

The Woman Who Was Known Too Much:

Notorious

Throughout the 1940s (and, indeed, to some extent in the 1950s), Hitchcock would continue to rework the genre of the "female Gothic," which features women who fall in love with or marry men they subsequently begin to fear; the plots typically involve women's investigation of their victimization by the men they love.¹ For example, in *Suspicion* (1941), a film made shortly after *Rebecca*, the heroine Lina (Joan Fontaine) marries the charming but unreliable Johnny (Cary Grant), despite the prohibition of her father, General McLaidlaw (Sir Cedric Hardwicke). Johnny turns out to be a gambler, a liar, and a thief, and after the death of her father, Lina begins to suspect her husband of plotting her murder—a suspicion that the film, in a highly unsatisfactory ending, proves to be unfounded. *Spellbound* (1945) and *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) are also about women whose lives appear to be endangered by the men they love; in *Spellbound* the man is a female doctor's psychiatric patient who poses as the head of a mental institution and who believes himself to be a murderer; in *Shadow of a Doubt* he is a beloved uncle who murders wealthy widows. *Notorious* (1946) depicts a woman, Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman), menaced by both her lover, Devlin (Cary Grant), and her husband, Nazi Alex Sebastian (Claude Rains), whom she marries in order to spy upon him for an American intelligence agency.

In a way, *Notorious* reverses the situation developed in *Suspicion*: in *Suspicion* Lina is the daughter of an upstanding military officer, whereas Alicia is the daughter of a traitor (each father dies rather early in the film). In both films, the Cary Grant character is the antithesis of the father—in *Suspicion*, Johnny is lawless and irresponsible; in *Notorious*, Devlin is a representative of the law, forcing Alicia to atone for the sins of the guilty father. Further, Lina's "frigidity" and fear of her husband is linked to her father's repressive attitude (he claims she is not the type to marry); and her suspicions of Johnny seem to be linked to her violation of the *Non du Père*, which in this case coincides literally with the *Nom du Père* (McLaidlaw).² Alicia, on the other hand, traces her promiscuity to the dis-

covery of her father's traitorous behavior: "When I found out about him, I just went to pot: I didn't care what happened to me." Thus, in both films, the father's position with respect to the law decisively determines the daughter's (aberrant) sexuality. In the one instance, the father's excessive severity in laying down the law results in his daughter's lack of sexuality, and in the other instance, the father's lack of fidelity to the law causes his daughter's excessive sexuality. In *Notorious*, it is only through allowing this sexuality to be placed in the service of a harsh and unbending law (that is, through becoming a Mata Hari for callous American agents) and nearly dying the same death as her father—death by poison—that Alicia can expiate her own sins and those of the father. This certainly does not sound like a promising narrative from a feminist point of view. As we shall see, however, in the process of working out the dialectics of excess and lack in relation to female sexuality and male law, a film like *Notorious* begins to expose some of the problems of women's existence under patriarchy.

After a title reading, "Miami, Florida. Three-twenty p.m., April twenty-fourth, nineteen forty-six," *Notorious* begins with a scene in which John Huberman is being sentenced for treason against the United States. Later that night after a wild party at her home, Huberman's daughter Alicia goes for a drive in her car with Devlin, who has been brought by one of the party guests. A policeman on a motorcycle stops them because Alicia is driving with drunken recklessness, but when Devlin shows him an identification card, the policeman salutes him and rides off. Realizing that Devlin is a federal "cop," Alicia begins to fight with him to make him get out of the car, but he overpowers her and knocks her out. The next day when Alicia wakes with a hangover, Devlin tells her that the federal agents want her to infiltrate a Nazi ring working in Rio de Janeiro because she is acquainted with one of the leaders, Alexander Sebastian. At first she refuses, but after Devlin plays a recording of a conversation between her and her father in which she repudiates the latter's traitorous activities, she agrees.

On the plane over to Rio, Devlin informs Alicia that her father has committed suicide by taking a poison capsule in his prison cell. Alicia explains how her discovery of her father's traitorous activities led to her loss of self-respect and to her "notorious" behavior. When they get to Rio, Alicia and Devlin begin an affair, although he continues to make nasty remarks to her about her past behavior. In the middle of a lengthy shot of the two of them embracing in her apartment, Devlin receives orders on the phone to come to the American embassy, where he is informed of her assignment: to pretend to fall in love with Alex Sebastian, who had fallen in love with her some years ago. When Devlin returns to Alicia's apartment, his behavior is cold and forbidding, and Alicia is surprised and hurt that

Devlin did not turn down the assignment on the grounds that the "new Alicia Huberman was not the girl for such shenanigans."

