

**Ecstasy and Agony:  
The Melodramatic Visions of Douglas Sirk and Alfred Hitchcock**

**by  
Susan Christine Kurbis**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

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## Abstract

"Ecstasy and Agony: The Melodramatic Visions of Douglas Sirk and Alfred Hitchcock" brings together Sirk, a master of 1950's film melodrama, with Hitchcock, the "Master of Suspense". The thesis proposes that The Birds and Marnie can be quite easily read as melodramas, and that the two films in fact bear notable thematic and visual similarities to several of Sirk's paradigmatic contributions to the genre. However, while Sirk's films demonstrate a celebratory attitude toward uninhibited states of feeling, Hitchcock's interpretation of the genre is much darker; his melodramas reveal a consistent suspicion of boundless emotionalism.

Each chapter thus emphasises Sirk's and Hitchcock's contrasting notions of affective excess by providing a detailed analysis of the role of the body (including its use by the performer), mise-en-scène (specifically, the concept of the bourgeois home), and music. Throughout, the level of spectatorial involvement and response encouraged and the degree of irony guiding narrative closure are considered crucial in determining each director's specific melodramatic vision. The study concludes that no matter how ironic Sirk's notion of the happy ending is, he consistently honours the melodramatic tradition of emotional ecstasy, while Hitchcock subverts the primary objective of the genre by agonisingly prohibiting release.

## Acknowledgements

When I began my M.A. part time in the fall of 1999 for something to do in my spare time, I had no idea that my studies would become a full time preoccupation. Over the past four years I have found myself variously mystified by labyrinths and postmodern historiography, frightened by White Hotels and spiral staircases, and enraptured by Jimmy Stewart and Bette Davis. For these diverse experiences, I give heartfelt thanks to my wonderful University College professors, especially Stephen Snyder for screening Now, Voyager on my very first night of classes, Brenda Austin-Smith for imparting her incredible wealth of knowledge on all things melodramatic, and George Toles for sharing his passion for "learning fun". I can't imagine having a more enthusiastic and challenging advisor: George always knew when I needed a boost in confidence or a gentle nudge in a more exacting academic direction. I have been overwhelmingly inspired by his love of film and literature and his demonstration that the intensely personal and the rigorously intellectual can find a happy union.

I extend love and thanks to my partner, Chris Jacques, for his understanding and support of my academic pursuits, his willingness to watch more film melodrama than he ever thought possible, and for always knowing the appropriate time to do his Robert Stack impression. I am thrilled that we will be walking the stage to receive our degrees at the same time as well as "graduating" into the world of parenthood together.

Finally, I would like to dedicate my thesis to my late father, Ken Kurbis. Through action rather than words, Dad demonstrated the importance of learning; in many ways, I am still the same child who tried to get good grades to please her father. I am certain he would've been very proud.

## Introduction

### Magnificent Obsession: A Passion for Film Melodrama

"You must remember that the ridiculous and the grandiose dwell very close together."

Douglas Sirk

My love affair with film melodrama began the moment I saw Paul Henreid light two cigarettes simultaneously and offer one to Bette Davis in Now, Voyager. The delicious, nicotine-stained romance of the moment took me in completely. Hitherto, I had always scorned makeover or "ugly duckling" (to borrow the film's term for pre-Jaquith Bette Davis) stories specifically geared to a female audience: films like Pretty Woman (1990) were more likely to make me cringe than sigh. Perhaps there was something more dignified about 40's melodrama, something more... vogue. After all, in what other era could a "spinster aunt" be completely transformed by a natty pair of shoes, an eyebrow job, and a fantastically wide-brimmed hat? The sheer elegance of Now, Voyager infuses even its most excessive moments with a sense of appropriateness; the film becomes a practical text for what to do and wear in moments of high melodrama. Why, certainly it is de rigueur both to blow smoke at and kiss one's lover through a chic black veil! Obviously one should wear an oversized corsage of camellias on one's evening gown to signify burning passion! Of course one should never ask for the moon when one already has the stars! Pathos never looked so good.

Despite its overwhelming sense of style, Now, Voyager's appeal reaches well beyond the visual. The screen adaptation of Olive Higgins Prouty's tale of

the lonely and neurotic Miss Vale captures the very essence of melodrama: "The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid, the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings" (Brooks, MI 4). Charlotte's impassioned self-nominations as she moves through the various stages of her recovery / transformation are the most intense and moving moments of the film. Stanley Cavell notes in Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman that "The film is preoccupied with change – a preoccupation laid on with a trowel, as issues in melodrama tend to be laid on with trowels: caring for them depends on whether you can care about matters that demand that openness or extravagance of care" (118). To my experience, it is practically impossible not to care for Bette Davis as she exposes herself at turn after turn in the film, always with excruciating, tear-soaked honesty. (Just give her the moon, Jerry!)

My ardent fling threatened to end abruptly upon my first viewing of Douglas Sirk's interpretation of the Fannie Hurst novel Imitation of Life. If the 1940's melodrama created a lush, smoky backdrop in front of which the hysterical body could (elegantly) cry aloud its need for recognition in the world, Sirk's 1959 maternal melodrama was a shock to my well-cultured senses. Those glaring colours! Those outlandish costumes and sets! That unfathomable story line! That ... "acting"! I scoffed aloud at Imitation of Life's cache of bizarre moments: the desirous (yet ultimately wooden) Steve's constant attempts to make Lora stand still (usually by clutching her shoulders) as she rushes off to



take yet another ill-timed phone call from her agent; the mulatto daughter's rage, expressed in obvious symbolism as she kicks about a stuffed white lamb (for it is her mother who wishes to be standing with the lambs on Judgement Day); the maid Annie's insane smiles as she endures humiliation after humiliation. I marvelled at what kind of director would encourage an actress to beam like a kid on Christmas morning as she describes how her child's father "left before she was born." Perhaps this is what Rainer Werner Fassbinder meant when he wrote "The way Sirk handles actors is too much" (23). In fact, almost everything in the film was "too much" for me. If, according to Cavell, melodrama lays things on with a trowel, Sirk had used a shovel in Imitation of Life.

However, just when my zeal for melodrama threatened to wilt like Charlotte's camellias, something miraculous happened. Watching the scene where Annie goes to Hollywood to find Sarah Jane at the Moulin Rouge and say her final goodbye, I found myself weeping right along with the characters. By the time Annie makes her last appearance at her funeral (albeit disguised somewhat like a giant wedding cake) I found my tearful state amplified: Imitation of Life had proven indeed to be a "four hankie" picture. My initial skepticism turned to awe: how could a film that established itself early on as so excessively vulgar inspire in me such a passionately emotional response? The question lingered as I experienced the same kind of emotional transformation viewing other Sirk melodramas. They too, were filled to overflowing with outrageous moments: Dorothy Malone flailing about her room in a nymphomaniacal cha-cha while her father simultaneously dies of a heart-attack atop a spiral staircase in Written on

the Wind; Rock Hudson being spurred to medical miracles by an angelic Otto Kruger in Magnificent Obsession; a wildly waving Hudson plunging from a snowy precipice in All That Heaven Allows. But just as I was about to give up on Sirk and his preposterous melodramatic vision, there consistently came moments of true pathos where tears flowed freely - both on screen and down my cheeks. I felt that Sirk was giving me the same kind of reassuring nod that Kruger gives to Hudson in Magnificent Obsession: "You can do it!"

I thus found myself happily caught in the very situation Mary Ann Doane (quoting Franco Moretti) illustrates in The Desire to Desire: "Tears are always a product of powerlessness. They presuppose two mutually opposed facts: that it is clear how the present state of things should be changed - and that this change is impossible" (91). On one hand I felt like I wanted Sirk to eliminate the moments of sheer ridiculousness, to tone things down and adopt the kind of grace that Now, Voyager is endowed with, yet on the other I realised that those moments of garish excess are the very heart of Sirk's filmmaking. In his interview with Jon Halliday, Sirk explained: "This is the dialectic - there is a very short distance between high art and trash, and trash that contains the element of craziness is by this very quality nearer to art" (110). As a "house director" for Universal Studios, Sirk found that "conditions were not perfect [. . .] Of course, I had to go by the rules, avoid experiments, stick to family fare, have happy endings, and so on" (Halliday 97). However, Sirk repeatedly transformed the trashy story lines of his material into what Pauline Kael describes in her essay "Trash, Art, and the Movies" as "a different kind of truth, something that surprises us and registers

with us as funny or accurate or maybe even amazingly beautiful" (102). Like Charlotte Vale, Sirk's films flawlessly (perhaps with not quite as much polish, but still with a "kind of beauty" as Charlotte might tactfully say) make the shift from "ugly duckling" to "funny butterfly" (Cavell 115). My melodramatic camellias bloomed anew.

I believe it is because watching Sirk has made me both more attuned to the conflicts of the maternal and family melodramas and more tolerant (indeed even appreciative) of excess that I was instantly enthralled by Alfred Hitchcock's Marnie (1964), which seemed to me an indisputable maternal melodrama, considering its emphasis on "separation, separation and return, or of threatened separation [. . .] all the permutations of the mother / child relation" (Doane 73). As a relatively new scholar of Hitchcock, I became fascinated by considering how the film would measure up against the standard that Sirk set for the genre just a few years prior. Hitchcock is certainly not as famously linked to melodrama as he is to suspense, but as Robin Wood illustrates in "Ideology, Genre, Auteur" (in Hitchcock's Films Revisited), Hitchcock shifted quite ably into various other genres; Wood offers a film noir reading of Shadow of a Doubt as an example. Certainly films like Rebecca, The Birds, and Marnie reflect the central characteristics of film melodrama illustrated by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith in "Minnelli and Melodrama": an indulgence in excess demonstrated primarily through the mise-en-scène, an interest in family dynamics (Hitchcock's particular obsession being the mother-child relationship), and an overall focus on the expression of emotion (73).

Perhaps the main reason I was so taken by Marnie is because it bears many remarkable similarities, both thematic and visual, to Imitation of Life. In their mise-en-scène, both directors routinely use studio sets, travelling mattes and painted backdrops rather than location shots. In fact, almost every scene that takes place out of doors or in the natural world is conspicuously unnatural. Marnie's horseback rides and most of Imitation of Life's Coney Island sequence are back-projected (as of course are all driving scenes), and virtually all of Marnie's outdoor sets, such as the Rutland parking lot and Bernice's Baltimore street, are painted backdrops, as is the vista out of Lora's suburban window.

Meanwhile, the interior spaces are infused with a sense of entrapment. One senses that Bernice hasn't set foot outside the home since the "accident": why wouldn't the exterior world, then, exist as a painting? In Imitation of Life, Annie is relegated to the kitchen almost immediately upon entering Lora's cold water flat, and on the rare occasions when she actually leaves the confines of the domestic space to pursue Sarah Jane, Sirk always partially conceals her from view (variously by Christmas trees and a screen in Harry's Club). At the Moulin Rouge, the one location where Annie refuses to hide herself, she is asked to move along in short order. Thomas Elsaesser observes that "melodrama is iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home and / or the small town setting, its emotional pattern is that of panic and latent hysteria reinforced stylistically by a complex handling of space in interiors" (62). In both films, the mise-en-scène reflects the suffocating mother-child relationships. In her essay "Mark's Marnie" Michelle Piso writes, "To belong to, or

to be loved; to be in possession of, or to give; to gather a thing to oneself and hoard it, or to empty oneself in the fullness of love – these are Marnie's opposing values,” (295) and the same tension permeates the relationships in Imitation of Life.

Finally, both Hitchcock and Sirk place enormous emphasis on the colour red in the mise-en-scène. In Imitation of Life, red signifies Sarah Jane's violence and anger; in Marnie, it represents the violence and fear of both her childhood and her adult existence. It is noteworthy that each daughter also identifies with the colour white: both Marnie and Sarah Jane cry, “White! White! White!” aloud in moments of frustration and pain. (To my knowledge, the only other character in either director's oeuvre to do so is Gregory Peck's Ballantine in Spellbound.)

On a thematic level, both films illustrate the melodramatic preoccupation with identity. In The Melodramatic Imagination, Peter Brooks notes that “a specific and very significant version of self-expression is the act of self-nomination which echoes through melodrama, breaking through disguises and enigmas to establish true identities” (38). Before the climactic scenes wherein they recognise their “real” selves (Marnie by finally remembering her past, and Sarah Jane by declaring herself as Annie's daughter in front of the funeral mourners), Marnie and Sarah Jane both pass for people they are not. The opening scenes of Marnie establish her as a woman of many identities: well before the audience sees her face, Hitchcock shows Marnie's little bird-like hands with perfectly manicured pink nails sorting through a stack of social security cards. “Whom shall I be today,” the hands seem to be deciding, “Marion

Holland? Mary Taylor? Martha Heilbron? Ah...Margaret Edgar, perhaps."

Marnie's mother tells her, "Men and a good name don't go together," and true to her mother's adage, she has many false names and no man. Sarah Jane also takes on several different monikers, going by Judy Brand at Harry's Club and Linda Carroll at the Moulin Rouge. She also passes for white, telling Susie, "I pretend I'm a rich girl with strict parents." Clearly, her good name and a man don't go together either: when boyfriend Frankie questions her real identity (by calling her mother a "bad name" - "Is your mother a nigger?") he beats her mercilessly.

Marnie and Sarah Jane's shifting identities can be linked to the characters' fundamental homelessness, for in addition to their many names, each young woman moves from city to city, Marnie escaping from inevitable jail time, Sarah Jane running from the prison she perceives her mother's love to be. It is significant that as young children, neither girl had her own bed: in the final flashback, we see Marnie relegated to the couch so that Bernice can entertain her sailor, and Sarah Jane tells Susie she lives "no place" at the beginning of the film.

Most importantly, perhaps, both films are highly ambiguous as to whether Marnie and Sarah Jane are successful in "coming home": Sirk and Hitchcock infuse a deep sense of irony into whatever resolution or "happy ending" their films may appear to have. Marnie's success in winning Bernice's love is questionable: Bernice admits that she did want Marnie (although she makes it clear in her monologue that the child places second, coming in just behind Billy's

basketball sweater), but she is still unable to touch her, a tentative reach toward her head being the most affectionate gesture she can summon up. She also characteristically refuses Marnie's head on her bad leg. And while one might say that Marnie has been successful in recalling the traumatic events of her past, we must, as Robin Wood does, question whether she has ultimately been "cured" (405): certainly the final chant of the children on the street - "Mother, Mother, I am ill" - provides a hint as to Hitchcock's opinion on the matter.

Sarah Jane's return to Lora's family fold is equally doubtful in terms of its potential for lasting happiness. As Sarah Jane declares that she has killed her mother to the entire funeral congregation, Lora screeches, "Sarah Jane, don't!" ('This funeral ain't big enough for two actresses making a scene,' she is perhaps thinking) and whisks her quickly into the hearse. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis insists that Sarah Jane's return can only mark her replacement of Annie as the family domestic:

As noted, the last shots of the film place her in the limousine with her surrogate family (by implication, her employers), and, as such, reinforce her acceptance of the symbolic position of the black woman. No longer willing to struggle to "be" as she "seems," Sarah Jane becomes fully black by taking her mother's place, and in so doing, she accepts her black identity with resignation. (329-330)

In both director's visions, the potential for resolving family tension and the maternal melodrama's "always uneasy conjunction of an absolute closeness and a forced distance" (Doane 74) remains bleak indeed.

One could easily speculate that the parallels, particularly those of mise-en-scène, spring from Hitchcock's and Sirk's early training in expressionism at the German studio UFA: Hitchcock apprenticed there (Freedman and Millington 6), and Sirk made at least 13 films for the studio between 1934 and 1939 (Fischer 339-340). In "Tales of Sound and Fury," Thomas Elsaesser (the only critic other than Robin Wood to mention Hitchcock and Sirk in the same scholarly work) draws parallels between the shared "visual culture" (51) of directors who started with silent film (Hitchcock) and German expressionists (Sirk). Also, both filmed America from an outsider's perspective, yet their films, notably Shadow of a Doubt and All That Heaven Allows, are considered highly representative of American life.

There are certainly numerous other comparisons that one might draw between Sirk and Hitchcock, particularly in terms of the shift in critical reception and their status in the world of academia. While both directors' films were commercially successful, they were initially met with poor reviews. Critics condemned Sirk's melodramas for their tendency to be overtly artificial and lachrymose. Imitation of Life, which has been cited as Universal's biggest money maker until 1975's Jaws (Film Frog 11) was panned by Bosley Crowther of the New York Times as "the most shameless tear-jerker in a couple of years" (241). Catholic World deemed the film "full of phony glamour" without relation to "anything that ever happened in real life" (Klinger 78). Perhaps the reviewer neglected to take note of the film's title, for to my mind, Imitation of Life by name alone implies that the film's project is to avoid verisimilitude, to expose a diegesis



that has departed from the real; however, numerous other reviewers similarly faulted Sirk's work for what they perceived as its stilted representation of reality.

Hitchcock, too, suffered the wrath of reviewers. For example, New York Times critic Eugene Archer deemed Marnie:

the master's most disappointing film in years [. . .] Not only is Marnie burdened with the most glaringly fake cardboard backdrops since Salvador Dali designed the dream sequences for "Spellbound," but the timing of key suspense scenes is sadly askew [. . .] When a director decides he's so gifted that all he needs is himself, he'd better watch out. (19)

Judith Crist of the New York Herald Tribune similarly concluded that Marnie "can only strike us as pathetically old fashioned and dismally naïve" (Kaspis 123). The dismissal of Marnie on charges of falseness mirrors the criticism aimed at Sirk's melodramas, as the ironic / subversive potential of the film is completely overlooked. Despite the early critical disdain, however, both artists were eventually reclaimed by the auteur critics of the Cahiers du Cinéma, which began a period of renewed interest in their work. Even Andrew Sarris, who charged that "Auteur critics are particularly vulnerable to the charge of preferring trash to art because they seek out movies in the limbo of cultural disrepute," (29) later included both Hitchcock and Sirk on his inventory of notable directors in The American Cinema, although only Hitchcock made his "Pantheon" list.

