annie/Keaton's costumes became an international referent in terms of Anglo-American Women's Liberation as a (sometimes) political fashion statement. By mentioning Annie, Almodóvar invites a comparison between this character and Pepa (Carmen Maura), not simply in terms of clothing but also in terms of whether the trouser suit and the miniskirt are relevant to their position and function within the films' structures.

The characterizations of Annie and Pepa reflect their different personalities and cultural contexts, but not a difference in their relationships with their

respective partners: Alvy (Woody Allen) in *Annie Hall* and Iván (Fernando Guillén) in *Mujeres* .... Annie's characterization could not be more dissimilar to Pepa's in *Mujeres* .... Pepa changes outfit eight times in two days and except for pyjamas and a cardigan, all of the outfits are suits, most of them including tight miniskirts and matching jacket and blouse. These are 1980s skirt suits suitable for a 1980s Spanish career woman in media.

Like Annie, Pepa dresses the part she wants to play, and the skirt suits with matching blouses and shoes signal her professional status and how well off she is. Unlike Annie, Pepa has not been born middle class and her use of clothing for self-confidence and to project her new status is an important part of her characterization.

This chapter undertakes a comparative analysis of both films' gender politics in the light of the different times (late 1970s and late 1980s) and contexts (the height of women's liberation in the United States in the late 1970s and the diffused and incipient nature of feminism and women's liberation struggles in post-dictatorship Spain in the late 1980s) in which they were produced. Despite Annie and Pepa's strikingly different characterizations, there is a close affinity between characters and films and a more complex relationship between costume and women characters' plights than it seems. I argue that Pepa is in fact a Spanish Annie Hall of the 1980s. *Mujeres* ... may look more conservative in terms of costume but is progressive in its analysis of gender and in how women characters

Figure 9.1 Pepa dons one of her skirt suits (designed by José María Cossío) as she disposes of Iván's things; Iván is in a phone booth calling her.

are situated within the film's symbolic structures. *Annie Hall*, on the other hand, seems outwardly progressive, but is in fact quite conservative despite containing enough material for a more ambivalent interpretation.

The spat

Almodóvar's reference to Annie comes in response to Susan Sontag's criticism of Pepa's characterization following her visit to the film set in 1988.[4] She says of Almodóvar: 'I was teasing him, but I meant it [...]. Here's this guy who's supposed to be a new breeze from Spain, iconoclastic and irreverent, reproducing this musty, old-fashioned image of women in high heels with their rears sticking out' (qtd. Lida 1988, 80).[5] Sontag and Almodóvar's spat in print shows the impact of second-wave feminist thinking – specifically the sociological approach dominant in the United States – in critiques of film representation of women. This approach to 'women's image in film' is summed up by Sue Thornham as 'a simple matter of "misrepresentation", to be corrected by more "realistic" portrayals' (1999, 1). Writing in 1999, Thornham explains that we can no longer 'envisage a utopian moment when "images of women" will "reflect" the realities of women's lives: cinematic representations are far more complex than this' (1). More than a decade earlier, this utopian goal seems to be what Sontag was hoping for.

Almodóvar, clearly piqued by Sontag's criticism, agrees with her feminist agenda, but also states that this has nothing to do with his character. His response takes up a whole page of the pressbook, a section titled 'tacones y falda tubo' (high heels and miniskirt). This page is split in two equally sized halves: on the right, the riposte to Sontag, and on the left, an illustration of the back of a woman's legs walking wearing high heels.

The illustration is a sketch in grey which recalls the 1950s American women's fashion magazine look of the film's stylized opening credits by Juan Gatti, credits that Gwynne Edwards has cleverly linked to how the film highlights the fragmentation and dehumanization of women (2001, 92). The legs are completely uncovered, provocatively ending in the outline of the woman's backside. The title is cleverly positioned across the sketch, with the letter 'y' suggesting the groin and pubic area were the woman to be facing rather than walking away from the viewer. The absence of the miniskirt draws attention to the fetishizing function of the heels in fashion. Additionally, the focus on heels and legs links fashion to one of the film's most iconic scenes, an extreme close-up of Pepa's

feet wearing black high heels as she paces her apartment impatiently waiting for a call from her ex-lover, Iván. Contrary to the sketch in the pressbook and the credits, this scene does not fetishize the woman's body. Instead, the fast pacing and extreme close-up combine to create a sense of growing impatience and urgency as befits a comedy, as well as showing that despite Iván leaving Pepa, she is not going to crumble like the character who inspired her character, Jean Cocteau's abandoned woman in *La voix humaine* (*The Human Voice*, Jean Cocteau, 1930).