The next day the two go out to meet Sebastian who is taking his daily ride, but when they slowly ride past on their horses, Alex fails to recognize her. Devlin gives Alicia's horse a kick, and Sebastian, who proves to be far more gallant and kind than Devlin, rides to the rescue. Alicia now renews her relationship with Alex, who invites her home to meet his mother at a small dinner party. During the dinner, Alicia witnesses a scene in which one of the men, Emile Hupka, points to a wine bottle and becomes extremely agitated. Over brandy the men have a conference and decide that Emile has become dangerously untrustworthy and must be eliminated.

In a scene at the races Alicia reports to Devlin the incident with the wine bottle, and she also tells him that he "can add Sebastian" to her "list of playmates." He is furious, and as the film progresses, he continues to treat her with icy sarcasm. One day, Alicia makes a surprise visit to the embassy to inform the agents that Alex has proposed marriage, a proposition she agrees to accept when Devlin remarks that he thinks it is "a useful idea." After the honeymoon, Devlin tells Alicia to persuade her husband to throw a party so that Devlin can come and investigate the wine cellar. The night of the party Alicia manages to get the key to the wine cellar from Alex's key chain, and, despite the jealous eye her husband keeps on her and Devlin, passes it on to Devlin, who sneaks off with her to the wine cellar. While Devlin is looking over the stock, a bottle falls off the shelf and breaks, spilling some kind of "vintage sand." He tries to hide the evidence of the breakage, and as the two prepare to leave the cellar, Alex, coming down the stairs to get more champagne, discovers their presence. Devlin grabs Alicia and kisses her, so that Alex will think they are in the cellar for a love tryst rather than for the purpose of espionage. Soon after, Alex and his servant return for the champagne, but Alex realizes his key is missing. Later that night, after the key has been put back on his chain while he pretends to sleep, he explores the wine cellar and finds that the "sand" (which turns out to be uranium ore) has been discovered.

Defeated, Alex goes to his mother, whom he had defied in marrying Alicia, to plead for her help. She devises a plan to poison Alicia slowly, a scheme which nearly succeeds, partly because Alicia, rather than admitting that she is sick, defiantly pretends to have a hangover during her usual meeting with Devlin. Eventually Alicia becomes aware of the plot against her, but it has proceeded so far that she is helpless to run away, and is taken to her bed by Alex and his mother. Meanwhile Devlin suspects that something is amiss and pays a visit to the Sebastian household. At long last avowing his love for Alicia, he helps her from her room, and they descend the stairs, accompanied by Alex and his mother who are powerless to stop them because to do so would alert the other Nazis present in the

house to the fact that Alex is married to an American agent. Claiming that they are taking Alicia to the hospital, Alex walks out of the house with Devlin and Alicia, but is locked out of the car by Devlin, who thereby leaves Alex to face certain death at the hands of his compatriots.³

As its title suggests, an issue of knowledge lies at the heart of the film. But although the term "notorious" alludes primarily to the idea of woman as sexually known and therefore held in contempt, the film is also concerned with other problems of knowledge and sexual difference. First, in the course of the film, as is the case in many Hollywood narratives, the woman becomes an object of man's sexual investigations. Secondly, however, the woman is *also* cast in the active role of knowledge-seeker: in her capacity as spy she becomes an investigator, attempting to wrest the (literal) keys to the mystery from her jealous mother-in-law and her husband. Hence, one of the main interests of the film lies in the way it combines elements of film noir, an essentially male genre, in which man is the active investigator of woman, and of the female Gothic, in which woman is assigned an investigative role.

Alicia is positioned at the outset of the film as object of man's curiosity and voyeurism. After the title announcing the time, date, and place of the narrative, the film begins with a closeup shot of a reporter's camera and then tracks along a row of reporters waiting outside a courthouse. A point of view shot of a man spying on the courtroom proceedings follows this initial shot, and then the man exclaims, "Here she comes." Alicia emerges with the crowd while flashbulbs go off in her face, and the male reporters crowd in on her with their probing questions. The shot ends with one detective telling another to make sure that she doesn't leave town, and when the second one goes off, the first is shown in closeup looking after. Following a couple of shots of Alicia's house taken from across the street, the film dissolves to the interior, where a party is taking place. In an extraordinary long take, we see Alicia standing in bright light drinking and bantering with the other guests, while in the shadowy foreground is a silhouette of the back of the head of a clearly-identifiable Cary Grant; Alicia addresses him a few times ("I like you . . . you're my kind of guy"), but he remains perfectly still and unresponsive—exhibiting the wooden behavior that will characterize him physically and emotionally throughout the film until its climax.