In the 1960's and 1970's (an era in which Sirk criticism particularly flourished) film scholars clued into Sirk's propensity for irony and attempted to

reclaim his work by downplaying the emotional excesses of the melodramas and instead focusing on his directorial vision as both self-reflective and highly subversive. In Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk, Barbara Klinger observes the change in attitude by noting Sarris's revised perspective:

Similarly, for Andrew Sarris, Sirk's perverseness "consisted of gilding fables for the masses until they meant the opposite of what they seem." In referring to Sirk's style as "artfully artificial," "relentlessly reflexive," and ironical, Sarris's reviews were tinged with a sense of textual politics absent in his earlier comments on Sirk in The American Cinema. (92)

Klinger, who takes a Marxist approach in Melodrama and Meaning, asserts that "the apparently hokey exteriors of Sirk's melodramas housed a social criticism of the United States, articulated through a self-reflexive mise-en-scène that pointed to the flawed materialism of the bourgeoisie" (90). Similarly, other critics have analysed Sirk's ironic touch, which was revealed to have an extensive breadth, from gender to race issues.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of critical revisionism though, was the trend of several writers in the 1970's who, ostensibly imagining Sirk as the stereotypical stoic German, emphasised his use of Brechtian distancing. Lucy Fischer notes that both Paul Willemen and Fred Camper portrayed Sirk as "a European left-wing intellectual," and attempted "to position his work within the frame of twentieth century art movements (in Germany and Russia) that opposed

naturalism" (Fischer 247). In his "Analysis of the Sirkian System" (such a cold and formal term!), for example, Willemen calls Sirk "merciless" in his manipulation of spectatorial emotions (274), and deems his preference for medium and long shots proof of the director's own cold detachment from a heightened level of response (276). Similarly, Fred Camper, in his 1971 Screen essay "The Films of Douglas Sirk," observes the "complete unreality [. . .] a kind of falseness, an anti-sensuality" (254) of Sirk's mise-en-scène and asks: "What do we mean by physical reality, sensual presence, if not a three-dimensional full-bloodedness which Sirk's frames would so obviously exclude? His characters, all living things, are forced into a kind of living death, or life only as shadows" (257).

However, what these scholars overlooked in their albeit noble attempts to portray Sirk as a very serious and / or quintessentially German artist, is that no matter the seeming artificiality of the characters and the mise-en-scène (the plastic textures and audacious use of colour) or the distance that Sirk's camera seems to take from his actors, when all is said, done, and represented in blazing Technicolor, there is something extremely uncontrolled and impulsive about Sirk's work. One need only take note of Sirk's decidedly emotional initial response to Magnificent Obsession as proof:

You have to do your utmost to hate it- and to love it. My immediate reaction to Magnificent Obsession was bewilderment and discouragement. But still I was attracted by something irrational in it. Something mad, in a way – well, obsessed, because this is a damned crazy story if ever there was one. (Halliday 109)

As ironic as Sirk's work is, he is certainly no cinematic Goebbels, although Willemen's description of Sirk as "merciless" and Camper's image of Sirk's characters as the walking dead - and one could add critic Bosley Crowther's accusation of "emotional bulldozing" in All That Heaven Allows (35) - conjure images of the director sporting a monocle, rubbing his hands together in cruel glee, and intoning, "We have ways of making you cry..." No matter how sadistic or subversive we perceive the Sirkian cinema to be, it is indisputable that he continually honours the melodramatic notion of "victory over repression" (Brooks, MI 4). Sirk, unlike that other passionate foreigner, Jerry, always gives the viewer the moon.

Perhaps some tend to imagine Sirk as an emotional bully because we see hearts break in his melodramas. In The Life of the Drama Eric Bentley asks, "What is the least that anyone would ask of a melodrama? As apt an answer as any is: a good cry" (196) and Sirk's films certainly deliver. Contrary to Willemen, I do not believe that Sirk holds himself, or his audience, coldly back from his characters' pain. No matter the intensity of his "craziness" (demonstrated via the absolutely unabashed exploitation of melodramatic excess), Sirk always leaves a space in his films for genuine feeling to be expressed. His denouements are undeniably ambiguous and ironic, but they are permeated with a powerful emotionalism. Robin Wood notes in Hitchcock's Films Revisited that:

Sirk never treats his characters, nor any section of his audience, with contempt; in his films the level of Brechtian distancing is never incompatible with a commitment to the themes and

quandaries of the melodrama. If spectators weep during Imitation of Life or Written on the Wind, Sirk isn't laughing at them: he is weeping, too. (45)

There is indeed something intensely tender about the way Sirk photographs suffering.

As I have mentioned, Wood is the only author other than Thomas Elsaesser to write about Sirk and Hitchcock in the same context; unfortunately, he doesn't explicitly compare the two directors. It is interesting to observe that while Wood acknowledges Sirk's connection to the audience on emotional levels, he doesn't regard Hitchcock in quite the same manner. He claims: "It can be argued that Hitchcock's cinema, on all levels (thematic, formal, methodological), is built upon the struggle to dominate and the dread of impotence" (21). Wood is joined by numerous other scholars who focus on Hitchcock's distancing from his subject matter and his legendary directorial sadism. Susan Smith, for example, deems him "in control of *his* self-inscription as saboteur," (14) and Donald Spoto notes that Hitchcock's "truest feelings and fears and yearnings" were "controlled, calculated, measured out for greatest effect with smallest effort" (8).

*Control* is certainly a key word in the Hitchcock critical lexicon, and surely we must have our suspicions of a director who considered Psycho a "fun picture" (Wood 142). Hitchcock's personal idiosyncrasies are typically written about far more frequently than Sirk's, and his staid public persona is quite frequently the basis for the formation of critical opinions. Freedman and Millington note that

“Hitchcock placed himself in the midst of that cultural formation by adopting this stance of the detached observer – a stance that works precisely by disavowing participation while indulging it to the hilt” (8). It would be a grave underestimation of Hitchcock’s artistic vision, however, to regard him as strictly callous and calculating, possessing only a “murderous gaze”. To do so would overlook the profusion of images in his films that consistently signal a loss of control: merry-go-rounds and merry waltzers, drunk drivers, vertiginous drops, and those famous spiral staircases. We are better served critically, perhaps, to view him like the Cary Grant character in Notorious - as a “fat-headed guy full of pain” - for Hitchcock indeed shows incredible moments of vulnerability through his films’ concern with the human ability to give and receive love. It certainly becomes impossible to accuse Hitchcock of coldly distancing himself from his characters after witnessing the extraordinary proximity of his camera during Sean Connery and Tippi Hedren’s first kiss in Marnie.

William Rothman (under the heavy influence of Stanley Cavell) observes that “Hitchcock calls upon us to acknowledge film’s ordinary avoidance of intimacy, and our own in our ordinary lives. Is it that we are fearful that our appetite for love is so voracious that we do not dare give in to it at all” (249). Hitchcock’s films simultaneously reveal a deep apprehension and suspicion of love and an overwhelming desire to be consumed by it. Thus, he ably captures what Geoffrey Nowell-Smith terms the “ideological failure” of melodrama: “Because it cannot accommodate its problems, either in a real present or in an ideal future, but lays them open in their shameless contradictoriness, it opens a

space which most Hollywood forms have studiously closed off" (74). Hitchcock's melodramas irrefutably provide a meticulous exploration of the "problem" of emotion. And for his part, Sirk possesses the masterful ability to create a tidal wave of melodramatic emotion while an undercurrent of irony tugs below the surface, and so he equally captures the "shameless contradictoriness" of which Nowell – Smith writes.

Despite the wealth of comparisons one can readily draw between the two directors, a study examining Sirk's and Hitchcock's treatment of melodrama has never been undertaken. Perhaps this is due to the fact that aside from parallels in training, critical reception, and mise-en-scène, it is unlikely that anyone would ever mistake a tightly restrained Hitchcock film for a brazenly emotional Sirk melodrama. Reflecting on the thematic preoccupations of Imitation of Life, Fassbinder writes, "Pain, death, and tears – one can surely make something of that," (24) and indeed both Sirk and Hitchcock exploit all three to the hilt. However, in terms of their individual visions of the melodramatic genre, there would seem to be no two directors with such opposing views. Sirk's films express the "ineffable" (Brooks, MI 72) through a dramatic roster of emotional outbursts both literal (cries, shrieks, and the smashing of vases and bottles) and metaphoric (the intrusion of weather – especially snow - to represent emotional breakdown or catharsis). Conversely, in Hitchcock's early 60's melodramas, Marnie and The Birds, opportunities for uninhibited release (for characters and audience alike) are much more limited: the films depict people struggling to consolidate their enormous desire for catharsis with an equally urgent need to

repress emotional displays. As a result, Hitchcockian melodrama abounds with voiceless screams, catatonic stares, hands that offer slaps in the face when they truly yearn to caress. Hitchcock also employs weather for metaphoric effect, but it is more likely to be a gloomy, spirit dampening, often dangerous rain than the refreshing crispness of a Sirkian snowstorm. Essentially, in the films of the ironist Sirk, tears are allowed ecstatic release, while the ironist Hitchcock creates filmic worlds where emotion is agonisingly contained by an overwhelming sense of fear. And while Sirk's films ironically subvert middle class American ideology through the use of excess and the expression of the ineffable, Hitchcock uses melodramatic conventions ironically to subvert melodrama itself.

The ultimate goal of my thesis is not merely to provide a comparison - contrast of Sirk's and Hitchcock's treatment of melodrama, but to use an analysis of Sirk's techniques (which I am considering as paradigmatic for film melodrama from the 1950's onward) as a springboard to examine Hitchcock's dark vision of the genre. Sirk's films have virtually come to define film melodrama of the 1950's (in both its incarnations as the family and the maternal melodrama): certainly the critical interest by prominent film scholars like Laura Mulvey, Thomas Elsaesser, and Lucy Fischer has helped to solidify his status as an authoritative voice. However, I think it is particularly valuable to bring Hitchcock into the conversation about melodrama, for it is, at its very heart, an affective genre, concerned first and foremost with the expression of feeling. And of the human ability to make ourselves known to one other and to express fearlessly our emotional desires, Hitchcock's films have much to say.



The chapters that follow will focus on elucidating three key areas that mark Hitchcock's departure from the Sirkian standard: Chapter 1 will explore the concept of the body as a marker of excess, particularly as it is revealed in the performances of the stars; Chapter 2 will examine the notion of identity by analysing each director's concept of "home"; and Chapter 3 will consider the aspect of *melos*, or music, as a signifier of the melodramatic. Sirk once noted that "What is interesting about a mirror is that it does not show you yourself as you are, it shows you your own opposite" (Halliday 47). The following study imagines Sirk looking into one of his own mirrors and coming face to face with Alfred Hitchcock.

## Chapter One

### Breast or Thigh?: Melodramatic Performance and the Excessive Body

I need only refer to Now, Voyager once again to highlight how film melodrama typically places an enormous emphasis on the body of the female protagonist as the plot unfolds, and how a major aspect of the heroine's quest for identity revolves around self-nominating, or revealing herself, in terms of tangible physical signs. Charlotte Vale gives one of the best I have ever heard: "I am the fat lady with the eyebrows and all the hair!" Hitchcock and Sirk, in keeping with melodramatic tradition, also focus obsessively on the female body, although both seem to have preferred slender blondes over fat, hairy heroines.

According to Donald Spoto's The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock, Hitchcock discovered Tippi Hedren in a diet cola commercial he saw on television, wherein she is whistled at by a child, and promptly set up a screen test with the model (449). The first scene in The Birds pays homage to the commercial as a similar young boy wolf-whistles (or bird calls, perhaps) at Hedren as she enters the pet store. Later, she is ogled by Mitch's San Francisco neighbour and by at least three other male characters in Bodega Bay. Finally, Mitch spies on her getaway boat through a pair of L.B. Jefferies sized binoculars after he discovers the lovebirds in the house.

The first moments of Marnie go even further to demonstrate Hitchcock's devotion to itemising Tippi Hedren: the film begins with a close up of her vagina, or rather, her purse. Numerous critics, such as Tania Modleski discussing Rear

Window in The Women Who Knew Too Much (78) and Sarah Street in "The Dresses Had Told Me: Fashion and Femininity in Rear Window," (97) can barely see a handbag in a Hitchcock film without linking it to a Freudian representation of female genitalia. Moments later, Strutt breaks down Marnie's less metaphoric physical traits: "Five feet five. One hundred and ten pounds. Size eight dress. Blue eyes. Black, wavy hair. Even features. Good teeth." Strutt even gestures with his hand as if to stroke that hair, much to the smutty delight of the detectives.

Hitchcock establishes a focus on hands, particularly Hedren's, very early in the film, first with the social insurance card shot I described earlier, then by having the camera follow her delicately gloved hand as she drops the persona of Marion Holland (via the locker key) down a vent (Marnie's foot reflecting the same type of anxiety Norman Bates must surely have felt waiting for that other thief named Marion to "go down"). These initial hand shots are extremely important as they not only reinforce Hitchcock's camera's scopophilic gaze but also introduce Marnie's fixation on touching. Jay McElhaney writes that "The desire to touch another human being who does not want to be touched animates the system of looking and perceiving which always determined Hitchcock's cinema" (92). Certainly many of Hitchcock's extreme close ups of Hedren's hands and face give the feeling that his camera, too, would like to touch her.

Similarly, Lana Turner's introduction in Imitation of Life immediately designates her body as one to be watched and possessed, also by a camera. As she searches for her lost child, she establishes herself as a physical presence by

striking a series of provocative poses highlighting her physique, as Judith Butler points out in "Lana's "Imitation": Melodramatic Repetition and the Gender Performative":

As she calls out for Suzy, the camera takes in her legs and then her breasts only to withdraw and establish a visual allegory of its own fascination by including the photographer, Steve, who is ostensibly taking the same shots with his camera [. . .] Lana / Lora is not flailing with despair but carefully composed, leaning over the railing so that both breasts are fully exhibited, stretching her legs so that the line is fully extended [. . .] the purpose of the introductory sequence is to introduce us to Lana through a kind of visual dwelling on her melodramatic gestures. (5-6)

Steve, the aspiring photographer, names Lora's series of poses "Mother in Distress." In fact, as she descends the boardwalk stairs, she positions herself at an angle by which he may fully and perfectly capture her concern on film. Sirk, too, has his camera trained on her, and shoots her in a manner reminiscent of the first appearance of Bette Davis in Now, Voyager - all legs and shoes - but of course, Lana's are much more of an appealing spectacle right from the start. At her second meeting with the smarmy agent Loomis, he commodifies her "talents", paralleling Strutt: "But you do have some qualifications. Your face will pass, and you have good, nice, long, silky legs. I like them. You have a chest full of quality and quantity. I like it."

We soon learn that Lora, primarily an aspiring actress, has been trying to

earn money as a model: "At least I'll be seen," she tells Annie. And, seemingly taking this information as the key to her character, most of what Turner does in the film is pose. Charles Dyer has analysed her particular way of constantly "turning away from the person she is acting with to deliver a line," (203) as if catching the audience's eye / camera's eye / Sirk's eye is far more important than making contact in the scene: "The film here draws attention to Turner's posing acting style, making its use of the style to embody 'imitation' explicit" (203).

Sirk allows Turner many opportunities to pose. As a flea powder model Lora Meredith is, ironically, not as good as Lana Turner at holding still, but her hopes of being seen are realised; her picture is noticed by Loomis and she is given another chance to prove that her talent is more than skin deep. There are also several instances where Sirk films in long shot so that we may take in Lana Turner from head to toe: after her big Broadway triumph in "No More Laughter" she is shown in a stunning silver gown with its matching, fur-collared jacket (one of the rare handful of truly chic moments in Sirkian cinema). We see here the full effect of Turner's svelte physique beautifully dressed. Rather than being cold and distancing, as Willemsen might assert of such a long shot, it is rather as if Sirk has pulled the camera back to impress the spectator: "This wardrobe cost seventy-eight thousand dollars – might as well show it off!"

Elaborate costumes aside, Turner's acting ability is perhaps the most underestimated in the long line of underrated Sirk performances. James McCourt is one of the non-believers, who grouches:

Never has Lana Turner's unctuously sincere pear-toned elocution

been better pitted against the utter vacuity of her gaze, the deadly precision of her MGM comportment – that walk, that invisible thick of the World's Great Quotations balanced on that perfectly poised head. Those Jean Louis gowns. It's all there, perfect imitation of vitality. If ignorance is a delicate and exotic fruit, whose bloom is gone if ever once touched, the Lana Turner character in Imitation of Life is the Queen of the Mangoes. (21)

Interestingly, McCourt's criticisms revolve around the physical aspects of Turner's performance such as her expression and walk, and it is these very qualities, I believe, that make Turner's performance a sheer delight to watch. Turner certainly knows how to become the centre of every scene, usually by being degrees more excessive and elaborate than anyone else in the picture. No one can compete with her – even Annie, who (along with Sarah Jane) becomes the emotional focus of the film's latter half, cannot prevent Lana from filling the screen with her physical presence. Juanita Moore, as the expiring maid / matriarch, is barely visible in the lower right corner of the shot as she gasps her last wishes, whereas Turner dominates, from her eyes, which sparkle as brightly as her diamond earrings with tears, to her rasping screeches of "Annie! No!" accompanied by a fantastic display of sobbing.