This use of shoes and clothes are remarked upon by Carmen Maura, also in this section of the pressbook, as Almodóvar re-produces a conversation with the actor who plays Pepa:

> I [Almodóvar] mentioned this to Carmen Maura.
>
> – With so much action, won't these heels and tight skirt be uncomfortable?
>
> Carmen replied:
>
> – Of course they'll be uncomfortable, but I will pretend that they're not. For a character like Pepa high heels are the best way of enduring her anxiety. If Pepa neglects her appearance, her courage will take a tumble. Coquetry is a discipline which represents her main strength. It means that her problems have not destroyed her yet.
>
> (1988, n.p.; my translation)

Maura's comments about her character development are crucial here for two reasons. First, it provides a first-hand idea of Pepa's choice of clothing. Second, it shows Maura's role in character development, with Pepa described as a woman in a particular context with a specific psychology. Interestingly, Pepa can let go of her coquetry when required, such as at the end of the film when her anxiety to talk to Iván has been replaced by calm acceptance of the end of the relationship.

The pressbook glosses Sontag's words to Lida, explaining that Sontag considers that 'high heels' and 'miniskirts' force Pepa to walk in a way that is 'inappropriate for an independent, modern woman' (n.p.; my translation), short for sexualized. Almodóvar's comment that 'this is not Pepa's concern' opens the door for a more nuanced analysis of the context behind Pepa's characterization through clothing. This context includes, for example, Spanish sociopolitical circumstances at the end of the 1980s, just after the Spanish transition from dictatorship to democracy, during which time slow changes in women's roles were taking place from the predominant conservative ideology to an incipient capitalist yet still mostly conservative society. Class is also extremely relevant

to an analysis of Pepa. Almodóvar is right in saying that Sontag's political agenda has nothing to do with Pepa, whose outfits are appropriate to how she is characterized as an upwardly mobile Spanish woman in late 1980s Spain who is nevertheless going to find out the hard way the difference between financial and emotional independence.

Despite Almodóvar's proto post-feminist views in the pressbook, costume choices for Pepa and other women characters in *Mujeres* ... show that these women characters in late 1980s Spain are certainly not in a post-feminist world. The film's ensemble women characters dress in a variety of ways, from conservative skirt suits – not fitted like those of lawyer Paulina Morales (Kity Mánver) or fitted like Pepa's – to the hyper-sexualized outfits worn by Pepa's model friend Candela (María Barranco). Regardless of their outfits, these women are shown to be emotionally dependent on the men in their lives, and whereas some will overcome this despite their upbringings, others will not. Characters' choice of clothing is part of their subjection to patriarchal and capitalist ideologies in Spain's newly democratic (and newly open to capitalism) society, whether we like what it says about the characters' ideology or not.

Sontag's label of Pepa's costumes as 'old-fashioned' points to a backwards sense of fashion inflected through second-wave feminist politics and the US context. Skirt suits were incredibly popular with working women in the 1980s in the United States and were popularized even more by TV series such as *Dynasty* (1981–9) and films such as *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988). The skirt-suit combination of feminine (the skirt and tailored jacket) and masculine (shoulder pads, business attire, block colours adapting the trouser suit's way of blending in) signals a development in women's work attire during their substantial incorporation to the business world in the United States.

In Spain, the skirt suit was not as widespread. The incorporation of women to the business world and professional jobs was behind that of women in the United States. Women had been joining the workforce during the 1960s and 1970s, but most women who worked were young and single, taking low qualification posts with low pay and responsibility. During the Transition from dictatorship to democracy (1975–82) many of the legal barriers to women entering the workforce were removed. For example, it was not until 1975 that married women were allowed to work without the consent of their husbands (*licencia marital*, marital license). It would take time until women entered the workforce in substantial numbers and even more until there were significant increases in the professions and management. Thus, Pepa's outfits

are in fact aspirational for her personally and for most Spanish women at the time, who could only dream of Pepa's financial freedom, professional success and wardrobe; they are not old-fashioned in the context of Spanish women's rights.[6] On the contrary, most Spanish women were not in jobs that allowed them to dress in a skirt suit; most of them worked in agriculture, factories and retail. Sontag's critique of traditional, patriarchal 'misrepresentation' of women shows Sontag's wishful thinking in terms of 'the realities of women's lives' (a political aim that as a feminist I share), but it misses the specificity of women's lives in Spain.

It is surprising to see the author of 'Notes on "Camp"' (1964), following a 'traditional sex-role stereotyping analysis' typical of American feminist film theory in the 1970s which, as Thornham explains, 'does not work' (2003, 10). Sontag is taking the lead from American second-wave feminist film criticism that conflated representation of women with the plight of real women. Whereas there is value in considering costume and characterization more generally as part of a film's textuality, the 'tube skirts and high heels' prevented Sontag from considering not only how these are part of Almodóvar's camp aesthetic with 'its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' (1964, 515) but also how clothing functions to structure and prompt meaning within the culturally specific context of newly democratic Spain. Sontag berates Almodóvar for doing precisely what she described more than twenty years earlier. Admittedly, she only visited the film set briefly so would have had little opportunity to consider the film as a whole. Almodóvar's camp aesthetic is coupled with a film structure that invites a critique of Spain's patriarchal society and reflection on how even the newly developing demographic of professional Spanish women was bound by patriarchal ideas on femininity and psychologically dependent on men and the discourse romantic love after decades under a fascist, ultra-Catholic dictatorship.