After setting the woman up as an object of male desire and curiosity, the film proceeds to submit her to a process of purification whereby she is purged of her excess sexuality in order to be rendered fit for her place in the patriarchal order. She is, as the critics say, "redeemed by love." Hitchcock accomplishes this purification largely through visual means: in the party sequence, Alicia, photographed in a long shot and standing in a

bright, harsh light, is wearing a bold striped blouse with a bared midriff (which, in a highly symbolic and repressive gesture, Devlin will cover when they go out to the car), and she exudes a kind of animal sexuality that is in keeping with her attire (later, Devlin will make a cynical remark about a woman's inability to "change her spots"—thereby equating female sexuality with animality). By the end of the film, however, when Alicia is on the verge of dying, she is etherealized and spiritualized until she becomes practically bodiless. Whereas in an earlier scene in bed, Alicia's voluptuous body had been emphasized when she woke up hungover, still wearing the suggestive blouse, and turned slowly over onto her back, in this later scene Hitchcock shoots entirely in closeup and utilizes low-key backlighting for a kind of halo effect. In the climatic staircase sequence Hitchcock continues to shoot predominantly in closeup, and even when he cuts to a medium or a long shot, Alicia's body, draped around Devlin, is entirely obscured by a loose, dark coat draped around it.

Not only does the film disembody the sexual woman, it also continually impairs her vision (something that Hitchcock films do to women with alarming frequency), thus ensuring that man remains in sole control of the gaze—and hence of the knowledge and power with which vision is always associated in the cinema. The threat inherent in Alicia's role as a Mata Hari may account for the severity of the punishment she undergoes and for the need to disable her vision. As the work of feminist film criticism has shown, sexuality and knowledge are usually mutually exclusive qualities in movie heroines, and in 1940s films they are kept separated by genre: in noir films woman is typically eroticized and made the object of the male gaze and of narrative investigation, whereas in the Gothic film, she becomes the subject of the investigative gaze, but is characteristically de-eroticized in the process: masochistic fantasy comes to substitute for sexual fantasy.⁴ One might speculate, then, that the situation in which woman becomes a Mata Hari, "making love for the papers," as Alicia comments, is extremely threatening to men because it involves women *exploiting* their sexuality to gain knowledge and power. Thus, despite the fact that Alicia's point of view is stressed once she gets inside the Sebastian house and begins searching for clues, the film takes care to maim her vision on several occasions. Early in the film, for example, when she is driving the car recklessly and drunkenly, a shot of the road taken from her point of view is obscured by her hair hanging down over her eyes. "This fog gets to me," she complains. The next morning she wakes up with a hangover, and another point of view shot reveals Devlin looming in the doorway in a canted frame; as he walks toward her, the camera turns until he is shown standing upside down. Later, at the moment she realizes she is being poisoned, her vision becomes totally blurred as she walks toward the silhouetted figures of Mother and Alex, who merge into a single shadow. And finally, in the

climactic scene when Devlin takes her down the stairs, she keeps her gaze averted from the action, and it is Devlin's watchful point of view that the camera stresses.

In a typical noir move, then, the film displaces the center of interest from Alicia as an object of curiosity in relation to her father's espionage activities to Alicia as an object of male sexual desire who must be tortured for and purified of her sexual past—and nearly blinded and killed in the process. In effecting this displacement, the film collapses two very different registers—the realm of politics (espionage activities, postwar fascism, the beginnings of cold-war paranoia) and the realm of private life (sexuality and romance)—into one. The fact that the political elements in the film get reduced to the status of a MacGuffin has generally been celebrated by critics. For example, Donald Spoto writes, "Although *Notorious* seems to be a spy melodrama, in fact it is not. The espionage activities are really Hitchcock's MacGuffin, his ubiquitous pretext for more serious, abstract issues. Here, the serious issue is one of common humanity—the possibility of love and trust redeeming two lives from fear, guilt and meaninglessness."⁵