The bodies in both Sirk's and Hitchcock's melodramas are thus endowed with a kind of excessiveness that very often reaches into the realm of hysteria. In his essay, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," Peter Brooks elucidates the connection between the genre and the hysterical body: "I have become

convinced that the hysterical body offers a key emblem of that convergence, since it is a body pre-eminently invested with meaning, a body become the place for the inscription of highly emotional messages that cannot be written elsewhere, and cannot be articulated verbally" (22). Both directors' films are well populated with hysterics; however, there is a crucial difference in how Sirk and Hitchcock deal with such bodily plenitude. Whereas Sirk generally indulges and celebrates such excessiveness, the project of a Hitchcock melodrama is either to fragment the body or to obliterate it altogether.

In Sirk on Sirk, Jon Halliday points out the "Straightforward antithesis between one vacillating character [. . .] and one very stable and direct one," (112) and Sirk commonly used the term "split" to describe the more hysterical personae of his melodramas (Halliday 112). Sirk's split characters, whom Barbara Klinger notes "have a kind of schizophrenia, an internal divisiveness that fuels the emotional complexity of the family melodrama," (117) are uniformly more interesting than the stable ones, and my particular favourite is Kyle Hadley in Written on the Wind. It is undoubtedly Robert Stack's performance, which combines intense physicality with passionate emotion, that makes the character so compelling.

Brooks states that the notion of hysteria has been historically linked, "from Hippocrates through Freud," to the female body ("Melodrama, Body, Revolution" 22). Playing Kyle, Stack breaks free of gender stereotypes and offers the viewer an uninhibited portrayal of male hysteria. Kyle can admittedly be interpreted as the most feminised of Sirkian heroes (all camp readings of Rock Hudson aside):

Stack's distinctively deep voice is rivalled in pitch not only by Hudson, but by Lauren Bacall as well; he is pummelled in the bar fight with the seemingly middle aged Roy Carter; he has a manly "weakness" (as his doctor puts it) – low sperm count. Considering the plot's focus on diminishing Kyle's masculinity, I feel it is therefore appropriate to examine the ways in which he signifies a fabulously hysterical state in almost every moment of the film.

In early films like Fighter Squadron, The Bullfighter and the Lady, and Bwana Devil, Stack was predominantly cast in the role of the "hard jaw" - a typing that would resurface in his work on The Untouchables (Thomson 828). As the alcoholic weakling Kyle, Stack breaks through his rugged façade to reveal the quivering mass of jell-o beneath. Essentially, what Stack gives the audience is a character who dissolves before our eyes from a self-indulgent, self-possessed playboy to become "the saddest of us all." At the outset of the film, for example, Kyle exudes confidence at Club 21, going so far as to grab two passing men for support as if they were mere handrails and snuffing out his cigarette in a glass full of expensive champagne. By the time he falls in love with Lauren Bacall, though, he has softened considerably, and reveals an intense vulnerability via his tender, almost-pleading voice and the hurt puppy look in his blue eyes. Of course, by the film's climax, he is an alienated, tortured wreck. Thomas Elsaesser notes that the character's deterioration reflects Sirk's ironic take on bourgeois family values (but in classic form, Sirk goes to the extreme in Written on the Wind, making the Hadleys extraordinarily wealthy):

In Minnelli, Sirk, Ray, Cukor, and others, alienation is recognised as



a basic condition, fate is secularised into the prison of social conformity and psychological neurosis, and the linear trajectory of self-fulfilment so potent in American ideology is twisted into a downward spiral of a self-destructive urge seemingly possessing a whole social class. (64-5)

In order to convey Kyle's state of utter physical and psychic meltdown, Stack gives what is perhaps the most palpably overstated performance of all of Sirk's troupe of performers (I would go so far as to say he easily outdoes Lana Turner). It is surely not only his character who believes in overindulgence (or as Kyle would say, "Not duties, but pleasures"), but Stack's acting in the film is a tour de force of excess. His performance, in fact, reflects perfectly the techniques formalised by nineteenth century melodramatic actors, as illustrated by Christine Gledhill in "Signs of Melodrama":

Melodramatic acting contributed a performance mode adapted to the work of internalisation and externalisation. Informed, as I have noted, by eighteenth – century theories of gestural language, and drawing on traditions of pantomime, harlequinade and acrobatics, melodramatic performance sought objectification of internal emotions and motivations in bodily action and vocal determination, incorporating personal emotion in public gesture. (219)

Stack effectively externalises his character's emotions through every move of his body. In the credit sequence of the film, we see him in a little yellow sports car, driving furiously; he opens a "bottle of corn" with his teeth, spits out the cork, and

chugs it back while still hanging onto the wheel with one hand. When he gets out of the car at the Hadley mansion, he drinks (in profile, as he does in most of the film), leaning backwards dangerously until he has finished the entire bottle, whereupon he staggers back a little, then flings it violently against the house. Finally, he wipes his mouth with his hand and lurches forward on a pitch to the left like an intoxicated mime pretending to walk in the wind (and indeed, he is fighting his way drunkenly through a gale force windstorm!). Kyle is thus clearly established in these moments as a character who stirs things up, from the dust his car kicks up to the mass of leaves that swirls into the mansion after him.

Stack portrays Kyle as a “terribly tormented” bundle of nerves and an outsider to the world around him, and he uses every physical gesture and expression possible to convey the inner anguish he finds impossible to put into words. I am hard pressed to think of another actor who has ever given as unambiguous a performance of drunkenness on film as Stack. He staggers, falls over, his laughter turns instantly to tears, his voice slurs, “sounding as if every word had to be painfully pumped up from the bottom of one of his oil wells” (Elsaesser 52): these displays are all clear signifiers of the classical melodramatic drunkard. I am reminded here of the 1884 play The Drunkard, by William Henry Smith, with its famous delirium tremens scene wherein the title character wrestles with snakes (290): in Written on the Wind, Stack plays out a similar episode in which Kyle deliriously relives a childhood memory of stealing from the local bottling plant. He mutters unintelligibly and writhes, bathed in sweat, while Lauren Bacall dabs his brow in horror. In his nightmare of guilt over

Mitch being beaten by old man Daly for the crime, Kyle too, is wrestling with a "snake": recall that he insults Mitch in the climax of the film, calling him "'Lousy white trash ... you crawling snake!"

It must be noted that Stack combines the best of a traditional, external melodramatic acting style with a more modern, psychological approach. For instance, Kyle's inner torture over his possible infertility is clearly communicated by Stack, even though the character cannot bring himself to utter the dreaded words. But as he wincingly explains to Bacall that he feels as if an avalanche (of emotion!) is about to crush him, Stack draws his knees up to his chest as if to protect himself from the onslaught, then hides beneath his covers. Through his body, which is "seized with meaning," (Brooks, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution" 18) Stack epitomises melodrama's need to externalise overwhelming and ineffable emotions by translating them into highly legible signs.

Hitchcock's The Birds also effectively translates hysteria into an excessive and unmistakable sign: hordes of attacking birds that swoop in unexpectedly and threaten to peck the Brenner family apart. Slavoj Žižek notes that without the birds, the film is conceived around the conventions of the standard family melodrama: "Thus the birds [. . .] make us forget, during their vertiginous and dazzling attacks, with what, in the end, we are dealing: the triangle of a mother, her son, and the woman he loves" (137). Hitchcock, I think, rather than using the birds to distract from the family drama, capitalises on the terror inspired by the birds to heighten the sense of tension devouring the Brenners. Robert Lang observes:

If the family is melodrama's favourite milieu, it is because there one finds the most vivid and troublesome contradictions of melodrama's ideological context, which is why it can generate intense, primal emotions that are always in some sense in excess of the situations that produce them. To the degree that the melodramatic text is hysterical, neurotic, or paranoid, so is the family. (50)

Though critics generally agree that no one interpretation can neatly explain the mystery of the bird attacks (there are always victims that don't fit the given hypothesis), many dwell on the idea of the birds as the manifestation of the panic that arises from Lydia's fear of losing her son Mitch to another woman's (sexual) love: for example, Margaret Horwitz states that the "bird attacks function primarily as extensions of [Lydia's] hysterical fear of losing her son, Mitch" (279) and Camille Paglia ruminates that it is Lydia who causes the birds to attack because of her "witchy malice" (80).

Unlike the excessive presence that the hysterical body is allowed in Sirkian family melodrama, Hitchcock's plan in The Birds is to attack the somatic, especially those bodies most tender and vulnerable (women, children ... and chicken farmers). The credit sequence begins with the actors' names being obliterated, just as their real bodies will soon be - Tippi Hedren's attractive one in particular. As I mentioned earlier, Hitchcock's camera and the male characters in the film do indeed dwell on her body as an object of desire; but a much stronger force in the film is the disapproving gaze of the mother, Lydia Brenner, played by Jessica Tandy. Tandy certainly must have been chosen by Hitchcock not only for

her considerable talent at playing a stern maternal figure, but also for her uncanny resemblance to Tippi Hedren. Camille Paglia points out that the scene:

. . . where Lydia bats frantically with both hands at the birds caught in her hair was so effective that it was used on the movie poster, whose hysterical woman has been universally misidentified (thanks to the retinting of the hair to blonde and the suit to green) as Melanie Daniels. Because screaming makes Tandy's face look strangely younger, the frosty mother and her female rival seem to have physically merged. (15)

As obvious as the resemblance is, the characters Tandy and Hedren play are actually mirror opposites. Melanie Daniels is established as possessing a beautiful body that knows how to do things (like break a plate glass window, drive a fast car, operate an outboard motor boat), whereas Lydia is older, dependent on her son, afraid of being left alone, and most importantly perhaps, less inclined to physical action than to stillness. Hitchcock brilliantly employs a nineteenth century melodramatic convention - staging tableaux at the conclusion of several scenes - and Tandy is often the central figure in these shots, a look of fear, concern, or scorn frozen on her face. In fact, Tandy's character clearly has a revulsion for all things physical: she reproaches Melanie for her alleged naked fountain jumping incident, and shows little predilection for aiding or comforting her sick child (certainly Cathy's birthday protest of "Hey, no touching!" has been learned from mother); the sight of the mutilated body of Dan Fawcett renders her first speechless and choking, then bedridden.

Jackie Byars states that in melodrama "female agency of the gaze must be punished," (160) but in The Birds, the woman who is on the receiving end of the gaze, Hedren, undoubtedly suffers the harshest punishment. It could be the result of what Bill Nichols describes as her "transgressive attempt to infiltrate the Brenner household" (159). It is certainly interesting to consider that Lydia, who loathes the body, disciplines Melanie in a most physical way via the birds grabbing and pecking at her; the mother therefore does not have to do any actual touching herself. (Coincidentally, the only time Lydia does touch someone is during the final attack on the house: her grip on Mitch's arm is almost exactly like that of the gull that has just attacked him through the open window. Mitch reinforces the image of Lydia as a violent bird by fighting her off in a similar manner). But it would appear that Hedren is also punished (perhaps by Lydia and the other women in the film, perhaps by Hitchcock himself) for being so much more attractive than anyone else.

Like Lana Turner in Imitation of Life, Hedren poses in the film more than she engages in actions: as I have noted, Hedren's body is one which apparently does things, but we never actually see her actively physically engaged in anything more demanding than starting the motor on the rental boat (and even then, in a mink coat!). She frequently has a frozen look of bemused confidence on her face, as if the persona from her diet cola commercial is the only one she knows how to play (this possibly may have been the case, based on her lack of acting experience), and the way in which she is filmed in soft-focus close-up increases the sense that her face is meant to be regarded in a manner more

special than the other characters in the film (in the glow of Hitchcock's boyish crush perhaps).

The bird attacks not only gradually ruin Tippi / Melanie's sense of playgirl poise and self-assurance (her cockiness is initially quite similar to that of playboy Kyle Hadley) and drive her into hysteria, but mar her looks as well. The first attack in the boat, which barely musses her hair-do, renders Melanie more dazed than frenzied. But by the time the birds attack the boarded up Brenner household, Hedren breaks her pose and literally spins her way around the Brenner family room, filmed in an unflattering low angle shot, while Tandy is placed sitting, comatose as usual, by a portrait of the dead husband. In the final bedroom attack, Hedren's arms, legs, hands, and face are devastated, and after hysterically attempting to fight off the birds she is reduced to Lydia-like catatonia. In a last frantic gesture, though, she flails out with her arms at Mitch, beating him away: the action is her final acceptance, perhaps, of the Brenners' "Don't touch!" rule. Mitch and Lydia then ironically place her in a corpse-like position (her arms folded across her chest) in confirmation of her crushed physical and spiritual vitality - thus her full assimilation into the Brenner family.

In The Desire to Desire, Mary Ann Doane points out that in film melodrama of the 1940's, hysteria and the overpresent body are closely linked to desire (12). Surely the same connection can be witnessed in melodramas of the 50's and beyond, and it is certainly apparent in Sirk's and Hitchcock's contributions. Hitchcock, for his part, can be seen as doing away with the physical as the price one must pay for desiring (or being desirable) as readily as

that same destruction might be construed as a manifestation of the hysterical: it is easy enough to interpret Lydia (if we wish to see her as the cause of the bird attacks) as meting out her punishment on Melanie (and perhaps Annie, too) for wanting her son. In a similar vein, Kyle Hadley's hysterical feminisation might be seen as a cruel and ironic backlash against his overwhelming desire to prove his manhood to Mitch and his father by impregnating Lucy.

Of course, one could propose that there is always some form of desire underpinning the triad of spectator, character, and star in virtually any film viewing experience; however, as Jackie Byars (quoting Genre by Stephen Neale) notes: "Heterosexual desire is by no means exclusive to the musical or to the melodrama. But the role it plays in these genres is specific and distinctive" (133). Desire plays an especially crucial part in the melodramatic plots of both Sirk and Hitchcock. Robert Stern notes that Sirk's stories almost all revolve around the (mostly thwarted) sexual desires of their protagonists:

The undercurrent of his other work surfaces in Written on the Wind as an overt study in sexuality. The plot tells of a playboy who is impotent, his sister, a nymphomaniac, his best friend, who is a sexual powerhouse and yet seems to have no sex drive at all, and the girl whom the playboy marries, an ambitious blend of fertility and frigidity [. . .] each of these characters seeks what is impossible in the Sirkian universe, a firm grasp on the elusive state of sexual fulfilment. (Stern 135)

Marnie, too, might be described in a similar way: its plot tells of an equally



wealthy young man who desires to conquer sexually a frigid kleptomaniac who prefers to mount a horse rather than a lover. To add more spice to the story, the woman's mother used to be a whore, and the man is lusted after by his sister-in-law (a nymphomaniac only in the most discreet and restrained Hitchcockian way); Hitchcock even touts the film as a "sex drama" in the trailer and wryly emphasises Mark's insistent embraces.

As I have illustrated, each director has his own distinct method for dealing with hysterical bodies. While the outcomes are similarly grim (although one must concur that Kyle is perhaps worse off than Melanie in his particular denouement), in Sirk's world there is always a kind of celebration or ecstatic build to the climax, even when it is death. Even in Imitation of Life, where Annie's body is typically prevented from being seen in the development of the plot, her funeral is a grandiose exhibition of presence and an extremely ironic form of self-nomination: "Look at me now – I'm dead!" The overt visibility of the flower-covered coffin, the carriage style hearse led by white horses, and the enormous crowd of spectators / mourners become a kind of Sirkian consolation prize to Annie for being relegated to the background for most of the film (in the physical sense, that is, for certainly her emotional struggle with Sarah Jane demands our attention and tears in the latter part of the film). The end of The Birds, however, is much more ominous, with the bandaged and lipstick-free Melanie being carried to the car by Mitch and Lydia while thousands of birds flock together for what one can only guess will be yet another attack on their already vulnerable and exhausted bodies.

Characters who are fuelled by desire and passion find similar treatment from each director. In Hitchcock's world, desire is curbed by an impulse either to erase or hurt the body. The motif is consistent throughout Hitchcock's oeuvre: a melodrama like Rebecca contrasts the absent body of a dead adulteress with her ever-present and vengeful spirit, while Psycho's dead mother (whose malevolent soul lives in her son, although her body has been stuffed) metes out her punishment on a naked Janet Leigh. In Sirk's world, desire, even when unfulfilled, is at least allowed uninhibited expression through ineffable gestures: dancing becomes extremely important in its capacity to both display the body and to express a desire that words cannot.

Mamboing Dorothy Malone, for example, who plays Kyle's "filthy" sibling Marylee Hadley in Written on the Wind, puts on a no less brilliant display of physical excess than Robert Stack; in fact, she won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1956 for her performance (Halliday 207). Christine Gledhill notes, "The melodramatic persona is totally committed to living out his or her dominant desires, despite moral and social taboo or inter-personal conflict" (212). As the nymphomaniacal sister, Malone's overriding objective in the film is to "have" Mitch Wayne: thus her desire is externalised into easily readable, uninhibited physical signs. "But whereas Stack projects a sense of unbearable inner tension, Malone's smooth features and sinuous movements suggest that she is possessed" with a "distorted libidinal energy" (Stern 145).

As Marylee, Malone doesn't just talk; she purrs and frequently hisses (another snake for Kyle to wrestle with). Nor does she simply walk; she slinks

and occasionally even sashays; her descents down the Hadley mansion's grand curved staircase would rival any showgirl at the Ziegfeld Follies. And while Stack has a tendency (playing the sexually defeated and drunk Kyle) to pitch forward, Malone, his slatternly opposite, consistently adopts a swayback posture. In several scenes, the actress uses her breasts to achieve her goal of getting closer to Rock Hudson's Mitch by literally thrusting them into him. At Kyle and Lucy's anniversary party, for instance, her advances are purely physical: she leans in close, fondling Hudson's knee, then crawls into his lap, leaning in to kiss him. Her question, "I've changed since we last swam in the raw, haven't I?" coupled with her black strapless dress, reinforce that the change she would like Mitch to notice is primarily the bodily one.