Skirt suits like the ones Pepa wears were mostly seen in American TV programmes and films such as *Dynasty* and *Falcon Crest* (1982–90). Popular Spanish television series of the time featuring professional women (lawyers) such as *Anillos de oro* (Wedding Rings, 1984) and *Turno de oficio* (Public Defender, 1986–7) adopted a realist aesthetic and did not commonly feature skirt suits, with the lawyer in *Anillos de oro* wearing high-neck blouses and below the knee flared skirts in muted colours, and the explicitly labelled 'feminist lawyer' in *Turno de Oficio* sporting a muted wardrobe of high-neck blouses and dresses as well as masculine-looking shirts and jackets.[7] Pepa's

skirt suits are part of the artificial aesthetic of *Mujeres* .... This 'emphasis on artificiality' is seen both in film sets and in the costumes' indebtedness to screwball comedy and Hollywood melodramas, which draw attention to the problematic nature of gender constraints and construction. In this context, it is not conceivable that an upwardly mobile professional woman in a Spain where feminism aligned with left-leaning parties in the 1970s and became greatly diffused in the 1980s would dress in any other way than a series of figure-enhancing suits and heels. The number of outfits draws attention to newly discovered consumerism.

Almodóvar's reluctance in the 1980s to align politically to any one movement (cf. Sánchez-Arce 2020) would have precluded a more feminist card-carrying character. However, *Mujeres* ... is clearly concerned with gender, particularly the process of women's emotional emancipation from men and romantic cisgender, heterosexual love. Departing from *La voix humaine*, *Mujeres* ... features four women who are abandoned by their male lovers and two men – father and son Iván and Carlos (Antonio Banderas) – who represent how male (mis)use of women is entrenched across generations.

Does characterization (costume in particular) in film result in better representations of independent, autonomous women? Does Pepa's characterization set *Mujeres* ... up to fail at progressiveness? Conversely, does Annie's characterization in *Annie Hall* signal a more progressive politics? Whereas critique of representation and calls for awareness of what representation may signal are always welcome, focusing only on costume can miss other, less obvious ways in which films may subject female characters to patriarchal discourses.

Because clothing is a big part of femininity – what Joan Riviere termed 'womanliness as a masquerade' in her 1929 essay[8] and thus constitutes gender performativity (cf. Butler 1990) – a narrow focus on costume can mislead viewers into assuming a more ground-breaking, gender-challenging attire corresponds to a more autonomous woman character. Thus, Annie's tailored trouser suits could be seen as a sign of the character's thoughtful statement on gender construction, and her tunics and kaftans may be interpreted as an indication of her liberation from patriarchal structures in line with the 1970s American women's lib movement. Notwithstanding, Annie is still in a coercive relationship with Alvy for most of the film, breaking up with him to move in with her producer Tony Lacey (Paul Simon) and glimpsed at the end of the film with a new boyfriend in New York. On the other hand, Pepa's late 1980s skirt suits and heels may signal (following Sontag) a sexualized woman who is the

object of the male gaze despite being a financially independent professional. As I have said elsewhere:

> Pepa is a woman in a society that values women's appearances and puts a great deal of pressure on women who are in the limelight as she is due to her media job. Her characterisation as a woman who despite her financial independence still depends emotionally on her ex-partner Iván [...] would not be believable without her desperate desire to look good.
>
> (2020, 101)

Indeed, Pepa only breaks free at the end of the film when she refuses to talk things over with him. Her newfound independence is not reliant on the matching outfit. Her tightly tailored miniskirt suit is stained with *gazpacho* as are her hair and face, destroying her make-up and hairdo. Her shoes are lost, and her tights are riddled with holes.

The ending affirms Pepa's newfound independence. After leaving Iván at the airport on her own terms and not telling him about her pregnancy, she claims her apartment as fully her own, 'Home at last!', and not the place she shared with Iván and which two days before she had considered too big for her. She does not discard the outfit, still wearing it as she settles down for a quiet chat with Marisa (Rossy de Palma). In fact, during her final monologue (which looks like a voiced interior monologue), she explains why she decides to put on her shoes as a practical issue: 'I'd better put on my shoes with this mess. I don't know which would be better, slipping on gazpacho or cutting myself on the glass.' This is followed by another pragmatic decision, this time about a possible relationship with the telephone repairman: 'The repairman is cute, but I'd better leave him for Marisa.'

Pepa's financial independence is reasserted as she mentions calling the cleaner. As she shares the news of her pregnancy with someone for the first time (this is also the first time that the audience hear of Pepa's pregnancy, which was only referred to obliquely at the beginning of the film), she explains her decision not to let the flat out. This decision reinforces her strength and independence, obliquely commenting on her much more important decision to bring her child up alone. The comedic ending, with Marisa confiding in Pepa that she has had an erotic dream and has lost her virginity while dreaming, further reinforces the theme of women's ability to do anything without (male, in this heterosexually-oriented film) assistance. However, the ending is more complex than it first appears because Pepa has resigned herself to living without Iván and bringing up their child by herself in 1980s Spain, where single mothers were stigmatized.