Certainly Spoto's analysis is accurate at the level of description. For example, during the suspenseful scene at Sebastian's party, a drama of sexual jealousy coincides with the "spy melodrama": various points of view shots show Sebastian jealously watching Devlin and Alicia to determine the nature of his wife's feelings for this man (Alicia has persuaded Sebastian to give the party so that Devlin may be cured of his supposed one-sided passion for Alicia by seeing how happy she is with her husband); meanwhile, Devlin watches Sebastian watching them and waits for the moment he might slip off unseen to the wine cellar. At the same time, however, the viewer is aware that Devlin is also jealous of Sebastian and conscious of Sebastian's glances at the two of them as signs of his possessive attitude toward his wife. Thus the entire drama of seeing and being seen is here and elsewhere motivated by the men's desire to know the real feelings of the woman and the nature of her relation to the other man in the triangle.

But while we might accept Spoto's description of how the "political" becomes the "personal" in this film, feminists certainly have less reason to celebrate the merger of these two realms, given the way in which the displacement makes the woman (rather than the uranium) into the object of man's epistemological quest. Instead, feminists might want to ask how it is that a collapse of these separate registers is so frequently and so easily accomplished in the Hitchcock text (and in noir films in general). We might speculate that there is something in the nature of male modes of knowing in patriarchy that allows for the kinds of slippages I have been discussing. Jean-Paul Sartre's description of the search for knowledge—

by which he means even scientific knowledge—as bound up with male vision and masculine sexual desire certainly suggests that this is the case. Sartre writes:

[T]he idea of discovery, of revelation, includes an idea of appropriate enjoyment. What is seen is possessed; to see is to *deflower*. If we examine the comparisons ordinarily used to express the relation between the knower and the known, we see that many of them are represented as being a kind of *violation by sight*. The unknown object is given as immaculate, as virgin, comparable to a *whiteness*. It has not yet "delivered up" its secret; man has not yet "snatched" its secret away from it.⁶

We can readily understand from this passage why a "notorious" woman is a disturbance to the order of things from a male perspective, and why it is important for a film like *Notorious* to render the woman virginal even if it nearly kills her. Further, in Sartre's grotesque insistence on the extreme of masculine sexuality—rape and violation—as the model and motor force of all enterprises of discovery, the language clearly excludes women from such enterprises, and implies that they are even denied the pleasures of cinema itself; for to see is to deflower. But whether Sartre is describing the *only* way of knowing or only one, male, way of knowing remains to be investigated. For now suffice it to point out that Sartre's discussion, which stresses the appropriate, phallic nature of *every* kind of knowledge, indicates how political intrigue and sexual desire can easily merge into a single hermeneutic.

Contemporary theory is largely in agreement with Sartre's view of discovery and revelation as masculine activities, considering narrative itself to be based on male sexuality and tracing its pleasures to the Oedipus complex. Hence Roland Barthes, speaking of the pleasures of the text, writes: "the entire excitation takes refuge in the *hope* of seeing the sexual organ (schoolboy's dream) or of knowing the end of the story (novelistic intellectual pleasure since it is mass-consumed), this is a far more intellectual pleasure than the other: an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end)."⁷ Thus narrative for Barthes is simply a reenactment of the child's investigations into his mother's sexuality and hence into his own origins: "seeing" and "knowing," regardless of *what* is seen or known, are equated with male sexual desire.

Barthes is clearly referring as much to Sophocles's drama of Oedipus Rex as he is to the Freudian myth. And what is interesting about the Sophocles work, from the point of view of the present discussion, is the way in which the great political enigma which that text poses—what is the origin of the plague?—finds its answer in the personal history of Oedipus Rex. The cause of the plague lies in Oedipus's crimes against the family:

killing his father and committing incest with his mother. If it is not quite correct to see the plague as a MacGuffin in the Sophoclean text, it is, I think, at least fair to say that in this murder mystery (the investigation into the death of Laius), the personal and political realms are coextensive and congruent—Oedipus's drive to know the secret that plagues the state leads to the discovery of his private sexual and familial history. Similarly, though the process is reversed, this congruency may be seen in the Freudian use of the myth: the boy's drive to know the secret of his origin, his investigations into sexuality, ultimately result in his assuming a place in the social and Symbolic order—the world of culture and the fathers.