In fact, Marylee hasn't changed at all emotionally: her childhood desire for Mitch has, if anything, only grown (like her body) to more exaggerated proportions. Robert Lang observes that "The melodramatic resonates with the atmosphere of childhood, with the irrational forces of desire which makes those films that put desire at the heart of the story and treatment melodramatic," (49) and the scene by the river where Marylee desperately relives her childhood love for Mitch (along with all the accompanying insecurities of an unreciprocated crush) is one of the most genuinely poignant moments in the film. Sirk allows Malone to capitalise on her expressive face: she mouths the words to the flashback playing in her head, touches her lips as she recalls the mulberry juice she used in a naïve attempt to be attractive, then throws herself against a tree in an explosion of tears. Christine Gledhill, quoting Bela Balázs, states: "[. . .] the

close-up on the actor's face [is] a 'window on the soul' which 'can find a tongue more candid and uninhibited than in any spoken soliloquy, for it speaks instinctively, subconsciously. The languages of the face cannot be suppressed or controlled'" (210-211). Hitchcock might have reason to dispute the point, for he certainly demonstrates time and again his ability to control a face and render it unknown, but in Sirkian melodrama the face is indeed a primary vehicle for conveying the inner life and overwhelming emotions of the characters. For example, Jane Wyman, while inherently more understated than Malone, uses her wonderfully emotive face to convey her characters' inner conflict and desire. Malone also beautifully and precisely captures Marylee's anguish by primarily physical means, and her ease in accessing facial expressions and gestures affirms perfectly Gledhill's further observation about melodramatic acting: "Such techniques suggest a return to the primal and ineffable gesture that underpins melodramatic acting for the access it offers to hidden moral drives and desires" (223-4).

Marylee's innocent daydreams of childhood puppy love are contrasted with her adult sexual cravings, and again, Malone's method of communicating her womanly lust is through her body. Her unnatural bloneness and exaggerated curvaceousness add as much sense of excessive falseness as any of Sirk's mise-en-scène. In the introduction to All That Hollywood Allows: Re-Reading Gender in 1950's Melodrama Jackie Byars asks, "What is natural about being a woman? About being a man? Is there anything "natural" about gendered social roles?" (1) and indeed, not much about Malone's overstated femininity

seems organic. I find it practically impossible to visualise her as a little girl down by the river, as I imagine her to have sprung fully grown (like Athena), but gyrating (like Aphrodite) from the loins of Mrs. Hadley (this is perhaps what *really* killed the mother).

In her role as an imitation goddess, Marylee embodies both Eros and Thanatos (whereas in The Birds, Lydia is the dour Thanatos to Melanie's Eros). The wonderfully ridiculous "Mambo of Death" scene is the climax (pun intended) of Marylee's overwhelming desire. As she bumps and grinds to the obnoxious record, tearing off her clothes for the unseeing eyes of Mitch's photograph in a dance of both sexual delight and frustration, her father dies of a heart attack on the curving staircase of the mansion. Through Sirk's use of cross-cutting there is little doubt that the cause of father's heart failure is the woeful recognition that his "daughter is a tramp," but Sirk also goes further to reinforce the idea that the music also inspires the senior Hadley to "let go" physically. As he reaches the top of the stairs, the music hits a crescendo and Sirk shoots a close up of the father's hand releasing the banister: his body finally succumbs, like his children, to the weight of his emotions and he tumbles to his death to the incessant beat of the bongo drums. Clearly the entire "happy, happy Hadley family" suffers as a result of physical and emotional overload. At the end of the film, Marylee is still alive, but Sirk certainly implies that she will live out her days lonely and forever tortured over her dream-date Mitch, who has fled with Lucy in tow. Fassbinder, in his characteristically vivid way, notes:

[. . .] the father has an oil derrick in his hand which looks like a

surrogate cock. And when Dorothy Malone at the end, the sole surviving member of the family, has this cock in her hand it is at least as wretched as the television set which Jane Wyman gets for Christmas [. . .] I hope she won't make it and will go mad like Marianne Koch in Interlude. For Douglas Sirk, madness is a sign of hope, I think. (23)

Mad or not, Marylee has asked for the moon but ends with even less than stars: like Bette Davis' Charlotte Vale, she is ultimately doomed to masturbate for eternity.

Poor Marnie. While Marylee Hadley at least has the option of self-gratification, a world of pleasurable touch is closed off to Hitchcock's heroine. "Since her mother will not touch her, will not love her, then she will move into a world where no one – particularly no man – will be able to touch her" (McElhaney 94). McElhaney also notes the film's "chain of desire" linking Mark, Marnie, and Bernice (99): the sailor's protesting line "There's nothing the matter with my hands!" becomes a kind of catch phrase for the relationship between the central characters. While virtually every man in the film wants somehow to touch Marnie, Mark is the most insistent of the bunch (unless, of course, we count Hitchcock himself). Marnie, however, is resistant to all advances: she has been scarred by some unnameable, barely remembered childhood trauma. As a result, her body is "closed for business" (as is her mother's, who used to "make her living from the touch of men," as Mark discreetly puts it).

One of my particular favourite moments illustrating Marnie's closed-off

physicality is when Mark tears off her concealing night gown on their honeymoon: we see her bare legs from the thighs downward and her head and shoulders, but nothing in between those two points. I like to imagine that Marnie has actually found a way to erase the body that used to exist between her head and legs, that the womanly form Mark had hoped to gaze upon and grope is simply a blank. I take his embarrassed apology, "I'm sorry, Marnie" to mean "I'm sorry to have discovered that you have no body." And while scholars like Michelle Piso and Jay McElhaney condemn the rape for its brutality against the female protagonist, I think the scene can also be viewed as Mark's great moment of humiliation. Heretofore he has dwelled on Marnie as a "wild" animal, yet as he "tames" her, she is blank faced and completely unresponsive to him. The shot, which moves from her face to the room's porthole, is, I suspect, Mark's point of view: he must avert his gaze as he has sex with a corpse. As an amateur psychologist, the realisation of his necrophilic desire causes him to look away even as he succumbs to his uncontrollable lust. The film's second "rape" scene, where Mark catches Marnie fondling the Rutland safe and forces her to take the money, almost borders on sensual. Marnie expresses her craving for money as she leans her head on the safe and runs her hands along it caressingly. Her hands tremble as she contemplates actually touching the piles of cash and the camera zooms in and tracks out, expressing her obsessive, Scottie Ferguson-like desire.

Marnie is aroused by money and her horse Forio, while men have no effect on her whatsoever (playing on the Freudian associations already established around handbags, one might say she would rather stuff her purse /

vagina with money instead of a man, which simultaneously confirms her frigidity and links her to Bernice as a prostitute). The character is not, however, without desire for human contact: she possesses an overwhelming physical craving for the touch of her mother. Early in the film, Marnie reaches out to touch her mother's hand in a longing gesture: Bernice pulls it away and places it to her heart as if she has been burnt or shocked by the contact. The reaction echoes the sentiment that Marnie will later express to Mark in words: "I'll die if you touch me!" Bernice is unable to reciprocate Marnie's desire because she is as equally fragmented as her daughter: she has become, essentially, an aching leg. In numerous scenes throughout the film, Marnie attempts to make physical contact with her mother by leaning her head on the sore limb, and the action is commonly met by Bernice's rejection, "Uh, Marnie, mind my leg." Louise Latham plays a maternal figure similar to Jessica Tandy's Lydia: both actresses capture a sense of physical frailty that simultaneously communicates hostility toward young, able bodies.

Just as Marnie's hands receive considerable attention from the camera, Bernice's leg figures importantly in the development of the plot, the culmination being the murder of the sailor (the excruciating memory both women have been suppressing). As Bernice struggles with him, their bodies simulate violent sexuality. The camera cuts from shot to shot: Bernice's fists lashing out at the sailor, his frenzied attempts to make her submit, their intertwined limbs, Marnie's horrified screams. As the sailor forces Bernice to the floor, he thrusts his hand between her thighs; this action, accompanied by the horrible cracking sound of



her breaking leg and cries for help, clearly illustrates Hitchcock's link of desire and physical pain.

One of Hitchcock's most revealing quotations is perhaps, "I never walk when I can ride. My exertion is from the neck up" (Spoto 21). Considering Hitchcock's motif of bodily obliteration, the quip encapsulates perfectly his subsequent approach to performance, as one can also say that most of Hitchcock's actors also work from the neck up. Despite the overall tone of emotional repression, the acting in Marnie is admittedly more psychologically driven than melodramatic personae are classically allowed: there are constant references to Freud and psychoanalytic practices throughout the film. However, this is not to say that Hitchcock necessarily subscribed to a highly internal performance style. There is certainly no evidence that Hitchcock encouraged a Method approach to his casts; in fact, the opposite would appear to be the case. An interview with Barbara Bel Geddes in the documentary Obsessed With Vertigo : New Life for Hitchcock's Masterpiece reveals Hitchcock's technique:

He said, now Barbara, don't act [. . .] I remember the scene at the drawing board where Midge was talking and drawing at the same time and he'd say, "Barbara, look up," and I'd look up. And he'd say, "Now look down," and I'd look down [. . .] And he'd say, "Cut! Very good, you see." So that was that.

Hitchcock thereby achieved a particularly tense moment in the film not through intense psychological preparation with the actor, but by a roster of simple, controlled eye movements.

According to Donald Spoto in The Dark Side of Genius, Hitchcock also purportedly dictated much of what we see Tippi Hedren do in her performances:

Her reactions in The Birds were subtle, and that was what pleased me about the girl. You know, she had never acted before. . . she had nothing to unlearn . . . I controlled every movement on her face. She did purely cinematic acting of very fine shadings all the time. She wasn't allowed to do anything beyond what I gave her. It was my control entirely. (470)

Thus, it comes as no surprise that Tippi Hedren's main acting talent appears to be her ability to repress physical and emotional impulses to the point of "unknownness" (Cavell 148). The camera may dwell on her physical features obsessively, but for the most part, Hitchcock films Hedren in such a way that her acting technique is difficult to describe. William Rothman remarks on her elusive quality:

Hitchcock's camera discovers in Tippi Hedren an exemplar of the difficulty and pain of expressing love. She is quite pretty, but we do not take easy pleasure in viewing her. She does not repel us and we are not unsympathetic to her, but something calls upon us to keep our distance. Indeed, the camera moves us too close and confronts us with our wish to avoid intimacy with her. (249)

Ironically, it is Hitchcock's camera's close fixation on Hedren that inspires the distancing effect. Deborah Fried notes a similar result in Hitchcock's use of process shots (and the same can be said, I believe, for his use of soft-focus):

"This device [. . .] in Hitchcock's hands can become a figure for the illegibility of people, for the obstructing and unrevealing blank that a face, even a gorgeously eye-filling and familiar face, can be" (21).

As I have mentioned, Tippi Hedren's face is frequently frozen into a "look" - in Marnie it is initially indignance, then the same corpse-like blankness she displayed in The Birds – and it is the resulting sense of remoteness that becomes a hurdle to emotional connection with her characters. Marnie's story is undeniably horrifying, but I seldom find myself moved to tears. In fact, I have only ever become emotional when Forio, the beloved horse, is shot. It is a unique Hitchcockian phenomenon indeed that an animal, and not the melodramatic heroine, should inspire crying. However, the distance from the actress that I perceive as an audience member reflects, I believe, Hitchcock's own desire to possess the actress for himself rather than a flaw in Hedren's technique. In several scenes in Marnie we see Hedren (purposely, in character) literally trying to erase the expression on her face, to rein in the intense rage that Mark is causing her and to retain a sense of emotional aloofness and composed neutrality. Donald Spoto observes:

The beauty of Hitchcock's most memorable stars is equalled, in fact, only by their coolness, a quality that has become synonymous with the Hitchcock woman [. . .] Like Hitchcock's motion pictures, the most carefully crafted feminine personae [. . .] tease the intelligence and the imagination before responding to emotion and desire. (398)

Hedren captures the very coolness that Spoto describes, which makes her scenes of emotional release in Marnie all the more enthralling. In both The Birds and Marnie, we become accustomed to seeing the actress flawless and reserved, almost *too* perfect. It is extremely disconcerting indeed when Hitchcock permits her dissolve, even briefly, to a terrorised, tear-streaked, and dishevelled state. And Hedren is completely convincing in her moments of breakdown, particularly in Marnie, where Hitchcock allows her a greater range of expression than bird-inspired catatonia: her face takes on an unanticipated expressivity and her high pitched voice reflects a childlike urgency. As a result, my wish as a spectator becomes to smooth her hair and explain away the emotion, as Mark does in the film. Through Hedren's performances, Hitchcock makes the audience acutely aware of the impulse to contain highly emotional states rather than to expose our inherent vulnerability to the world.

Compared to Hitchcock's films, the acting in Sirk's melodramas is completely unbound on both emotional and physical levels. The performances of Stack and Malone, on first viewing, read as grossly overplayed, whereas Tandy, Latham, and Hedren come off as much more subdued and realistic in their portrayals. Nonetheless, as a spectator it is not difficult to enter fully into the performances of Sirkian melodrama, as overpowering as they initially seem. After all, melodrama is founded on excess, and Sirk finds ways, through an appropriately extreme *mise-en-scène*, to help his actors climb to higher melodramatic heights. Despite the excess the acting often achieves, Sirk's players still manage to infuse their characters with an inherent likeability. Of

Dorothy Malone's portrayal of Marylee, Fassbinder notes:

I love her as I rarely love anyone in the cinema; as a spectator I follow with Douglas Sirk in the traces of human despair. In Written on the Wind the good, the "normal," the "beautiful" are always utterly revolting; the evil, the weak, the dissolute arouse one's compassion [. . .] Douglas Sirk looks at these corpses with so much tenderness and radiance that we start to think that something must be at fault if these people are so screwed up, and, nevertheless, so nice. (23-4)

We feel that Stack and Malone deserve our sympathy and tears because their emotional risk-taking has been extreme: they have dared to experience overwhelming feeling, and have still lost out in the end. "It gives their pathos a tragic ring, because they take on suffering and moral anguish knowingly, as the just price to pay for having glimpsed a better world and having failed to live it" (Elsaesser 67).

Sirk admitted a fascination with failure, possibly stimulated by his early training in theatre. To Jon Halliday he pointed out that the "underlying element of hopelessness" (151) in his Universal melodramas is tied inexorably to the classical notion of *échec*: "It is an ugly kind of failure, a completely hopeless one. And this, again, is why the concept of *échec* is so good. There is no exit. All the Euripidean plays have this no exit – there is only one way out, the irony of the 'happy end'" (133, 136). Indeed, Sirk's final moments – a repentant Sarah Jane being absorbed into the blackness of the hearse, Jane Wyman and Rock Hudson

taking turns at the bedside while the other weakly fights off death (in Magnificent Obsession and All That Heaven Allows, respectively), and Marylee Hadley slumping over the model oil derrick – confirm Sirk's assertion that "Success is not so interesting to me" (Halliday 133).

Eric Bentley notes that "Melodrama is not so much exaggerated as uninhibited," (204) and the performances that Sirk brings out in his casts become veritable texts for melodramatic actors by the sheer force of their unrestrained physical presence. Hitchcock's melodramas are conversely imbued with an exaggerated sense of inhibition. A prime example is Jessica Tandy's response to the gruesome display at Dan Fawcett's farm: Hitchcock denies her a good, cleansing scream or cathartic vomit, both physical cues that she gives with her open mouth and retching noises. More comical, perhaps, is the scene in the restaurant where the one maternal character who achieves any kind of emotional excess is resoundingly slapped in the face by Tippi Hedren (perhaps on the director's behalf) as if to say, "Stop making a fool out of yourself. We don't allow such displays in this film!"

Hitchcock does briefly allow a degree of emotional display in the closing flashback scene in Marnie, for he clearly must have realised that to deny the characters some response would render them completely inhuman. But rather than allowing their feelings to flow freely, Hitchcock combines cross cutting and tableaux to convey the characters' states of mind. For example, Louise Latham, as the young Bernice, achieves one of the most horribly grimacing expressions I have ever seen, but her moment is cut short by still shots of the child Marnie's

stunned, tear-stained face and the sailor's blood soaked t-shirt. Latham, like Tandy, is not allowed to scream - the shriek associated with her terror-stricken face seems to come from an off-screen source. Yet again, Hitchcock employs the technique of cutting emotion off from the characters and the spectator to demonstrate how inaccessible extreme states of feeling can be.

The entire concluding scene offers limited access to full emotional expression, for once Marnie and her mother have relived their trauma in flashback, Hitchcock firmly closes all doors to it. While both women's faces are wet with tears, the frenzy of feeling demonstrated in the flashback cannot be retrieved in the characters' present. Bernice can barely look at Marnie as she reveals the story of her youthful mistakes, and when the women do touch, it is almost unnoticeable: they grasp hands shyly as Marnie kneels down beside Bernice's chair. Of course, Bernice's sore leg again interferes with the moment, as does Mark, who attempts to explain all the tears away: "When a child of any age can't get love it takes what it can get, any way it can get it. It's not so hard to understand." The line, of course, is deeply ironic, and brings to mind Psycho's psychiatrist, who, despite a textbook knowledge of clinical terms, possesses absolutely no comprehension of the inner workings of Norman / Mother's mind. It is clear (particularly via the reprised chant of "Mother, Mother, I am ill...") that Mark has been similarly completely unable to "penetrate" Marnie's psyche: she will never be known to him.