In addition to the disparity between outfit and autonomy at the end of the film, *Mujeres* ... makes the point about women's emotional dependence being unrelated to their use of sexually alluring clothing. There is another character who wears skirt suits, the so-called 'feminist lawyer' who is Iván's latest conquest, Paulina Morales (Kity Mánver). Paulina always wears skirt suits with hemlines beneath the knee and blazers that are not tightly fitted. Her outfits are closer to the power suit, but with a skirt and block colour. These more standard work clothes do not make as much a statement as Pepa's, signalling Paulina's 'womanliness' – necessary for a woman in the very masculine legal profession in 1980s Spain – without encouraging Paulina's sexualization. Despite Paulina's less sexualized outfits as a professional woman, she has also fallen for Iván's tricks and is already losing patience with Iván's outward passivity.

As Florence Redding Jessup states, *Mujeres* ... is 'a story about emancipation from machismo' (1994, 300) through the means of comedy. Jessup makes an eloquent argument in favour of *Mujeres* ... 's underlying feminist politics and its matter-of-fact take on the pervasiveness of patriarchal structures and ideology in 1980s Spain: 'Almodóvar's humour in this funny film renders machismo absurd. Yet our laughter has undertones of frustration as well as optimism. Pepa overcomes her subordination to the macho; the macho continues with someone else. Machismo roves around society throughout this film; the final scenes indicate that mañana it will go away' (302). Among Jessup's many insights is her awareness of Almodóvar's nod in the film to the newly established Instituto de la Mujer (The Women's Institute), founded in 1983 (309). Iván's estranged wife Lucía lives next to the Instituto de la Mujer. This juxtaposition of new institutions and agencies devoted to work against gender discrimination and equality with the story of a woman who is irretrievably wedded to the ideology that makes discrimination possible shows Almodóvar's awareness that Spanish society still had work to do to shed its subjection to strict patriarchal ideology as promoted for more than forty years during the dictatorship.

Annie, a 'post-feminist torch-bearer'?

Almodóvar relates Annie's costumes to Charles Chaplin's formal suit attire when playing The Tramp. The trouser suit in *Annie Hall* bends gender expectations in fashion. It is both aspirational *and* a sign of Annie's adherence to masculine looks to succeed. Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans skilfully analyse

Annie's changing outfits in relation to the character's transformation into an 'assertive, post-feminist torch-bearer of the career woman's cause' (1989, 173). As they explain, 'the Annie Hall Look that [...] so dominated women's fashions after the film's release, is based on the clothes Annie wears in her as yet unreconstructed, empty-headed identity of her first appearances in the film', a look that disappears, 'giving way to a much more liberated outfit' consisting of more skirts and tunics, and overgrown jumpers (173).

While it is true that Annie becomes more assertive, and that her costumes change as Babington and Evans explain, I remain unconvinced that she has become a 'post-feminist torch-bearer', a label that perhaps fits Alvy's first wife Alison Portchnik better. Annie's clothes may be a sign of her individuation process, but she breaks-up with Alvy to move to California with her producer, adopting New Age fashion, which can be seen in the proposal scene: light flowing kaftan, neutral scarf and ombre, neutral sunglasses. She has kept her New York straw bag. This 'new' Annie has left behind the trouser suit and is dressing more similarly to her middle-class mother's style, the style she also nods to when Alvy and Annie visit the Halls in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. For this reason, I believe that Annie's outfits are more about fitting in and career aspiration than they are about a feminist agenda.[9]

Mujeres ... occupies a position in Pedro Almodóvar's career like *Annie Hall*'s in the career of Woody Allen.[10] Both films were highly successful and were quickly considered classics, winning numerous awards and nominations. Both marked a jump to mainstream filmmaking for Allen and Almodóvar. More importantly, both films are problematic comedies that develop against the generic grain. *Annie Hall* blends comedian comedy[11] with romantic comedy, ending in a reverse melodrama with the male character, Alvy, suffering despite his attempts at being funny. This can be seen in the use of the chicken joke at the very end where it becomes a poignant reflection on relationships:

> ALVY: It was great seeing Annie again. I realised what a terrific person she was and how much fun it was just knowing her and ... I thought of that old joke, you know ... This guy goes to a psychiatrist and says 'Doc, my brother's crazy. He thinks he's a chicken.' And the doctor says, 'Well, why don't you turn him in?' and the guy says, 'I would, but I need the eggs.' Well, I guess that's pretty much now how I feel about relationships. You know, they're totally irrational, and crazy, and absurd and ... but I guess we keep going through it because most of us need the eggs.

Alvy's statement that romantic relationships are 'totally irrational, and crazy, and absurd' but ultimately necessary closes the film in a would-be comic yet philosophical acceptance of painful feelings surrounding his break-up with Annie. Alvy bookends the film with jokes as a frame for his reflection on 'what went wrong' (note the passive construction devoid of a subject responsible for the failure of the relationship) and, later, as a way of acknowledging that despite 'our' awareness that romantic love is a ruse, we cannot help ourselves from falling for it. *Annie Hall* thus cleverly combines comedian comedy with thoughtful reflection on traditional discourses of love and how they influence behaviour. Alvy's joke is the equivalent of a stage bow, but this is followed by a puncture of his comic persona and return to the painful feelings he sketched in a more comic mode at the beginning of the film. This volte-face shifts the film from comedy to male melodrama as Alvy succeeds in affirming his suffering. The link between male suffering and comedy as described by Kathleen Rowe is thus blurred, a blurring that is perhaps more easily achieved due to Alvy's schlemiel status, a role that already departs from traditional masculinity.