In *Notorious*, the male oedipal logic on which narrative is supposedly based may also be traced in the stories of Alex and Devlin—both variants of *the story*, which, as we saw in the last chapter, Raymond Bellour claims is continually told in Hollywood film: the hero must “accept the symbolization of the death of the father, the displacement from the attachment to the mother to the attachment to another woman.” Alex's story, of course, represents the failure of Oedipus since he is unsuccessful at effecting the displacement described by Bellour—hence, the little drama around keys in the film: Alex (whose very name, “a-lex,” suggests his place outside the law) asserts himself in order to obtain the keys to the house from his mother, only to deliver them over to a woman who proceeds to betray him, personally and politically, thus forcing him into a renewed dependency on Mother. For Devlin, however, the outcome is very different. Bellour notes that the woman, who represents “lawless sexuality” in the classic film, serves as “the very image of castration” (like the mother in the oedipal scenario) and so she must give way to the heroine “who reverses the image, through whom the masculine subject will find . . . the positivity of a regulated sexuality, . . . the woman who permits the fixation of his desire . . . through the conjunction of his entry into the social order and the internalized, finally bearable image of his own castration.”⁸ We have seen that Alicia represents both types of woman successively in the film, that she herself must reverse the initial image of her “lawless sexuality” (a lawlessness or “a-licit-ness” suggested by *her* name) in order for the couple to be formed, and for the social order to be ratified and fascism to be vanquished. Fascism here, in another collapse of the personal and the political, is represented by the mother who abuses maternal power (Mrs. Sebastian). Alicia is made to atone for *her* as well as for the father, with the result that Devlin finds in “the second Mrs. Sebastian” the good, domesticated, and eventually powerless German woman.

Drawing on the work of Jurij Lotman, Teresa de Lauretis writes of the way narrative works to produce Oedipus, and she observes, “plot (narrative) mediates, integrates, and ultimately reconciles the mythical and the historical, norm and excess, the spatial and temporal orders, the in-

dividual and the collectivity.”⁹ However, de Lauretis argues, no such integration is possible for women, whose lives in patriarchy are riven by contradiction. We might say, following on de Lauretis's insight, that women's experience in patriarchy is expressed not in the oedipal tragedy, nor in any myth which functions to “reconcile the individual and the collectivity,” but rather in a more Hegelian conception of tragedy—of narrative in general—which stresses conflict and the *irreconcilability* of various imperatives facing the individual. It is interesting that Hegel's model for tragedy was *Antigone*, a play about *another* woman whose sufferings are required as atonement for the crimes of her father—in this case, the sins of Oedipus himself. Antigone, who insists on burying her brother against the decree of Creon, defies the laws of the state in the name of a higher law, which demands respect for the dead, and in the name of the “sacredness of kinship.” Most of all, Antigone offends because she leaves the private sphere, to which as a woman (and therefore a slave) she is confined, in order to take up a public role. Similarly, in *Notorious* the main dilemma facing Alicia is that she can perform her patriotic, public duty only by violating the private sexual code. Defending her in her absence after one of the agents snidely alludes to her sullied reputation (the only times he *does* come to her rescue until the climactic rescue scene itself), Devlin perfectly articulates the double bind in which Alicia is placed: “Miss Huberman is first, last, and always not a lady. She may be risking her life, but when it comes to being a *lady*, she doesn't hold a candle to your wife, sir, sitting in Washington and playing cards with three other ladies of great honor and virtue.” Here we find a true instance of the “love vs. duty” theme which Hitchcock had elaborated in his discussion of *Blackmail* and which we saw could be applied with much more justice to the situation of women than to men.

A “conflictual” narrative of the sort I have been describing, functions not to integrate the individual into the social order, but to express women's experience of lived contradiction in patriarchy and thus is likely to elicit the kind of “dialectical” response that several feminist film theorists have insisted is characteristic of the female spectator at the cinema. It is in terms of this alternative notion of narrative that we may understand the impossible positions of the heroines in many, if not most, Hitchcock films, of which *Notorious* seems to me in this respect exemplary—perhaps because it is a film made shortly after the war ended. In his in-depth study of 1940s films, Dana Polan has shown how wartime narratives were forced to confront a basic contradiction between Hollywood ideology, which tended to submerge the political into the personal, and the ideology of the war years, which stressed the necessity of the individual's subordinating himself and his personal desires to the larger war effort.¹⁰ Even women were expected to contribute to this effort—an expectation that, in its coun-

termanding of traditional notions about woman's place, would only exacerbate the pull of contradiction in these films.