To conclude with an appropriate analogy, Douglas Sirk's approach to emotion and its expression via the melodramatic body is akin to Dorothy

Malone's breasts: magnificently large, but undeniably real in presence and insistency. Hitchcock, conversely, is the "sore leg" of melodrama: his bodies are fragmented and cut off from emotion, despite their agonising pain. Sirk's bodies ecstatically mambo their way to oblivion, and the spectator is invited to join in the dance. Hitchcock destroys melodramatic excess by trapping his bodies in telephone booths or ripping them to shreds in their own homes, while audience can only look on, agog. If melodrama promises, at its bare minimum, "a good cry," (Bentley 196) Hitchcock ironically frustrates the very project of melodrama by denying both his characters and his audience access to those necessary tears.



## Chapter Two

### Homecoming Queens:

#### Melodramatic Heroines and their Domestic Dwellings

The bourgeois residence features prominently in film melodrama, and both Hitchcock's and Sirk's stories play themselves out in the home - an "emotional hothouse" in Jeremy Butler's words (289). Could there be any better place to nurture our neuroses, our obsessions, our often dangerously misguided notions of what it means to love and be loved than in the kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms of the homes where we grew up? The family dwelling reflects the excessive emotions of melodrama most efficiently, and it is in the visual realisation of domestic spaces that Sirk and Hitchcock are perhaps most alike. "Sirk has said: you can't make films about things, you can only make films with things, with people, with light, with flowers, with mirrors, with blood, in fact with all the things which make life worth living" (Fassbinder 22). The two directors indeed fill their characters' homes with items from Sirk's list of interior design essentials, giving special favour to flowers (flaming gladioli in Marnie; plastic blooms of all varieties in Written on the Wind) and mirrors.

Mirrors visually reinforce the melodramatic notion of identity and self-nomination: certainly Sarah Jane's anguished cry of "White! White! White!" is rendered all the more powerfully because Sirk has the character direct these lines into a mirror in which her mother's face is also reflected. The mother-daughter pairings in Imitation of Life also metaphorically mirror each other: ultra-

white Lora and Susie's conflicts seem pale and shallow reflected against the deeper, darker emotional implications of Annie and Sarah Jane's struggle. In The Birds, Lydia surely sees her lost youth and vitality reflected in Melanie, and Marnie's foggy memories of childhood pain are exacerbated whenever she sees her young doppelganger, Jessie. Sirk's and Hitchcock's employment of mirrors, literal and metaphoric, highlight Stanley Cavell's notion of melodramatic "unknownness" (148): the glass concurrently reflects the need for recognition, both of oneself and by others, as well as the profound difficulty of achieving such acknowledgement.

Sirk and Hitchcock share a fondness for grand and dangerous staircases, which are usually curved so as to facilitate the most dramatic falls. For both directors, descents down a flight of stairs (be it plummeting like Mr. Hadley or making an extremely disappointing entrance, as Joan Fontaine does in Rebecca) dramatically signify the ultimate vulnerability of human emotions. Thomas Elsaesser confirms:

This letting-the-emotions-rise and then bringing them suddenly down with a thump is an extreme example of dramatic discontinuity, and a similar, vertiginous drop in the emotional temperature punctuates a good many melodramas – almost invariably played out against the vertical axis of a staircase. (60)

One rarely discovers joy waiting at the foot of a melodramatic staircase.

The two directors also show a preference for conspicuous colours (like the electric blue box of letters on top of the fridge in Imitation of Life and the blood

red suffusions that flood the screen in Marnie), and a variety of eye-catching chotchkes and set furnishings (Lauren Bacall's calendar with the gold, rhinestone encrusted poodles and the "Aloha" pillow of Marnie's nightmare, for example). Michelle Piso notes of Hitchcock's settings that "they are defiantly airless inventions which underscore and condemn the unnatural quality of the film's depicted world," (Piso 292) and the same holds for Sirk's visual representations of middle-class life, too.

The defiance Piso writes of is realised by Hitchcock and Sirk in the sense that, in spite of the aesthetic of falseness, the sets ignite a genuine spark of desire in the spectator to touch and savour their sumptuousness. This desire is often enacted on our behalf by the characters: the scene in Written on the Wind where Robert Stack ushers Lauren Bacall through the Miami hotel room, opening closets and drawers so that she may take in the splendour of the space puts me in mind of the moment in Rebecca where the nameless heroine is led around a glamorous boudoir by Mrs. Danvers, who likewise invites her to look at and touch the remnants of her former mistress. In All That Heaven Allows, Cary accidentally smashes the Wedgwood teapot Ron has painstakingly repaired as a token of love; in The Birds, Lydia similarly dwells on her broken teacups, picking them up ritualistically, as if each piece were a significant fragment of her life (Nichols 143). I find the image particularly "touching" in that it inspires my first true moment of sympathy for Lydia: the fragility revealed in Jessica Tandy's gestures and face makes me yearn to offer the consoling pat on the back that no character in the film can manage. Thus, the objects filling the characters' homes are endowed as

greatly by melodramatic conventions of looking and touching as bodies are in the films.

However persuasively the characters are tempted to touch, and however strongly the spectator is invited to absorb completely the visual splendour of the *mise-en-scène* (for though we cannot literally reach out and take hold, it is possible to “touch” them with our eyes), Sirk and Hitchcock manage to infuse a sense of menace into their sets: despite an extreme lushness, interior spaces often (like the flower made up of hundreds of tiny insects that Mark describes to Marnie) become deadly traps. Through the combination of excess with an ironic play on the meaning of “home,” Sirk and Hitchcock achieve “[a]n acute sense of claustrophobia in décor and locale” (Elsaesser 52) that reflects the malevolent undertone that a supposedly safe, comfortable domestic dwelling can assume. Sirk reveals:

I considered that the houses people live in exactly describe their lives. They are always behind those window crossings, behind bars or staircases. Their homes are their prisons . . . People ask me why there are so many flowers in my films. Because these homes are tombs, mausoleums filled with the corpses of plants. The flowers have been sheared and are dead, and they fill the homes with a funeral air. (Stern 116)

All That Heaven Allows is surely one of Sirk's most profound statements on the confining and life-draining potentialities of home. Jane Wyman, as the widow Cary Scott, is bound into her home by the conservative ideals of the

gossipy town in which she dwells: the town's name, Stoningham, is an obvious indication of the emotional capacities of its dwellers – the rules of decorum are set in stone, so to speak. Sirk also establishes Cary's house rather unambiguously as a tomb. Kay, in all of her naïve, book-learned intelligence, tells Cary of "that old Egyptian custom [. . .] of walling up the widow alive in the funeral chamber of her dead husband along with his other possessions," but asserts, "Of course, that doesn't happen anymore." Cary's wry response, "Doesn't it?" reflects her (and surely Sirk's) bitter acknowledgement of the truth and her restless unhappiness with the arrangement.

It is clear from the attention she receives from Howard and Harvey that she is still desirable and attractive, but according to the town's unwritten law, Cary's social life is expected to have died along with her husband. Cary is constantly reminded of her role as a widow by members of the country club set, particularly Mona, and her removal of her husband's "urn" (the trophy) from the fireplace mantle is interpreted by Ned as the ultimate sin against his father. Her deeming of the object as "clutter" signifies her rebellion against the death-in-life existence she is leading; her increasingly painful headaches, while colourfully described by Fassbinder as something "that happens to us all if we don't fuck once in a while," (22) also indicate that her brain is not quite ready to shut down emotionally. The notion of Cary's social death is clearly indicated when the children present her with a television set as a Christmas gift. Her sorrowful reflection in the mirror-like screen as she listens to Mr. Weeks, the salesman, promote the set as "all the company you want," is incredibly moving, and

underlines what Cavell describes as "the nightmarish possibility that the self has been rendered fully recessed, completely private, absolutely inexpressible, utterly unknowable to the world" (Rothman and Keane 101). Cary is prepared neither to accept the life of lonely invisibility that the television symbolises, nor to waste her time with Harvey, who, as a substitute television, offers an equally empty promise of companionship.

Another fascinating exchange in which Sirk emphasises the capability of the home to render its inhabitants unknowable happens between Cary and Ned after she tells him and Kay of her intention to marry Ron Kirby. The two confront each other, but on opposite sides of a decorative screen, their faces partially hidden from each other. Cary's line, "Ned, we mustn't let this come between us," is imbued with a greater feeling of irony as she struggles to make her son not only see her point of view, but to see *her* as a live human being with feelings and desires. But Ned has already screened out his mother's concerns: his primary interest lies not in Cary's happiness, but in where he and Kay will live on their increasingly infrequent weekend trips home. In two different scenes he reasons that she cannot possibly give up "a home that's been in the family for I don't know how long." Ned believes history of ownership to be a worthy rationale for keeping the house in the family, and Cary, whom he obviously considers to be another possession of the late Mr. Scott, is thereby sentenced to "life imprisonment" in her own home.

Perhaps the only greater instance of a female character being held captive in the family home in Sirk's films is Annie Johnson in Imitation of Life. She too is

typically placed behind Christmas trees and screens, but unlike Cary, who eventually breaks free of the confinement of her home and the Stoningham socially elite (or at least Sirk leaves us with the *impression* that she has succeeded), Annie is absorbed into the *mise-en-scène* completely. From her first entrance into Lora's cold water flat she is immediately bound into the confines of the kitchen - often quite literally by a closed door - making tea, washing Lora's clothes, and generally "taking care of pretty things" (Lora being the main pretty thing to which she must tend).

After Lora makes it big on Broadway and moves to the suburbs, Annie takes on more and more the role and look of a domestic servant: her dresses are generally dark blue or grey with a white lace collar, and she is rarely seen without an apron. Again, she is filmed mainly in the kitchen - unless she placed in the background of the frame, making highballs at the bar while Lora and her playwright lover argue about the controversial "coloured angle" of her next play. Sirk uses the moment cleverly to highlight how Annie's concerns always come to the forefront of the spectator's attention: there is no denying that her reaction to Lora's ignorance is what we are all focused on in the scene. 'Will she give Lora a piece of her mind?' we wonder, hoping Sirk will answer in the affirmative. Although Annie does not respond with words, her disgusted expression speaks volumes and, for a moment, pulls her forth from the background of the frame.

Reflecting on the role of African-Americans in classic film melodrama, Mary Ann Doane notes, "Black servants haunt the diegesis [. . .] and are frequently used to [. . .] invalidate any claims of racial inequality through their

representation as essential and legitimate (unquestionable) appendages of the nuclear family" (80). Annie's true status as a member of the family is represented by Sirk with characteristic irony through Lora's demands for a foot massage when Annie is clearly drained after preparing hors d'oeuvres for the house guests *and* being humiliated by Sarah Jane (in the memorable "crawdads" scene). As Annie rubs, Lora babbles, adding insult to injury by revealing her complete ignorance of Annie's life outside the home: "It never occurred to me that you had any friends."

The nearer she comes to death, the closer Annie comes to being fully incorporated into the *mise-en-scène*. Bedridden, her skin blends with her dark wooden headboard and her white night gown merges with her snowy sheets, rendering her virtually invisible even as she weakly utters her last wishes. Finally, in death, she is swallowed up by an enormous white coffin. Sirk uses the spectacle of the coffin ironically once again to illustrate that Annie, despite being constantly relegated to the film's visual background, still inspires the most emotional response in the viewer. (In a dose of double irony, Sirk also employs the coffin to show that Annie, unlike Sarah Jane, has morbidly succeeded in becoming white.) By making Annie a nearly invisible yet powerfully compelling presence throughout the entire film as she haunts Sarah Jane, Sirk achieved his own interpretation of Hitchcock's unrealised dream project: a film version of Mary Rose (Spoto 474).

One cannot deny, however, that Hitchcock is a master architect of menacing domestic spaces: his interiors rival Sirk's in their ability to confine and



to consume the inhabitants. Bernice and Lydia, Hitchcock's maternal figures, are as securely locked into house arrest as Cary and Annie. As I have mentioned, Bernice, in particular, seems to have lost touch with the outside world. Her injury, coupled with her painful memories of the past, have made everything beyond her doorstep virtually non-existent: it is all a painted backdrop (of course, Lora Meredith, too, lives her imitation of life in front of painted theatrical sets). Robin Wood considers the artifice of the ship and the street effective in communicating the predominant theme of the film because they signal "the intolerable constriction of Marnie's life," (174) and I would posit that the world for both women is also intolerably *constructed*. Of course, knowing Hitchcock, we must suspect that there is something hidden *behind* the painted scenery— a jagged peephole, perhaps, into a world of tremendous and overwhelming emotion. Unlike Norman Bates, though, the characters in Marnie keep their painting firmly in place - that is, until Mark removes it by force and reveals the blood-soaked corpse concealed behind it.

Marnie, like her mother, has painted over the emotional trauma of her past, and also lives in a highly confined world, albeit away from the row house on Van Buren Street. However, her crimson tinted flashbacks indicate clearly that she has not really escaped from the house and its true meaning in her life. And although Marnie is able to move into the outdoors and interact with nature, it is as false as her mother's street:

The horse evidently represents the life Marnie wants to lead. After the confinement of offices, hotel rooms, and railway stations,

Marnie galloping on Forio is an image of freedom – but even the image of freedom is illusory in its appearance, for she is riding in front of a studio back projection machine. (Cameron and Jeffery 275)

Some critics have faulted Hitchcock's preference for back projection and studio sets (as opposed to location shoots) as old-fashioned and ineffective; however, by drawing attention to the illusory world of his characters, Hitchcock shows the inherent difficulty they face in accessing their real desires. The majority of his characters, in fact, are somehow trapped, be it in a world of delusion or fantasy, within their relationships with other characters, or both.

Marnie's marriage to Mark is paralleled with imprisonment, similar to Cary Scott's, but Hitchcock also highlights the marriage as a trap. He intensifies The Birds' predator / prey relationships via Mark's dehumanising treatment of Marnie. The hunter lustfully pronounces, "I've tracked you and caught you and by God, I'm going to keep you." To reinforce the notion of entrapment, Hitchcock consistently places the couple in restricted locales: the crowded race track; the car where Mark "pulls" his proposal (as if Marnie had a choice in the matter); the claustrophobic room on the ship where Mark intends to keep Marnie until their marriage has been consummated. We might question, as Mark does, the seriousness of Marnie's intent when she attempts to drown herself in the ship's pool rather than jumping overboard, but considering the pattern of confinement set up by Hitchcock, it makes perfect sense: Marnie's particular trap is also self-imposed, and she therefore purposely makes any possibility of true freedom (and

true happiness) inaccessible. She prefers to remain unknown, not only to Mark but to herself as well.

In their essay "The Universal Hitchcock," Ian Cameron and Richard Jeffery note, "In familiar, safe places, where we spend large parts of our time, nothing ghastly is likely to happen" (265). Hitchcock confounds our notions of home as a comforting haven (or a "gilded cage") in which to take refuge from the constant onslaught of emotional strife found in the world outside. In The Birds, for instance, both indoor and outdoor spaces are filled with danger; there is nowhere that the characters can evade violent confrontation, be it of avian or human nature. The first attack on Melanie Daniels in the open boat escalates to an assault on the Brenner home via the fireplace, which traditionally represents the warmth and comfort of home and family. In Hitchcock's vision the hearth becomes a passageway through which domestic order is ruined by the sparrows that sweep, like a fire, through the family room. (Coincidentally, in The Birds, like All That Heaven Allows, the dead patriarch is a symbol of lost order: Lydia grouses, "If only your father were here," implying that his presence would have prevented the attacks from ever occurring. His icon is also desecrated: as Lydia attempts to straighten his portrait after the fireplace attack, a dead sparrow falls off onto the piano.) The final attack on Melanie takes place in a bedroom, which in Hitchcock's world is never a place of sweet dreams: in "Mark's Marnie" Michelle Piso notes that Heidegger calls the bed childhood's "hallowed site," (301) and explains how bedrooms function in Marnie as places of terror and pain. For Melanie Daniels, too, the bedroom becomes the location of a nightmarish

(sexual) assault: "The white canopy bed and children's book on the floor indicate that this is a young virgin's room, which has itself been gang-raped even before the mass assault begins on Melanie" (Paglia 83).

As a result of the birds' numerous attempts to defile the sanctuary of the home and the bodies of its inhabitants, the Brenner house is eventually transformed by Mitch into a tomb: he boards up the windows and doors, and the furniture is used to block all access points. The family is sealed inside, waiting, like Cary Scott, for what seems like certain death. Annie Hayworth's house also becomes her grave: after she is killed by birds on her front porch, Mitch places her body back inside the house. Bodega Bay, a place in which she implies she was never really at home, ironically becomes her permanent resting place.

It is clear then, that Sirk and Hitchcock share a comparable notion of the melodramatic home and the uses of an excessively confining mise-en-scène. The radical difference in overall vision becomes apparent, though, when one examines how each director deals with various intruders, of both human and natural origin, that enter into those domestic spaces. In Sirk, the intruder / intrusion is likely to be a welcome presence that becomes the primary facilitator of emotional release, whereas Hitchcock's intruders typically bring with them the ironic housewarming gifts of fear and anxiety.