Alvy has managed to hide from himself how much he is to blame for the end of the relationship. Nevertheless, he provides many leads to viewers of his attempts to shape Annie as an intellectually aware, successful woman as well as to control Annie when she becomes just that. His stance is one of reluctant resignation to fate, just like his attitude to life. Alvy's comedic front is not quite what it seems, as seen from the opening scene. As Jason Bailey states, 'his gags aren't greeted with reassuring laughter from a delighted audience [...], only the rather eerie silence that accompanies the opening credits. It's a striking choice [...] in the opening scene, and throughout *Annie Hall*, he's not performing for us; he's talking to us, sharing of himself, making a personal connection' (2014, 31).

The film casts spectators as detectives piecing together Annie and Alvy's relationship and, like him, searching for a reason for their break-up. It shows Alvy revelling in the past, hence the 'jumbling up the [narrative] pieces so that the audience is lulled out of the complacency of preconceived notions [about a boy-meets-girl narrative]' (Bailey 2014, 32). This retrospection increases the perception of the pain Alvy suffers at the end. This genre blending may be related to Allen's original idea for *Annie Hall*: 'I wanted to do a realistic comedy, where I can speak to the audience and bare my soul. Maybe there'd be fewer laughs, but hopefully the characters will be engaging and their lives will be interesting, even if they're not always speaking in joke' (2020, 189). The working title of the film, *Anhedonia*, about a man who cannot experience pleasure (Allen 2020, 190;

Cowie 1998, 15), also points to the blending of melodrama and comedy, as well as providing a lead as to the reason for the break-up from Annie's perspective.

As Annie exclaims in exasperation during the proposal scene: 'Alvy you're incapable of enjoying life, you know that?' Annie's comment contradicts Alvy's statement in the opening scene: 'I'm not a morose type. I'm not a depressive character.' This is one of many instances where Alvy's self-centredness and the film's use of his point of view/gaze is subverted, allowing a glimpse of Annie's point of view. Other punctures of Alvy's point of view include the split-screen parallel therapy sessions, the fights over Alvy's spying on Annie and, less obviously, Annie's out-of-body experience while having dissociated sex with Alvy or her facial expressions when, for example, Alvy presents her with sexy underwear.

The emphasis on Alvy's failed introspection and the narrative's prevailing use of his point of view colours much of the criticism of *Annie Hall* and Allen more generally as 'operating in the service of sexism and as perpetuating patriarchy' (Girgus 2002, 48). For example, Richard Feldstein explains how *Annie Hall* is, despite its title, not about Annie but about Alvy: 'Trace its code of narrative arrangement and you will find that *Annie Hall* is not about its namesake, because the primary sequence of events depicts Alvy's life, not Annie's. Although Annie is a historical subject who progresses through perceptible transformations, each passage is supervised by Alvy as part of his tutorial' (1989, 74). However, the film's use of metacinematic techniques – including referentiality and self-reflexivity (cf. Schatz 1982), fragmentation, breaking the fourth wall, use of split screen, use of media such as the comic and footage of television programmes and so on (cf. Schwanebeck 2015; Szlezák and Wynter 2015) – encourage distance and, together with the instances where we are provided with opposing points of view as seen above, can be the source of a deconstruction of Alvy's dominant gaze.

I have always interpreted *Annie Hall* against the grain, disliking Alvy intensely and cheering when Annie stands up for herself. This is not simply a matter of feminist politics; the film itself offers enough rope, so to speak, to hang Alvy, who comes across as a patronising, controlling, would-be Pygmalion.[12] Despite most of *Annie Hall* not being 'about its namesake', as Feldstein says, with Annie presented as Alvy's object of desire, we also glimpse another Annie, the character who 'progresses through perceptible transformations', a person who manages to break free from Alvy's control, leaving him only with narrative to pursue his dreams of possession. Alvy's narrative, his play as well as the film, signifies his failure.