To answer the question posed earlier, then, about women's modes of knowing in patriarchy, we can say that this knowledge has to do with an awareness of contradiction—and that Hitchcock's films, in their preoccupation and identification with women as victims, reinforce that knowledge in the female spectator. Throughout the film, Alicia is shown to be the locus of the crisscrossing of various desires and duties that seem to conspire in her downfall (an apt image is that of the tiled floor over which Alicia moves like a pawn in the games of men).¹¹ Like *Blackmail*, which it resembles in some crucial respects, the film offers several striking shots that emphasize the woman's status as victim: the shot in which Devlin passes his identification card across her body to hand to the police officer on the motorcycle; the one in which a closeup shows his foot kicking her horse so that Sebastian will ride to her rescue; the one in which Alicia lies frozen in terror on her bed framed by the profiles of Alex and his mother looking at one another; and, finally, the ones at the end in which Alicia is half-carried down the stairs between Devlin and the Sebastians, the two forces—of law and order, on the one hand, and of fascism, on the other—having unwittingly colluded in her torture and near death.

As he had done in *Blackmail*, Hitchcock privileges the woman's consciousness—even as he makes her into an object of male investigation—so that *all* spectators are encouraged to identify with her in her plight. It is important not to allow this crucial point to be obscured by the fact that the film depicts male oedipal dramas and rivalries. For example, a recent "Bellourian" analysis of the film insists, quite wrongly I think, that our identification must be with Devlin:

The second term of the romantic triangle to be introduced is Dev . . . with whom a strong identification is immediately mobilized. If, so far, Alicia is defined as the object of the gaze, it is Dev who is encoded as the source of the look. In our first view of him, he is seated in the left foreground with his back turned to the camera, silent and in silhouette, while all others in the frame are bright and animated. This inert character is the spectator . . .¹²

Now, one might very well question whether the film's spectator is more likely to establish a "strong identification" with a silent, "inert" character who shows us only the back of his head or with characters who are humanized by being presented as "bright and animated."¹³ If it is indeed correct to see an analogy between Devlin and the film's spectator—and I

believe it is—surely this analogy is meant to be perceived *critically* by the viewer: spectatorship is here shown to be a somewhat shady activity—and more than a little menacing. From this shot onwards, *Notorious* encourages us to condemn Devlin in his role as withdrawn, judgmental spectator, and it draws us into an intimate identification with the vulnerable and increasingly helpless heroine: for example, insofar as the film uses point of view shots to convey Alicia's impaired vision, it forces us all to share in her disablement. Here, it would seem, is a classic example of a situation in which both male and female spectators occupy a primarily masochistic position.

As I have already had occasion to note, film theory has most frequently assigned the masochistic position to the female spectator. In an article on "the woman's film" of the 1940s, Mary Ann Doane has argued that this type of film mimes "a position which can only be described as masochistic, as the perpetual staging of suffering"; female fantasy is presented as preoccupied with notions of "persecution, illness and death."¹⁴ In the chapter on *Blackmail*, I suggested that Doane neglects the important possibility that women's response to the depiction of feminine victimization and suffering is likely to be one of anger. Now, in light of *Notorious*, I would like to go even further and argue that female suffering may *itself* be an expression of anger. Alicia's self-destructive behavior is from the beginning shown to be simultaneously aggressive and hostile: her excessive drinking and her promiscuous behavior are an angry response to her father's criminality, and when she is driven by Devlin's sadistic treatment of her to renew her notorious ways (e.g., to drink too much), contempt and defiance are strongly marked in her voice and manner. "What a rat you are, Dev," she says in reply to one of his barbed remarks and orders the second drink she has just refused.

In her article, "Theorising the Female Spectator: Film and the Masquerade," analyzed in the chapter on *Blackmail*, Doane proposes that the only way for the female spectator to gain the appropriate distance from patriarchal cinema and the images of victimized, suffering womanhood is to adopt an ironic distance from them. This strategy, in Doane's view, would amount to performing a feminine masquerade—exaggerating the traits of femininity so as to call their "naturalness" into question. Doane offers the notion of masquerade as an alternative to the masochistic "overidentification" to which she considers the female spectator especially prone. I believe, however, that film theorists like Doane have erred in considering the psychic phenomenon of masochism to be a simple entity (consisting of pure pleasure in pain), rather than a complex process that may even be composed of ideas and emotions unacceptable in women in patriarchal society.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that in his impressive study,

Masochism in Modern Man, Theodor Reik considers masquerade to be the essence of female masochism. He writes: "Female masochists exaggerate their femininity. They display an ultrafemininity."¹⁵ Analyzing the masochistic fantasies of his female patients, Reik observes that the "female situation is not only shown or acted out in the phantasy, the degrading and humiliating element not only demonstrated but these are the features which are even exaggerated." Reik concludes that the fantasy does not point to an "acceptance of femininity"; it is meant to expose the position of women in patriarchal society in such a way as to express contempt for it. The fantasy "mock[s] at the man's conception of the female role" (p. 237).