In All that Heaven Allows the "natural" man, Ron Kirby, played by Rock Hudson, enters Cary's closed world and lets in a flood – or perhaps more appropriately, a snowstorm – of emotion. In All That Hollywood Allows, a study of 1950's melodrama and gender, Jackie Byars defines Ron's role in the plot: "The

plot of the female-oriented melodrama begins as the community of women and children is invaded by a young and virile male "intruder-redeemer" who identifies the problem – the female protagonist's lack of connectedness to a male" (149). Ron begins the films as an "extra" (Fassbinder 22) in Cary's world: as she chats with Sara about week's social activities, Ron prunes her trees in the background. Cary is as natural a hostess as Ron is a gardener, and she invites him onto the patio (but not into the house) for some rolls, coffee, and chit-chat: her persistent but gentle line of questioning helps Ron bloom into a conversationalist, and thus begins their mutual attraction. Of course, as much as she desires him, Cary has strong doubts as to whether Ron will fit into her world of country club dinners and socialising: the disastrously chilly first meeting with Ned and Kay and the fiasco of Sara's "coming in" party for Ron prove her intuition correct.

Although Ron is unable to assimilate himself into the confines of Cary's rigid existence, there is more than enough room for her in his free, boundless world of nature. At Mick and Alida's clambake there are numerous references to Cary's comfort: it is clear from the warm hospitality and friendliness that everyone is invited and welcome, from the peculiar Manuel the Lobster King to the cake bearing bird-watcher Edna Pidway (Mrs. Bundy's east-coast cousin, perhaps). As the evening progresses, some joyous Sirkian dancing ensues, and Ron and Cary spin and laugh further into their love affair; a low-angle shot emphasises a flock of birds flying overhead in the twilight sky (on their way to Bodega Bay?). A stowaway dove in the mill is also the catalyst for Cary and Ron's first kiss: shaken by the flapping of wings as she mounts the stairs of the old building, Cary

falls into Ron's arms, and their lips meet to the cooing of the trespasser.

Hence, nature plays a crucial role in bringing Cary out of her sheltered indoor world and into Ron's. In addition to the benevolent presence of birds and deer, there are several intrusions of weather into the home that intensify the emotions being experienced by the characters. Cary visits Ron on a chilly winter day; he calls her to see the transformation of the mill into a rustic but comfortable dwelling. Cary is particularly taken by the enormous picture window that provides a fantastic view of the wintry outdoor world; Ron has made nature an extension of the house, another "room" to be freely accessed and enjoyed. "It's so friendly," Cary enthuses. Up to this point in the film, we have typically seen her peeking out of the curtained windows of her lonely tomb, usually in great sorrow: the "Joy to the World" scene is equal to the television incident in its emphasis of Cary's total isolation. But through Ron's window, the whole world seems within reach: he tenderly assures Cary, "Home is where you are."

Snow is a particularly important symbol in many of Sirk's films: it acts as a signifier of the ineffable emotions that the characters struggle to express in words. In Imitation of Life, a raging storm marks Annie's discovery that Sarah Jane has been passing for white at school, and Lora and Steve's first bitter break-up occurs during the same blizzard. In Written on the Wind, Kyle hits the height of his emotional breakdown as he haltingly tries to communicate his pain to Lucy: he says he feels that an avalanche is about to crush him. (Later, when Kyle can no longer suppress his emotions, he becomes a human tornado and whirls through the Hadley mansion, tearing the house apart in rage as a pile of

leaves blows into the house with him.) Perhaps Sirk was carrying on the tradition established by D.W. Griffith in the early film melodrama Way Down East wherein Lillian Gish is carried away on an ice floe in the climactic scene. Rather than freezing the emotions of the characters as one might expect, melodramatic snow works ironically, thawing the heart and freeing up intense passions. Cary's fear of leaving behind the only life she's known leads her initially to reject Ron's proposal: as she tries to rush away, she opens the door to the mill and crisp winter snow blusters into the space. Cary's heart melts and she cries out, "Oh Ron, I love you so much!" as the snow circles their embrace.

In Hitchcock's world, intrusions aren't quite so friendly, as the interloper is more likely to be unwelcome or menacing to the sheltered existence of the characters. In The Birds, for instance, Melanie Daniels is the first to invade the Brenner home with her gift of the lovebirds, and the pet shop scene, in which she is introduced as a self-centred practical joker, immediately arouses the spectator to be suspicious of her motives. The lengths she goes to deliver the lovebirds to Mitch are fairly extreme, and in the end, she addresses the card to Cathy, a child she has never met. Her back route approach to the house, in a boat so as not to be seen, is devious from the outset, and Camille Paglia likens her to a "terrorist planting a bomb" (34). Her entry into the Brenner household, to me, evokes an image from childhood: Melanie is the greedy Goldilocks inviting herself into the three bears' house and wreaking havoc with their orderly, predictable lives.

Lydia clearly senses danger in Melanie: she is extremely hesitant to invite her back to the house for dinner, and expresses her displeasure with Mitch and

Cathy's constant pleas to Melanie to stay as a guest in the house. Annie, too, appears reluctant to rent Melanie a room for the night; like Lydia, she perceives some kind of rivalry and acts highly suspicious of Melanie's intentions. And in fact, the women's instincts are correct: there is an intense predator / prey love affair developing between Mitch and Melanie. The climax of Melanie's role as human invader of Bodega Bay occurs during the café scene where the hysterical mother accuses Melanie of causing the bird attacks: "They said when you got here the whole thing started! Who are you? What are you? Where did you come from? I think you're the cause of all this! I think you're evil! Evil!" Melanie's violent response – slapping the woman across the face – surely does little to calm everyone's reservations.

Jay McElhaney notes the "chain of desire" (99) linking Marnie's characters, and I believe that one can also make a clear case for a chain of intrusions that forms an indissoluble bond between them. Marnie enters Strutt's world as the meek, modest, and highly desirable Marion Holland, then proceeds to invade his safe. The film proposes that the string of robberies is connected to her repressed childhood memories of the "men in white suits" who entered her house nightly (via the sinister tapping on the window) and deprived her of a bed. Jessie is also perceived by Marnie to be a trespasser in her childhood home—she is extremely jealous of the attention the child receives from Bernice.

However, Mark Rutland is indisputably the primary "intruder-redeemer" in Marnie's world, for without him, she would still be, as Hitchcock quips in the film's trailer, "going about her business like any normal girl – happy, happy, happy." It



is unclear, however, as to how successful Mark is at redemption; like Melanie Daniels, his motives seem rather suspicious from the outset. Not only does he trap and tame wild female animals for amusement, but his interest in Marnie's rehabilitation is highly steeped in fetish: reflecting on Mark's inner monologue while witnessing Marnie in the midst of the robbery, Hitchcock proposed that it might be: "I hope she hurries up and does the robbery so I can catch her at it and possess her!" (Truffaut 253). The scene certainly evokes Shadow of a Doubt's climactic moment when Uncle and Young Charlie grapple on the train – their legs and feet entwined in struggle – and is yet another instance of Hitchcock's merging of sex and violence. Mark even acknowledges his warped desire when he threatens Marnie that "some *other* sexual blackmailer" might not show the same gentleness he considers himself to be exhibiting.

Mark demonstrates few moments of tenderness throughout the film and his quest to uncover Marnie's past (and her body) is particularly invasive. When Mark bursts into Bernice's home with Marnie during the storm, the mother protests, "What do you think you're talking about? Coming into my house like this and talking about my accident." Susan Smith, in Hitchcock: Suspense, Humour, and Tone, examines the tendency in Hitchcock's male characters to assert their "epistemic superiority" (128) over the narrative world. Indeed, Mark's goal throughout the film is to discover "what happened to the little girl," so that he may find a cure for Marnie's kleptomania and (more importantly to him) her frigidity. In the end, though, it is Bernice, not Mark, who controls knowledge: "You don't know the whole story and nobody does but me." Smith notes that "it is the mother

who has, all along, both possessed and authored the real, hidden script, and by implication, been the character most closely aligned to the film's overall epistemic position" (37). Bernice may be a stranger to the outside world, but within her own home she regulates the flow of memory and emotion. She has also become able to restrict the intrusion of men into the home, thus Mark, who is bound to destroy the illusory world she has created for Marnie and herself, is hardly a welcome guest. As he provokes Marnie further into revelation, Bernice flies at him with her fists raised and screeches, "You get out of my house!"

As with Sirk, Hitchcock's invaders are often accompanied into the home by intrusions of nature. Eric Bentley notes: "Melodramatic vision is paranoid: we are being persecuted and we hold that all things, living and dead, are combining to persecute us. Or rather, nothing is dead. Even the landscape has come to life if only to assault us" (202). While Bentley's opinions may not necessarily hold true for Sirk, who films the natural world in a more positive, if not idealised manner, nature is indeed far more treacherous and menacing in Hitchcock's films. Sirk's birds in All That Heaven Allows, for instance, inspire passionate first kisses and dancing, whereas Hitchcock's recall the old superstition about a bird in the house foreshadowing death. The attacking sparrows, gulls, and crows incite terror and hysteria, particularly in the female characters. Susan Smith notes that the opposite is true for Mitch:

In contrast to the other characters, though, who tend to accede fully to the emotional impact of the attacks, Mitch's preoccupation with warding off the birds by encaging himself and the other characters

within the home and by barricading the chimney, windows and doors suggests a contrived resistance to allowing his emotions to gain release. (146)

During the “penultimate” attack, as Smith calls it (139), the birds try to hammer their way through doors and windows of the Brenner home, and the trapped humans, so wrapped up in their own fear, whirl their way around the room (Hitchcock’s eerie version of dancing) in anticipation of their deaths. Mitch, true to Smith’s observations, remains isolated from the women, occupying himself instead with moving furniture around and fighting off any creature that dares touch him, Lydia included.

In Marnie, intrusions of weather, particularly rain, figure more prominently. Whereas Sirk’s snow liberates the emotions, Hitchcock’s rain dampens the spirits, and when accompanied by thunder and lightning, it is extremely dangerous, both physically and emotionally. Marnie is terrified of thunderstorms because they trigger subconscious reminders of the murder of the sailor. The storm at Rutland’s is accompanied by red suffusions and a tree crashing through the window of Mark’s office. Perhaps the most intriguing and puzzling aspect of the fallen tree is where it could possibly have come from: at the outset of the scene, we see the Rutland office building with its empty parking lot (another painted vista), but no evidence of trees. Like The Birds, this invasion of nature demonstrates the total absence of safety both indoors and out. Even in a painted world, something “real” like a tree can come crashing in at any time, potentially releasing all manner of terrifying emotion as it does for Marnie. Mark, whom we

might consider as dangerous as the tree, breaks into Bernice's home during the final storm and forces an enormous flood of horror and pain. However, the tempest is brief: Hitchcock only allows the most fleeting glimpse of who Bernice and Marnie really are: "Any figure in his designs can emerge, for a brief interval, as a tantalizing, credible "you" and then regain the face of a stranger" (Toles 22). In Marnie's thunder and lightning inspired flashback, for instance, the viewer witnesses the overwhelming sense of horror shared by mother and daughter; once the storm is over, though, they rein their emotions back in tightly and become unknown to each other again. In this sense, Marnie's characters follow Lydia's example of "straightening the painting" after the onslaught.

In a moment from The Birds that doesn't immediately strike one as crucial, Annie Hayworth watches a flock of birds pass overhead and wonders aloud, "Don't they ever stop migrating?" The line stands out in my mind because one could ask the very same question of both Hitchcock's and Sirk's heroines. Each director ironically contrasts the entrapment of interior spaces with the notion that the inhabitants really possess no sense of belonging; they are figuratively (and often literally) homeless. Michelle Piso notes: "Placelessness is crucial to Marnie, identifying woman as wanderer, the one who, crossing borders and thresholds, merely expands a territory of desolation. To be without place is to be without identity; Marnie has had several, none sufficient" (298). Sarah Jane, as I have previously discussed, is also essentially without a place she can truly call home: as a resident of Lora's massive house, she comes and goes by the back

staircase and door. The character is also a runaway, attempting vainly to escape both her blackness and Annie's suffocating love. And Cary Scott may own a house, but she isn't at home in Stoningham's social circles; Ron helps her to understand what it means to be welcomed and cherished.

Thus, the melodramatic emphasis on the heroine realising her identity is strongly tied to the concept of home, and in particular, the notion of *homecoming* becomes crucial to the resolution of the plots and the excessive emotions experienced by the characters. (Recall that Charlotte Vale sarcastically refers to her locked bedroom as "My castle, doctor." After her liberating transformation, the emotionally chilly Vale estate opens up and becomes a warm and inviting home.) Of course, Sirk and Hitchcock each have their own unique vision of whether it is possible to discover the self via a sense of belonging somewhere. At the end of Imitation of Life, Mahalia Jackson sings "Trouble of the World" at Annie's funeral, which repeats the line, "I'm going home to live with my Lord." In Sirk's melodramatic world, it is indeed possible to go home, and these homecomings are imbued with characteristic emotional ecstasy, although admittedly in the form of Fassbinder's "pain, death, and tears" (24). Sirk typically leaves us with a generous amount of doubt about the longevity of the happiness or the sincerity of the welcome that the characters achieve upon their return: "you don't believe the happy end, and you're not supposed to" (Halliday 151).

Annie Johnson's dream is to have an elaborate funeral with crowds of mourners to witness her "goin' to glory." Like Willy Loman in Death of A Salesman, she believes that the number of people at her funeral is a final

determination of her self-worth and identity. Sarah Jane appears unexpectedly, running through the slushy streets and literally throwing herself on the coffin (a moment that yet again demonstrates the emotive powers of Sirk's snow). She makes a spectacle of herself through her excessive, but clearly heartfelt outburst of emotion. Sarah Jane self-nominates, "Mama! I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it! Mama! Do you hear me? I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Mama! Mama, I did love you! [. . .] Miss Lora, I killed my mother! I killed her! I wanted to come home! Now she'll never know how much I wanted to come home!" But Sarah Jane's declaration of her identity as Annie's child is all for naught – she is too late to reconcile with her mother. Mary Ann Doane describes the intense emotionality of such moments in film melodrama as the "rhetoric of the too late": "Pathos is thus related to a certain construction of temporality in which communication or recognitions take place but are mistimed" (91).

While Sarah Jane cannot be recognised by Annie, she is by Lora, who quickly ushers her into the hearse (not merely to stop her from further making a scene, but presumably also to take her back to the Meredith home). However, the spectator, while moved by Sarah Jane's overwhelming realisation and Lora's sympathy to the young woman, is left skeptical as to the future Sarah Jane will have. It may be possible that Lora's acknowledgement of Sarah Jane (as her adopted child) finally affirms her identity as "white". However, the final image of Sarah Jane leaning her head on Lora's shoulder is tremendously unsettling: the submissive gesture signifies to me that the character is destined to take over as Annie's replacement in the household, as Flitterman-Lewis speculates (329-330).

The denouement of All That Heaven Allows also hints at the possibility of homecoming, but again it is treated ironically; from the spectator's position, it is difficult to accept with full certainty the success of Ron and Cary's union. After Ron's accident (he plummets off a snowy precipice while waving at Cary and is crushed, so to speak, by the very avalanche of emotion that Kyle Hadley fears), Cary rushes to his side, but not before she takes in fully the warmth and comfort of the mill. "This room - the beauty that Ron's put into it - and the love!" she exclaims. The film's final line, "Yes, darling, I've come home" appears to confirm Cary's true place and identity, but one cannot help but wonder what kind of future lies in store for her. While I am generally relieved that Cary has finally made the right decision, it is undeniable that Ron appears to have been seriously injured: the once vital man of nature has been critically harmed by it. In "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama" Laura Mulvey asks, "How can a mother of grown children overcome the taboo against continued sexual activity in 'civilised society', when the object of her desire is reduced to child-like dependence on her ministrations?" (79). Cary will undoubtedly live out her days in Ron's lovely home, but Sirk leaves the viewer speculating that she will fill those days caring for an invalid (the very fate she sought to avoid in her rejection of Harvey).

Written on the Wind is surely Sirk's bleakest statement about the possibility of homecoming. The climactic scene begins with Lucy pleading to Mitch: "Take me out of this house [. . .] I'm afraid," as Kyle whirls through the main floor rooms, tearing apart the décor. After being shot, Kyle asks Mitch, "What are we doing here, Mitch? What are we doing? Let's go down to the river

where we belong [ . . . ] I'll be down at the river, waiting, waiting." The river, a carefree retreat for Marylee, Kyle, and Mitch, signifies the childlike freedom that the Hadleys have lost. Their primary struggle throughout the film is to return to that blissful place in nature where they felt loved and accepted, but it is impossible for them to reclaim their innocence; Kyle is only able achieve a comparable state of emotional ecstasy in death. Mitch's final dismissal of Marylee confirms Sirk's opinion: "Look how far we've come from the river," is an echo of the maxim "We can never go home again."

Kyle's demise leaves the Hadley mansion vacant except for Marylee, who peeks out the curtains in a manner reminiscent of Cary Scott as Lucy and Kyle make their escape. To emphasise her absorption into the business world and her distance from the river, Sirk dresses Malone in a conservative grey business suit, a departure from the shocking pinks and reds of her usual wardrobe: Marylee is thus rendered unrecognisable in the Cavellian sense of the word. While her gesture of stroking the oil derrick suggests her contemplation of substituting her sexual identity for a corporate one, Marylee's final defeated slump over the model acts as an unvoiced self-nomination: "This is *not* who I am!" But there is no escape for Marylee from the all-consuming Hadley name: Sirk ends the film with a shot of a servant closing and locking the iron gate of the estate, sealing her in forever.