'Nearly' a love story: The importance of genre

Mujeres ... blends (particularly screwball) comedy with melodrama (cf. Evans 1996), starting melodramatically with the song 'Soy infeliz' (I am unhappy), reflecting Pepa's feelings on being abandoned by Iván and ending the otherwise frantic story with a quiet scene where female friendship and motherhood substitute the traditional romantic ending. *Mujeres* ... is an anti-romantic comedy, much like *The Women* (1939), 'in which matrimony is undone and men remain a structural absence superfluous to the film's pleasures' (Rowe 1995, 51). The final song of *Mujeres* ..., 'Puro Teatro' (Pure Theatre; La Lupe, 1969), underscores the film's deconstruction of the misleading discourse of romantic love, men's abuse of it and women's subjection to it. *Annie Hall* also deconstructs romantic love but pulls back from this repeatedly to uphold it. Remarkably, whereas *Mujeres* ... lays the blame squarely on the nearly absent male character who refuses to be tied to convention by committing to any one woman, *Annie Hall* presents us with a male comedian who is ready to commit and a female character, also in show business and played by a comic actor in her own right, who refuses to. This reverses comedian comedy in which women 'tend to signify the demands of integration and responsibility for the male' (Krutnik 1990, 37). As Joanna E. Rapf explains, 'with *Annie Hall* in 1977, after he met Diane Keaton, [Allen] did begin dealing with this existential angst and darkness from a woman's point of view. [...] He was able to get away from [Steve] Seidman's misogynistic comedian-centred comedy and, indeed, to laugh at it' (2013, 274). Both films end with Annie and Pepa's rejection of their male counterparts.

Annie Hall was marketed as 'a nervous romance' (see 1977 poster) and, as has been pointed out, marks a development in romantic comedy in its use of an unhappy ending (Bailey 2014, 32). In Spain, the tagline of the poster was '"casi" una historia de amor' ('almost' a love story), which reflects the film's challenge to the genre of romantic comedy whilst still adhering to some of its characteristics, not least the exploration of the tensions in a heterosexual couple.

Traditionally, these tensions are driven by 'the "excessive" woman who "desires too much"' (Rowe 1995, 41). One could say that Annie's desire to learn (going to college) and advance in her music career (moving to LA) causes most of the tensions in her relationship with Alvy. However, the film also allows the opposite, placing Alvy as the excessive character who desires too much, in this case an

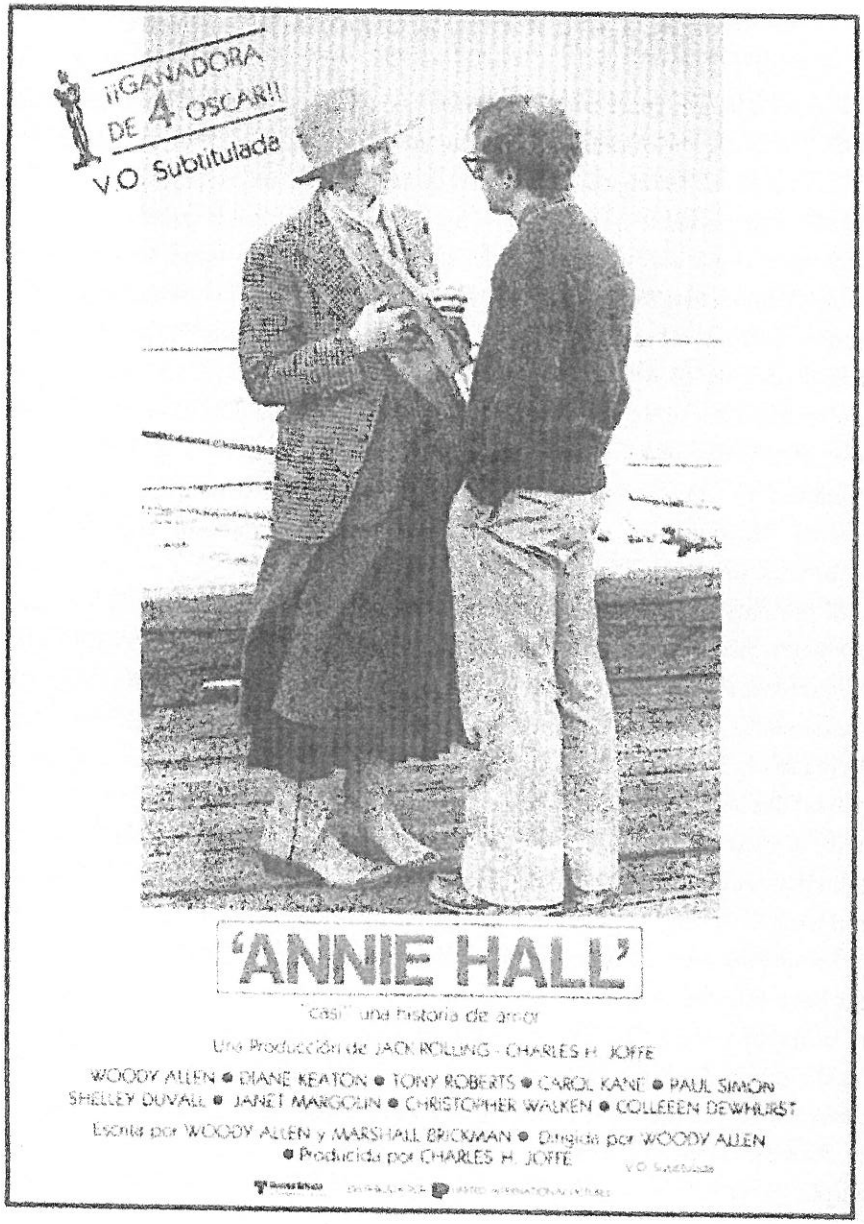

Figure 9.2 Spanish poster for *Annie Hall* (1977).

intellectual, independent partner who nevertheless remains compliant and in awe of him. Despite Alvy's initial encouragement, he is not keen on his Galatea striking out on her own (cf. Knight 2004). This is obvious in the way he talks to Annie when he realizes that he wants to get back together with her: 'Listen, I … I want you to come back here. Then I'm gonna go out and get you.' Not only is Alvy demanding that Annie becomes his girlfriend again, she has to sacrifice her career and move back to New York with him.