Sirk's homecomings are deeply tinged with irony and uncertainty, but at the very minimum the characters are allowed to return to or to retain some form of shelter, however provisional or tenuous. In Hitchcock's melodramas,



homecoming is in itself made completely impossible: one really *can't* come home again, as even the most oppressive of interior environments are ultimately destroyed. (Hitchcock surely set the standard in Rebecca, where Maxim and the heroine return to a Manderley in flames.) In The Birds, the malevolent entity (like Mrs. Danvers) also wins out, and the characters are evicted from their once comfortable dwelling: the birds have moved in by force and have irreparably damaged the Brenner home. Hitchcock thereby places Melanie's acceptance into the household in jeopardy, for "home" essentially no longer exists. And not only has the house been destroyed, but its inhabitants, too, have been nearly annihilated, particularly Melanie. Physically and psychically wounded to the point of unresponsiveness (she hasn't had her eyes pecked out, but she has still effectively gone blind), she is unable to self-nominate, to share a moment of reconciliation with Lydia (and thus gain the mother she never had), or to profess mutual love with Mitch. Rather than coming home, Melanie has been lost.

Hitchcock's vision of homecoming in Marnie is as doubtful as that in The Birds: while the home has not been literally destroyed in the film, the discovery that Bernice was a prostitute shatters Marnie's illusions about the older woman's identity as a mother. While a "moment of agnition or recognition" (Doane 91) is shared by the two characters (signified primarily by their horrified screaming in the flashback), they return to their usual state of unknownness at the end of the film. As in Imitation of Life, the revelation has occurred far too late for mother and daughter: Bernice's refusal of Marnie's head on her leg symbolises their still-wounded relationship.

Like The Birds, Marnie also ends with the heroine being taken from the home. Mark hesitates as he says, "Uh, Mrs. Edgar, I'll bring Marnie back," and Bernice surely sees through the obvious lie: her last line, "Goodbye, Sugar Pop," has an eerie finality to it. The mother seems to have foreknowledge that Marnie, or at very least the Marnie she raised, will never return to the painted house on Van Buren Street. The children outside Bernice's door also function as an indication that Marnie will reclaim neither her lost childhood innocence, nor, perhaps, her mental health. As Mark ushers Marnie into the car, they stop their game and stare at her, then resume their ominous chant: "Mother, mother, I am ill..." The denouement is thus imbued with the feeling that more emotional damage than healing has come from Marnie's forced homecoming.

In Sirk's melodramatic vision, domestic spaces invite the female protagonists inside, then slowly close in on them, rendering them prisoners in their own homes. A series of intruders, both human and natural, aid in keeping the heroines from becoming completely unknown to themselves and the world: self-nomination, however ironic, is still possible in Sirk's melodramas. For the audience, too, it is possible to "come home": Sirk opens all doors to emotion, allowing the spectator free access to join the characters in their tears. However, Sirk subtly undermines any sense of an unequivocally "happy" ending via a deeply rooted sense that all is not quite right with the world: the emotional highs of homecoming are always tempered by the final image of a hearse or a locked gate.

Hitchcock departs even further from the traditional melodramatic sense of

a clearly resolved denouement through his more shadowy vision. His heroines are initially trapped in the home, only to be violently expelled from it in the final moments: homecoming is thereby entirely unfeasible. The audience, too, is led up a dark and winding path to the threshold of intense feeling; however, just when we anticipate a release of emotion through a long-awaited self-nomination, our expectations are frustrated. The door to the home is closed abruptly in our faces, or the house is burnt to the ground. Yet again, Hitchcock masterfully manipulates melodramatic conventions to subvert the overall emotional goals of the genre, and thus keeps both his characters and his audience wandering indefinitely in a cold, persistent rain, yearning to be invited inside.

## Chapter Three

### Fireworks and Laughter; Pecans and Screams:

#### Melodramatic Music and Sound

The last line of Stanley Cavell's Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman reads: "Music, moods, worlds, abandonment, subjection, dispossession – of course; we are speaking of melodrama" (222). With characteristic poetry, Cavell encapsulates one of melodrama's fundamental features: the link of music to heightened states of emotion. In The Melodramatic Imagination, Peter Brooks confirms: "Not only is the very existence of melodrama as a distinct genre originally linked to its use of music, music is inherent to its representation" (48). The genre concerns itself with translating the inexpressible into unambiguous signs, and as I have established in chapters one and two, the body of the performer and mise-en-scène are key contributors to emotional expression (in Sirk) or repression (in Hitchcock). Musical accompaniment, however, brings to the melodramatic scenario an "additional legibility" (Brooks 48).

In Magnificent Obsession, Helen Phillips' sole night of happiness revolves around a display of "music and fireworks," an apt description, I think, of Sirk's employment of music to accentuate the explosive nature of human desire and feeling. Hitchcock, of course, has a unique, more discordant "ear" for melodramatic music: rather than focus the audience's attention on

orchestral fireworks, he brings our awareness to the hissing fuse and the terrible silence before the blast.

From 1951 to 1959, Sirk's films were scored by Frank Skinner and Joseph Gershenson; the one exception is 1957's A Time to Love and a Time to Die, composed by Miklos Rozsa (Halliday 211). Sirk clearly endorsed the employment of music to unify the various elements of his films, as he stated in his interview with Jon Halliday:

...the word 'melodrama' has rather lost its meaning nowadays: people tend to lose the 'melos' in it, the music. I am not an American, indeed I came to this folklore of American melodrama from a world crazily removed from it. But I was always fascinated with the kind of picture which is called a melodrama, in America.  
(107)

Skinner and Gershenson, who worked both individually and collaboratively, imbue the music for Sirk's most successful weepies with the decidedly German notion of "gesamtkunstwerk": "the complete fusion into an integrated whole of the various elements of the dramatic art form – music, words, action, setting" in the Wagnerian tradition (Bruce 9). The two composers' extravagant musical accompaniment faithfully supports the emotional goals of Sirk's films.

Hitchcock also employs music to accompany his character's timorous descents into the dusty fruit cellar of emotion. Sound and melody are extremely important in his entire oeuvre: his innovative approach in films such as Blackmail, Rear Window, Psycho, and The Birds is certainly as noteworthy as his

extraordinary camera technique. Elisabeth Weis, who dedicates an entire book (The Silent Scream: Alfred Hitchcock's Sound Track) to an examination of Hitchcock's contribution to film sound, notes the number of characters who are musicians (87) and points out the link between song and murder (19). While Sirk's more traditional application of music maintains an ironic function, Hitchcock's use of orchestration, diegetic sound, and silence is ultimately more subversive to the overall intent of melodrama.

Bernard Herrmann composed scores for Hitchcock from 1955 (The Trouble With Harry) to 1964 (Marnie): his last score for 1966's Torn Curtain was rejected by Hitchcock (Bruce 117). Unlike Skinner and Gershenson, Herrmann adopted Hanns Eisler's Brechtian philosophy opposing "the Hollywood dictum that music must follow visual incidents and illustrate them either by directly imitating them or by using clichés that are associated with the mood and content of the picture" (Bruce 16). There are only a handful of moments in Herrmann's offerings in Marnie and The Birds (for which Herrmann acted as "Sound Consultant" rather than composer) wherein music directly mimics an emotion or incident: our expectations of the extra legibility that melodramatic music is intended to provide is often completely confounded.

The introduction of Marnie is a prime example of the ironic distance Hitchcock establishes between sound and image. Herrmann's soundtrack begins with intense, trembling violins that evoke an incredible sense of suspense and danger. However, there is no visual support for the music: what we see on the screen are the opening credits of the film, fashioned like the turning pages of a

book. Unlike Sirk's Written on the Wind, where the very first montage sequence of Robert Stack speeding through the Hadley oil fields is underscored by appropriately up-tempo music, what we hear at the outset of Marnie is completely incongruous to what we see. Herrmann intensifies the situation by bringing the music to a dramatic crescendo as the credits close with the director's name: we anticipate that Hitchcock will *finally* allow us to catch a glimpse of something exciting and intense in the initial image of the film. Our hopes, however, are disappointed. The first shot is not of a speeding car or a murder, but a close-up of a yellow purse. To reinforce the established distance, the camera becomes stationary and the purse "walks away" from it, accompanied by the receding sound of Marnie's footsteps.

The conclusion of The Birds similarly subverts our expectations about the traditional notion of the soundtrack as an aural guide. Susan Smith notes the feeling of spectatorial unease resulting from the menacing low hum that dominates the soundtrack during the last few minutes and the lack of a musical cue that the film has reached its conclusion:

The absence of the usual musical flourish at the end of the film - following on from the disconcerting sound of the low hum that is first heard when Mitch goes out to the garage - is also especially unsettling for it denies us one of the standard conventions traditionally used to signal a sense of narrative closure. And it is the unresolved nature of the ending itself (as stressed by the withholding of the words 'THE END') that encapsulates and

sustains (even on subsequent viewings) the film's overall tone of disquiet. (126)

As the exhausted Brenners drive away into an unknown future, the spectator believes, for a moment, that they have finally escaped. However, the bird noises eventually drown out the motor and rise to a piercing crescendo, which seems to signal not only another imminent attack, but also their triumph over both the human body and emotions.

Sirk takes quite a different approach to musical accompaniment in his melodramas: the score is much more likely to mirror the action of the plot faithfully. In fact, the few scholars who have briefly analysed Sirk's use of music dwell on the tendency of his scores to "mickey-mouse," or to fuse action and music *too* literally (Karlin 79). In Magnificent Obsession, for example, the music tumbles and crashes to a halt when Helen knocks a flower pot off the ledge of her hotel balcony, and in All That Heaven Allows, Ron's plummet off the precipice is accompanied by a similar descending scale and final punctuating thud. The frequency of such moments, wherein the "musical-dramatic sync" (Karlin 79) is particularly conspicuous, has led writers like Barbara Klinger to emphasise camp readings of Sirk's music: "The effects of film music in soliciting comic readings of melodrama cannot be overestimated" (149). Klinger refers to the "corny" use of "Ode to Joy" in Magnificent Obsession and Marylee's mambo in Written on the Wind as examples, noting that "In each case, film music underscores the emotion in those scenes to such an extent that it appears as an entertaining instance of the dramatic ineptitudes of previous forms – their failure



to exercise verisimilar restraint and to indulge instead in rampant overdramatization" (149).

It is perhaps too simple to forget that melodrama is to a great extent built around a *lack* of restraint, and consequently to devalue Sirk's films for their overindulgences. I believe it is not only possible, but necessary, to look beyond the obvious. Sirk effectively reclaims melodrama's traditional use of music as a marker of emotion as well as a reflection of the excess (in both the affective and somatic realms) at the heart of the genre. Most interestingly, from 1953's Magnificent Obsession to 1959's Imitation of Life there is a noticeable progression in the excessiveness of the scores themselves. The relatively conservative application of music as "a system of punctuation giving expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the story-line by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue," (Elsaesser 50) in Magnificent Obsession evolves into a completely uninhibited exploitation of orchestral effect in Imitation of Life. Virtually every character has theme music, from Susie's twinkly, childish chimes, to the ominous low piano that follows Sarah Jane's misadventures. Even minor characters like David Edwards and Allan Loomis have their own unique melodies. The film, Sirk's last in Hollywood, is his "swan song," ecstatically filled with melody.

Magnificent Obsession's music is remarkably subdued, considering the incredible twists and turns of the plot and the emotional highs and lows of the characters. The film's score is built primarily around the repetition of a central leitmotif, a "brief musical theme associated with a dramatic idea, place, situation,

or character " (Flinn 18). There are two recurring themes in the film: the first is a tender love song played on the piano, which subtly accompanies Jane Wyman and Rock Hudson's romantic scenes. The second, more noticeable motif, is Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," which reprises in every scene wherein Bob Merrick interacts with the angelic Edward Randolph, and underscores the younger character's voyage to discovering "the source of ultimate power." If the familiar tune wasn't sufficient to mark the religious premise of the film - both Sirk's and John Stahl's 1935 version of the film are based on Lloyd C. Douglas' sermon-cum-novel (Halliday 201-2) - the accompanying choir sounds compellingly like the heavenly host. Robert Stern notes that the song "leap frogs with the characters' own verbal expressions as an "off-screen voice," abstractly describing the spiritual tone of the drama, just as the off-screen voice of Edward Randolph periodically intrudes to provide the metaphysic" (96). Of course, the most memorable occurrence of the motif is during the film's climax, as Bob gets the go ahead "from above" (Randolph looking down over the operating table and giving his encouraging nod): both instrument and voice swell to a glorious crescendo as Bob begins to operate.

However inspirational the tune may be to Merrick on his quest to discover his "powerhouse," Sirk's use of "Ode to Joy" also reinforces the film's ironic undercurrent: the chance of true, uninhibited joy for the star-crossed lovers is extremely slim. "Excitement" and happiness are eternally deferred until "tomorrow," and the film ends with fulfilment still unknown by Helen Phillips. Sirk confessed to Jon Halliday, "As far as I'm concerned, heaven is stingy," (140) and

the paradoxical employment of sacred music confirms his skeptical position. In All That Heaven Allows, Sirk includes an off-key rendition of "Joy to the World" sung by a passing group of children to emphasise musically Cary Scott's utter despair and loneliness on Christmas eve. (Written on the Wind is the sole film of the four to exclude religious music; however, considering the spiritual void in which the characters exist, the absence seems completely appropriate.)

The notion of the sacred is also reflected in Sirk's unique vision of the requiem: as a prime example, the first sombre notes of Imitation of Life's theme song later become recognisable as Annie's funeral march. (In the credit sequence, Sirk actually blends the sacred with the profane: the dirge evolves into the film's florid love theme, sung by a Nat King Cole sound-alike.) The solemn melody occurs consistently whenever Sarah Jane breaks Annie's heart: it underscores Annie's "Born to be hurt" monologue, Sarah Jane's tearful apology after the crawdads incident, and Annie's "heart-attack" outside Harry's Club. (Like Hadley Sr., whose collapse is also inspired by his wayward children, Annie crumples to the ground as the music rises in volume and intensity.) In the final scene, Sarah Jane self-nominates that she killed her mother, and we tend to believe her, as the music throughout the film has already aurally confirmed the deadly tension between mother and daughter.

Annie's funeral is dominated by gospel singer Mahalia Jackson's rendition of "Trouble of the World." Sirk uses the song in the film to override yet again the audience's focus on Lora Meredith: Jackson, like Annie, is initially relegated to a spot almost out of the frame, high above the weeping congregation, but she

nonetheless becomes the focal point of the scene. By the end of the song, Sirk removes all distance (physical and emotional) by filming her in close-up:

Before shooting those scenes, I went to hear Mahalia Jackson at UCLA, where she was giving a recital. I knew nothing about her. But here on the stage was this large, homely, ungainly woman – and all these shining, beautiful young faces turned up to her, and absolutely smitten with her. It was strange and funny, and very impressive. I tried to get some of that experience into the picture. We photographed her with a three-inch lens, so that every unevenness in the face stood out. (Harvey 222)

Sirk considered the funeral to be ironic – “All that pomp” (Harvey 222) – and the scene is certainly laden with unsettling images: the enormous white coffin that is ostentatiously visible yet at the same time a confirmation of Annie’s invisibility, and Sarah Jane’s submission to Lora are but two examples. Jackson’s solo, however, imbues the scene with the authentic emotion that Sirk always brilliantly manages to conjure at the denouement of even the most preposterous plots. Charles Dyer observes: “The fact that Jackson’s singing is so ‘genuinely’ emotional that she cannot lip-synchronise herself with any precision draws attention to the artifice of the film medium which is ‘unable’ to ‘capture’ her untrammelled outpouring of emotion” (205-6). Mahalia Jackson’s powerful, impassioned voice and unattractive, but nonetheless rapturous facial expressions act as Sirk’s reminder that beyond Lora and Sarah Jane’s surface world (the

“white” world, perhaps) of appearances, lies a “large, homely, ungainly” realm of overwhelming feeling.

Hitchcock also makes ironic use of “sacred” music, albeit of a different variety: children’s songs are used in The Birds and Marnie to amplify “the disruptive possibilities of sound” (Smith 125). The child is a key figure in literary and film melodrama, be it sick, orphaned, illegitimate, or variously smothered or neglected by its parents. Donald Spoto considers Hitchcock’s youthful experiences crucial to the development of his artistic direction and lifelong fascination with the punishment meted out upon “naughty boys” (9): Norman Bates’ grim-faced stuffed bunny rabbit might very well be Hitchcock’s most intensely disturbing referent for his vision of the child. In Shadow of a Doubt, Strangers on a Train, and Psycho, Hitchcock clearly links traumatic childhood events and strained parent-child relationships to the creation of adult sociopaths. In his melodramatic offerings, Hitchcock also demonstrates a fascination with the consequences that an unhappy youth has on the adult: certainly Tippi Hedren’s most compelling moments are those in which she reverts to a vulnerable, childlike state.

The Birds uses the voices of children in song not only to heighten suspense, but also to relay a sense of melodramatic excess (that will later be completely undermined aurally). In one of the rare instances where Hitchcock’s sound actually echoes the visual, a murder of crows silently gathers on a play structure as the children chant repetitively: “She combed her hair but once a year [. . .] With every stroke she shed a tear. [. . .] I asked my wife to wash the floor [

. . .] She gave me my hat and showed me the door.” The song seems to continue ceaselessly with verse after verse added to the maddening “Ristle-tee, roistle-tee, now, now, now” chorus; the number of birds increases with each repetition. Paired with the visual menace of the crows, the normally innocent sound of children singing becomes extremely sinister (especially since the song fundamentally echoes one of the film’s thematic concerns: domestic sorrow). Soon after, as the crows attack, the children’s screams meld with the sound of wings and cawing, making attacker and victim indistinguishable.

In Marnie, a group of pre-pubescent girls intones “Mother, Mother, I am ill / Send for the doctor over the hill / Call for the doctor, call for the nurse, / call for the lady with the alligator purse.” A seemingly harmless song again achieves an excessive malevolence: the kids sing with a creepy emotionlessness that forebodes the repressed nature of Marnie’s relationship with her mother far more effectively than orchestration. Hitchcock thereby provides an aural clue of what will transpire behind the door of Bernice’s brick row house (the menace is compounded by the fact that it is Jessie who answers it). However, the song is ultimately ironic, as it arouses spectatorial suspicion of the film’s resolution: its repetition *after* Marnie’s discovery of her past and her brief accompanying emotional outburst increases the viewer’s feeling that she really hasn’t been cured at all. Hitchcock denies the audience closure by trapping his heroine once again, this time in an ironic musical “loop”: Marnie ends her journey to self-discovery where she began, on Mama’s doorstep, still ill and searching for a cure. The music thus eerily echoes Norman Bates’ (and Hitchcock’s) opinion: “I

think we're all in our private traps, clamped in them, and none of us can ever get out. We scratch and claw, but only at the air, only at each other. And for all of it, we never budge an inch."

Love themes are central to the musical motifs of Skinner and Gershenson's and Herrmann's scores; however, Sirk and Hitchcock employ them to achieve radically different emotional outcomes. All That Heaven Allows builds on the union of music and tears established in Magnificent Obsession, and additionally links Eros and Thanatos through the use of the love theme as a dirge. Cary Scott's house is repeatedly likened to her own tomb, and in one scene she pensively plays the love theme on her piano, a melody that Robert Stern likens to her "funeral dirge" (117). In fact, Skinner and Gershenson frequently use romantic piano music incongruously in the scoring of Sirk's films to signify loneliness and death. In Magnificent Obsession, the piano marks Helen's moments of deepest pain: her husband's death, the accident that causes her blindness, and the doctors' decree that there is no help for her. But in All That Heaven Allows, Cary Scott plays the love song herself while gazing into the mirror above the keyboard, an effect that all the more powerfully emphasises her morbid existence.

The refrain also occurs at the conclusion of the film and proves Sirk's talent in rendering the standard love theme completely ironic. The lovers have been reunited, but heaven, as Sirk puts it, has indeed been "stingy": Ron, Cary, and spectator alike are left to consider a future with no guarantee of happiness. The final shot pans out of Ron's window into nature, but the couple is left in the

interior world: the sense that Cary and Ron have been “closed in,” not only by the mise-en-scène but by the music as well, is solidified in the final notes of the score.

Marnie's credit music introduces the two main leitmotifs of the film: the suspense theme and the love theme. While the suspense theme initially establishes an ironic tension between sound and action, it is admittedly used in a traditional manner during the remainder of the film, underscoring Marnie's nightmares and red visions. The love theme, however, maintains a highly paradoxical function. It is as likely to accompany Marnie's rapturous rides on her horse Forio as her kissing scenes with Mark - although one such kiss *does* occur in a stable (as Marnie might say, “You Freud ... me Jane?”). More disturbing, however, is the reprise of the love theme as Mark rapes Marnie. Hitchcock builds up to the song through a sequence of diegetic sounds: Mark slams the door, and Marnie cries “No!” then gasps as the night gown falls to the floor. There is a brief moment of silence as Mark contemplates her (invisible) body, and then the love theme swells as he kisses her. But while the music aurally conveys a sense of ecstasy and a surrendering to passion, the spectator sees Marnie's emotions freeze and her body become a statue.

Marnie refuses to submit to the emotional sway of the love theme a second time after Mark forces her to return to Van Buren Street: she is pulled from the car crying, “No!” yet again as the song, this time ominously underscored with diegetic thunder and rain, plays in the background. While Sirk's characters allow themselves to be transported to rapture by the love song (no matter how



ironic the denouement of the film turns out to be), Hitchcock's heroine is unaffected by the emotional tone the score is attempting to inspire: the melodramatic love theme thus falls on deaf ears.

The Birds is unique to the genre in that the sound of birds, electronically produced on an instrument called a "trautonium" (Spoto 460) replaces the traditional orchestral soundtrack. In several scenes the bird twitters and chirps actually substitute for the standard love motif. (Sirk may render a love song ironic, but Hitchcock takes the additional step in The Birds and makes it virtually unrecognisable!) The lovebirds are an important symbol in the development of Mitch and Melanie's relationship, and the sound of birds consistently accompanies their scenes of verbal foreplay. Perhaps the most interesting occasion is when Melanie is making her way back across Bodega Bay after covertly delivering the lovebirds to the Brenner's house. Mitch gazes at Melanie through the binoculars and grins, and Melanie responds with her own coy, self-satisfied smile: all the while, the sound of seagulls squawking increases in intensity as a backing track to their flirtation. However, Mitch and Melanie are distracted from their game and the impending romance is cut short when a gull attacks her. Just when the audience believes that birds will bring Mitch and Melanie together (in a manner similar to Sirk's dove), Hitchcock's seagulls preempt love with their violent, piercing cries.

Human screams are also crucial to The Birds and Marnie. Elisabeth Weis notes that Hitchcock "showed less creative interest in the dialogue per se than in such noncognitive forms of human expression as screaming and laughter. Their

value as sound effects is usually as important as their significance as human utterances" (17). Appropriately, much of the screaming done in the two films is either unvoiced or nondiegetic, Hitchcock's way of yet again forbidding the characters to express their pain even in the most inarticulate and primal fashion: animals are actually allowed freer access to screams than their human counterparts. Lydia gives a horrified, mute shriek after she discovers the mutilated body of Dan Fawcett, and Marnie makes a similar gesture during the storm in Mark's office. Two voiced screams in Marnie actually come from an off-screen source rather than from the characters' mouths. As I mentioned in chapter one, Bernice's flashback scream is essentially nondiegetic, and in the hunt scene, a similar cry is heard as Marnie and Forio gallop furiously toward the stone wall. Marnie's lips do not move, and it is therefore impossible to tell whether the scream has come from her or the horse. When Forio falls, though, we hear, diegetically, the agonising sounds of an animal in pain, and Marnie begs a neighbour for a gun, explaining, "My horse is screaming!" An intense blast silences the animal's cries, and Marnie gives her "benediction" (Wood 402): "There. There, now." The brief utterance is perhaps Hitchcock's way of speaking through his heroine: 'Now there shall be no more screaming; emotion is safely contained again.'

Diegetically located sources of sound, or "aural intrusions," (Weis 125) are also frequently used as a replacement for the characters' extreme, but repressed, emotions. Marnie is as sensitive to sound as she is to sight and touch: throughout the film she is variously tormented by the sound of tapping (by the

sailors on the window and her mother's cane on the stairs), the crash of thunder, screams (both animal and human), and Jessie's pecans. In the pecan incident, Hitchcock's use of sound powerfully underscores Marnie's emotional excess. As she tries to discover why her mother won't touch her, Marnie's voice rises in intensity and volume. Finally, she shouts, "Is that how you think I get the money to set you up?" (i.e. she has been prostituting herself to the fictional Mr. Pemberton) and Bernice slaps her across the face with an audible whack. Marnie's hand hits the bowl of nuts, the pecans hit the floor, and only then does the suspense theme commence. The aural force of the pecans clattering on the kitchen linoleum is astonishingly violent and perfectly epitomises Marnie's pent up feelings as they come desperately spilling out of her. Bernice's slap functions (in a manner parallel to Melanie Daniels' slap of the hysterical mother in The Birds) as a prohibition of such a blatant emotional display.

Interestingly, one of the sounds of which Marnie is most terrified, human lovemaking, is never actually heard in the diegesis. Hitchcock makes it clear, though, that Marnie equates the natural sounds of sexual intercourse with pain: she cries out in her dream state, "Don't hurt my Mama!" After her second tapping-induced nightmare, she struggles to describe the experience to Mark: "I'm cold and I hear the noises." When pressed to elaborate – "What noises? What are they like? Who makes them?" – she sarcastically counters, "You Freud...me Jane?" However cognisant Marnie may seem of the Freudian overtones of her dream, its true meaning remains unknown to her until she returns to Bernice's house during the storm. The sound of thunder and Mark's

tapping on the wall bring back an experience excessively laden with horrifying sounds: Bernice and the sailor threatening each other as they struggle physically; the crack of her leg as it breaks under his weight; the dull thud of the poker smashing in his skull; the shared screams of mother and child.

Sirk, conversely, relies very little on diegetic sound in his melodramas. At the end of Written on the Wind, it is music that accompanies the concluding image of Marylee's imprisonment, not the actual solid clang of the closing iron gate (unlike Hitchcock, Sirk's films provide narrative closure, both visual and aural). Magnificent Obsession includes some motorboat noise and the smashing flowerpot, while All That Heaven Allows is almost completely devoid of "natural" sounds. (The irony is clear, of course, considering the film's preoccupation with nature, and is surely a conscious decision on Sirk's behalf to draw attention to Cary's isolation from the world.) Sirk undeniably prefers diegetic sources of music, which are usually introduced during the scenes of dancing he includes in all four films. Such scenes prove yet again Sirk's loyalty to the conventions of nineteenth century melodrama and the traditional uses of music: in The Melodramatic Imagination, Brooks notes that "there is in every classic melodrama a ballet" (48). Magnificent Obsession and All That Heaven Allows employ jaunty accordion tunes to highlight the developing love between Jane Wyman and Rock Hudson. In both cases, Sirk adds only brief diegetic sounds (fireworks and laughter, respectively) to intensify the audience's sense of the emotional ecstasy being experienced by the lovers as they dance.

Of course, the most extreme instances of music and dance as signifiers of excess are developed in the wayward daughters of Sirkian melodrama, Marylee Hadley and Sarah Jane Johnson. The characters, who possess bodily surfeit, are actually able to *control* diegetic music through their use of radios, record players, and jukeboxes. In Written on the Wind, Marylee turns on a jukebox in her scene with Roy Carter: the trashy sounding jazz tune, which makes heavy use of low, sinister sounding piano notes (which, as I have already mentioned, are also linked to Sarah Jane) and saxophone, later tracks her throughout the film as nondiegetic accompaniment. Marylee has two dances: the first is after her unsuccessful attempt to seduce Mitch at Kyle and Lucy's anniversary party (which Sirk punctuates musically by having Hudson strum an out-of-tune chord on his ukulele) and the second, of course, is her unforgettable mambo, which she initiates by turning on a record player. The wild tune of "Temptation" is heavy on the bongos and perfectly accompanies Marylee's display of emotional and bodily excess. Similarly, the scene in Imitation of Life in which Frankie punishes Sarah Jane for her excess (her blackness) is backed up by an equally percussive jazz number that is driven by the frenzied beat of bongo drums.

Like Marylee, Sarah Jane is able to control diegetic music (she has both a record player and a radio in her bedroom) and also possesses a similar sort of physical abundance: when Steve sees grown-up Sarah Jane for the first time he marvels, "It can't be. Why, you were all legs," to which she suggestively responds, "I still have them." Her excess is also marked by her wish to escape her blackness: ironically, she does so by "trying to vanish into the imitation world

of vaudeville,” (Halliday 148) a world where she places her body on display for the enjoyment of lustfully laughing male patrons. (Here, Sirk’s use of diegetic laughter produces the same incredibly disturbing effect as Hitchcock’s.) Sarah Jane’s vaudeville world is filled with the same kinds of sleazy jazz music and dancing that Marylee prefers, but Sirk intensifies the connection of music and excess in Imitation of Life by having Sarah Jane perform for a live audience (rather than a photograph of Rock Hudson). Her “Empty Arms” number is sexually suggestive (with its repeated pleas to fill up her empty spaces) and the entire theme of the song is a sassy pronouncement of bodily presence: “Now Venus, you know, was loaded with charms / And look at what happened to her. / Waitin’ around, she’s minus two arms / Could happen to me, no sir!” Marylee’s mambo has no accompanying dialogue (her wild gyrations are her sole means of expressing her intense passion), but Sarah Jane’s intentions are made quite clear in her lyrics: through music, Sirk gives the character the language to express her desire.

If melodramatic music is indeed intended to give “voice” to the characters’ ineffable emotions, then Hitchcock’s employment of music and sound is clearly subversive: in The Birds, aural and emotional excess degenerate into terrified silence rather than impassioned self-nominations accompanied by equally demonstrative backing tracks. The Birds is certainly dialogue-heavy at the outset: the characters constantly ask questions in order to gain some understanding of (and control over) Melanie and the bird attacks. The cries of the crows, gulls, and sparrows betray the tension underlying Mitch, Lydia, and Annie’s thinly veiled

attempts to keep their feelings in check. As the attacks increase in brutality, though, the characters' controlled voices are rendered bird-like: the children's screams blend with the bird cries, and Lydia and the other hysterical mother in the café begin to squawk and screech as fear overwhelms them. By the end of the film, though, all dialogue dissolves to speechlessness, and Hitchcock's notion of the "unknown" once again triumphs over the characters' search for epistemic and emotional control.

The final attack on the Brenner house provides the most anxious moments of the film. There is virtually no sound as Melanie and the Brenners wait for the birds to strike the house: the four minutes of silence are almost as intense as the attack itself. When the birds begin to hammer away at the windows and doors, Hitchcock still allows no trace of human emotion to be heard: excess is represented solely through the sound of the birds. After the final bedroom attack, in which the hushed flapping of wings is the main sound, Melanie is reduced to muteness, except for her apprehensive "No! No!" as Mitch and Lydia usher her past the horde of birds to the car. The subtext of this signature Hedren line is consistent with its meaning in Marnie: "I hereby deny and close myself off to excess: it is easier to be an unfeeling corpse than to experience this devastating pain."

Sirk's lush scores accompany his characters' journeys into delight and despair: music rises to match their magnificently unbound states of rapture and crashes with their utter despair. For the audience, too, Sirk's music is a reliable aural "road map," guiding us faithfully through the world of the film. We can be

certain to reach a clear emotional destination, no matter how ironic, by the final notes of the orchestra. Hitchcock, too, uses music and sound to accompany character and audience through his melodramatic worlds: however, he typically frustrates our desire to be taken by the hand down a straight path to emotional release and closure. His ironic use of music and sound leads us into an aural labyrinth filled with disembodied screams, slaps, birds shrieks, and finally, terrified silence.



## Conclusion

True to Norman Bates' psychotic wisdom, I perhaps haven't budged an inch, for now, in concluding, I find myself back where I began - on the steps of the Vale mansion with Stanley Cavell. Cavell believes that "Coming to know what films are – what film is – is inseparable from acquiring self-knowledge" (Rothman and Keane 10) and I personally came to know film, and film melodrama in particular, when I saw Now, Voyager. Through Charlotte, I discovered my "untold want": to see films as clearly and completely as possible, to gain some insight into my own spectatorial desires, and perhaps to achieve a butterfly-like metamorphosis into a film scholar.

My goal throughout this study has been to scratch and claw a bit at melodrama with the aid of some Hitchcockian birds. The genre is primarily concerned with reflecting the suppressed or the unspeakable on the surface, which perhaps explains the prevalence of mirrors in the mise-en-scène of film melodrama; throughout the process of scratching, I have certainly caught my own reflection numerous times. My first impulse is often to feel superior to Sirk's films - to reduce them to camp, to chuckle condescendingly at their indulgences, or to regard them as kitschy remnants of a bygone era. I have therefore attempted throughout to take a fresh look at Sirk, to rethink the modern tendency to be either overly nostalgic or cynical and dismissive of such an emotionally liberated vision. I additionally hope to have blown some Sirkian wind through the

critical opinion of the director as an über-serious artist (all irony and distance, no fun).

By digging into the deeper ironies of Sirk's melodramas while at the same time acknowledging his predilection for craziness, excess, and ecstasy, I have come to an understanding and appreciation of his insight into the human potential (and need) to freely unleash our emotions, no matter how hopeless the final outcome of the plot may seem. For character and audience alike, the heart always triumphs over the mind, thus confirming Fassbinder's opinion that "Douglas Sirk's films liberate your head" (23). Sirk once said, "I think often of the connection between 'play' and 'please'. They are the same thing: a play must please. And in a way, the American melodrama allowed me to do this" (Halliday 109). In Sirk's films I have found the very pleasure of which he speaks: he plays the Edward Randolph to my Bob Merrick, always giving the go-ahead to experience laughter, fireworks, dancing, and tears. Recent imitations of the Sirkian melodrama, such as Todd Haynes' Far From Heaven or François Ozon's Huit Femmes, clearly strive to achieve a similar delight, but ultimately beg examination as documents of the modern perception of the genre and its current relevance. Would audiences take as much pleasure in these films were they stripped of their 1950's costume and décor?

While Sirk defines what film melodrama is, Hitchcock, his mirror, shows us what it can *become*. In his version of melodrama through the looking glass, Hitchcock creates worlds where overwhelming emotion and desire are agonisingly contained. Donald Spoto notes that "Film would not only be a refuge

and expression of his deepest longings, it would be a forum through which he would probe into the reality behind the longing, the dread of isolation behind the dream" (Spoto 221); Hitchcock's melodramatic characters share the same overwhelming desire for love that is always tempered by the fear of never being known fully by anyone.

Sirk's films aim to please, and Hitchcock's films also provide spectatorial satisfaction, albeit of a distinctive variety: he inspires the sort of delight that comes from constantly being a bit out of balance. He essentially confounds our expectations of melodrama: if we anticipate being provided with full states of release leading to neat narrative closure, we are certain to be disappointed. Whereas Sirk is a generous benefactor of our melodramatic needs, Hitchcock makes the viewer work a little harder. We become like the second Mrs. de Winter (or perhaps even like Lila Crane), anxiously searching for those moments of potential release and never knowing quite what we will discover. Hitchcock's melodramas lead us to terrifyingly familiar places – haunted bedrooms, cold kitchens, family rooms drenched in blood – and as a result, we become all the more aware of the astonishing complexity of human desire and emotion with which melodrama is so concerned.

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