Annie Hall's multiple endings reflect the film's uneasy blend of comedian and romantic comedy. After the second break-up, Alvy is back in New York and tries dating other women. He tries to replicate the lobster scene, but his date does not find him funny or even realise he is joking. Alvy's comedy act is dependent on a receptive, comic sidekick, Annie. Alvy tries to get Annie back, flying to Los Angeles and proposing, but Annie rejects him, saying 'No' twice and leaving. On his return to New York, Alvy writes a play about his relationship with Annie, changing the ending of the proposal scene to an acceptance by Sunny/Annie. Alvy breaks the fourth wall to comment upon this trite ending and continues narrating his later encounter with Annie and final lunch when (he says) they 'kick around old times'. There is a montage of scenes from happier times to the song 'Seems Like Old Times'.

Because the end credits are silent, the last aural impression is of Annie singing 'Seems Like Old Times', bringing back memories of the selective montage about the relationship, all of it positive. The ending is quiet and nostalgic, enabling both the construction of an idealized relationship and revelling in the knowledge that it has ended. This, of course, is from Alvy's perspective as he is narrating and most of the film is focalized through him. This is a comedy that ends as a male melodrama with the main character, comedian Alvy, mired in his painful feelings and accepting that he must move on. At this point, the film's structure has put autonomous Annie back in the place Alvy would have liked her to end, back with him in New York and pining for their lost relationship as described in the song. Nostalgia encourages viewers to yearn for the relationship to have worked, regardless of the film's techniques to enable a deconstruction of Alvy's point of view as outlined above.

Annie Hall's ending is remarkably different from that of *Mujeres …*, where nostalgia had briefly made an appearance during the film but ends by looking to the future as Pepa discusses her pregnancy and decision not to let out her apartment. The end credits song, 'Puro Teatro', also extends the main character's perspective. This is a song about a woman seeing through her ex-lover's lies and refusing to accept him back after he broke her heart. The singer uses a theatre metaphor, the 'final curtain', to refer to the definitive ending of the relationship. This is a far cry from *Annie Hall*'s nostalgic revision; Pepa's point of view continues to be privileged and Iván's actions are not excused. He is not allowed to reframe the events to suit himself, as Alvy does.

Conclusion: Keaton and Maura, Annie and Pepa

Annie and Pepa are watershed roles in their respective national cinemas, both characters being shaped by and shaping their stars' personas. As well as Keaton being a comedian and singer in her own right, her wardrobe was mostly used to characterize Annie, as Allen explains:

> [Keaton] came in, and the costume lady on the picture, Ruth Morley, said, 'Tell her not to wear that. She can't wear that. It's so crazy.' And I said, 'Leave her. She's a genius. Let's just leave her alone, let her wear what she wants. If I really hate something, I'll tell her. Otherwise she can choose for herself.'
>
> (2004, 83–5)

Nevertheless, as Claire Mortimer explains, 'Keaton's contribution to *Annie Hall* has been sidelined – not only by critics and scholars but also by Keaton herself, whose generosity and humility serve to eclipse her creative contribution and shore up the status of Allen as auteur' (2022, 244). Similarly, Maura had an established star persona by the time *Mujeres* ... was made from multiple credits and, most importantly, her hosting of *Esta noche* (*Tonight*, 1981–2, Fernando García Tola), a TV variety show where she performed the role of candid presenter whose weekly tagline was the comment a supposed producer had made to her: 'Nena, tu vales mucho' (Babe, you're worth a lot). Maura's star image is referenced in her role as Pepa. It is important to look beyond the auteur framework to consider how women collaborators shape these projects. Mortimer's essay on the Keaton/Allen collaboration does just this. There is no equivalent for Maura/Almodóvar so far.

The films portray similar struggles and victories by their women characters as they become autonomous beings despite the filmic and social structures that are stacked against them. As Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz states, 'Pepa's dramatic arc leads her from drug-induced incoherence, heartbreak and desperation to redemption, regeneration, the assertion of her subjectivity and desire, and the satisfying closure of her unresolved narrative' (2007, 114). Likewise, Annie's development (which from Alvy's perspective seems to be all down to his mentoring) leads to her breaking away from his controlling grip. As Sam B. Girgus explains: 'Annie does learn to use language more effectively, at least in terms of achieving her independence and advancing her career. Annie's acquisition of more developed and coherent speech often evidences itself in rebellious exchanges with Alvy, a psychologically accurate way of relating her growth and her independence from Alvy' (2002, 56).

Both the two films' are comedies with the heterosexual break-up as main the theme. There the similarities seem to end. *Annie Hall* uses a documentary style and overt metacinematic techniques to puncture realism and emphasize representation; *Mujeres* ... is a camp pop comedy indebted to screwball comedy and melodrama. The former is dominated by the male character – Alvy – whose point-of-view viewers are almost exclusively shown and whose voice over opens and intrudes upon the film repeatedly; the latter begins with a voiceover from the female protagonist, Pepa, and offers her point of view nearly exclusively, even during the few times her ex-partner speaks, speech that is nearly always mediated by technology (answering machine, dubbing studio recording, Pepa re-reading an old postcard of his). In *Annie Hall*, we get Alvy's personal history of desire and are shown how he returns to Annie as nostalgic object of desire periodically and, most importantly, at the end; *Mujeres* ... shows us how Iván's personal history of desire impacts on the women he uses and the child he fathers, but this is secondary to Pepa's journey to emotional independence from him and her decision not to tell him that she is pregnant by him.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis of the two films' gender politics within their specific cultural contexts has highlighted the international impact of *Annie Hall* and the many points of contact between these seemingly disparate films. The analysis of costume and characters' plights is used to explore how a critique of film representation can move beyond comparing cinematic representations of women, what Thornham calls 'a utopian moment when "images of women" will "reflect" the realities of women's lives'. To do this, one must consider filmic structures in relation to genre, style and other formal matters alongside cultural contexts. Paying close attention to these has shown that both films portray similar struggles and victories by their women characters as they become autonomous beings (Pepa even more than Annie) despite the social and filmic structures that are stacked against them. In addition to this, the analysis of the spat between Almodóvar and Sontag in relation to representation reveals the need to revise first impressions based on characterization. As we know, an outfit that breaks canons of femininity is not a safeguard against more psychological structural patriarchal oppression of women or guarantee of film's pushback against structural oppression. Alternatively, a character dressed in a way that upholds these same canons of femininity may not in itself account for the film's overall politics.

Pepa's accidental burning of her double bed at the beginning of *Mujeres* ..., the bed she used to share with Iván, anticipates the burning of the whole set

representing the marital home by Tilda Swinton in Almodóvar's latest return to Cocteau's play *La voz humana* (*The Human Voice*, 2020). The accidental burning in the 1980s, which is followed by Pepa destroying and disposing of mementos of her life with Iván, is followed by Swinton's deliberate burning of the props and set to the life she has been pining for, a life that we are shown to be a play/masquerade. Both Annie and Pepa masquerade. Both become aware of the strictures of these roles. Both achieve small victories in worlds that are shown to be hostile to women. Despite (possibly because of) the heels and miniskirt, Pepa's journey seems to be the most remarkable. She is truly a Spanish Annie Hall.

Notes

1 The literal translation is 'high heels and tube skirt'. However, Pepa is seen mostly in miniskirts rather than tube skirts, hence my translation of 'falda tubo' as miniskirt throughout. The use of 'falda tubo' seems a direct allusion to Susan Sontag's use of 'tube skirt' (qtd. Lida 1988, 80), a comment that this section of the pressbook responds to.

2 Many thanks to the Filmoteca Española (Spanish Film Archives) for providing access to this pressbook.

3 See also Peter Krämer's chapter in this collection.

4 Many thanks to Professor Kathy A. Parsons (Iowa State University) for invaluable help in tracking down Sontag's comments for *Elle*.

5 As I have said elsewhere, 'Almodóvar's defence sounds a little dated and not particularly progressive. […] Almodóvar plays down the fact that Pepa's choice of clothes reveals a patriarchal culture at work, even in a woman who on the surface appears to be independent' (2020, 101).

6 For insightful analyses of costume and the construction of the female body, see Gaines and Herzog.

7 For a discussion of the construction of national identity through television in Spain and representations of women, see Louis (2020).

8 'Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the "masquerade". My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing' (Riviere 1986, 38). For an analysis of masquerade and the construction of femininity in *Women …*, see Girelli 2006.

9 Diane Keaton's outfits are also not necessarily feminist statements. In a 2014 interview, she was asked about her trademark look, replying thus: 'Clothing that actually hides the body. There's a lot to hide in my case' (Siegel 2014).

10 See Krämer's chapter in this collection and Symons for the importance of *Annie Hall* in Woody Allen's career, also Smith (2014) and Sánchez-Arce (2020) for the centrality of *Mujeres …* to the career of Pedro Almodóvar.

11 Frank Krutnik analyses the genealogy and development of comedian or comedian-centred comedy, explaining that it 'differed from mainstream fiction films in one important respect: comedian-centred films were not organized simply in accordance with the narrative-based aesthetic of classical cinema. They exhibit, instead, a combination of fiction-making and performative entertainment spectacle' (1990, 17). This creates a tension between the fiction-making and comedian performance: '[t]he comedian figure deforms familiar conventions of film heroism, unified identity and mature sexuality. […] At such moments, the comedian's performance intrudes into the fictional masquerade. […] Through the intrusion, the comedian figure demonstrates that unified character identity is a fictional mask' (29).

12 For an analysis of *Annie Hall* and the Pygmalion myth, see Knight (2004).

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