We must therefore not be misled by the submissiveness seemingly implied in Alicia's "ultrafeminine" traits: her "ecstatic weakness" (in Sponto's words); her soft, feminine gestures; and especially the "clinging kisses" so strongly emphasized in the early sequence shot when she and Dev kiss and talk about dinner in her apartment—the same "clinging kisses" referred to in anguish by Sebastian after he becomes aware of her betrayal.¹⁶ As Reik observes of those theorists who emphasize "the dependence of masochistic characters," they overlook "the fact that one can draw somebody down by clinging to him" (p. 159). It is not only that the "clinging kisses" bring down Sebastian and the house of Nazis; Alicia's suffering also, eventually, causes Devlin to come round and admit his own pain and suffering. One might speculate that the appeal of *Notorious* as a woman's film is directly related to the way in which Alicia's tribulations force Devlin to acknowledge his vulnerability and his error: in this way, Alicia's "persecution, illness, and [near] death" may be said to provide an outlet for the female spectator's anger.

If Alicia appears in the film to be the perfect masochist, Devlin appears to be the quintessential sadist—stern, remote, and punishing, always in command of himself and the woman who nearly dies for love of him (even in their poses, gestures, and clothing, the sharp contrasts between the two suggest the gendered binary oppositions of much feminist film theory). In the sequence following her party when the two are in her car, Devlin's control is stressed in a variety of ways, although Alicia is the one in the driver's seat. Several times the camera shows a closeup of his hand ready to take hold of the wheel should a steady grasp be required. Even his expression conveys his sang-froid, so much so that Alicia deliberately begins to speed in order "to wipe that grin" off his face and break down his self-possession. Finally, in a very shocking incident, he knocks her out with a sharp punch to the jaw when she begins to fight him after discovering he is a "cop." Devlin's power and control continue to be stressed in the next scene when he stands menacingly in the doorway and forces her to drink the cure for her hangover that is in a glass looming in the foreground of the image—a shot which rhymes with those of the poison coffee cups

later. In making this connection the film clearly links Devlin to the Nazis—to the father who killed himself with poison as well as to the Sebastians who try to murder Alicia. To be sure, Devlin believes he is administering a cure, but as Alicia's face suggests when she drinks down the liquid, and as the entire narrative shows, his is a cure that nearly kills.

As the film progresses, Devlin steadfastly maintains his air of command and continually allows Alicia to be placed in compromising or dangerous circumstances; often, of course, he actually places her in these circumstances—for example, when he kicks her horse and then watches intently and impassively while Sebastian rides to the rescue. It is noteworthy that while, in ways we have already discussed, Devlin's trajectory involves an oedipal progression, in another way, we might say that he is fixed at a preoedipal moment—that moment analyzed by Freud in the child's fort/da game. According to Freud, the child gains symbolic mastery over the mother and her movements with a little object on a string that he makes disappear and reappear. For Freud, the game is ultimately a "sadistic" one in that its object is to gain power over another. Recently, theorists have challenged Freud's interpretation, however, and have suggested that the game really points to a fundamentally masochistic inclination on the part of the child. Thus, as I pointed out in the introduction, Kaja Silverman insists on the importance of the fact that the child much more frequently sends the object away than brings it back and seems to take more satisfaction in its disappearance than its reappearance.

Leo Bersani also notes the implications of the fort/da game for a theory of masochism, writing in terms which strikingly recapitulate Devlin's situation with respect to Alicia:

The child enjoys the fantasy of the mother suffering the pain of separation which she originally inflicted on him. And to say this is to be reminded that revenge here must include the avenger's own suffering; by making his mother disappear, the child has just as effectively deprived himself of her presence as he has deprived her of his. But the child's suffering is now inseparable from two sources of pleasure: his representation of his mother's suffering, and what I take to be the narcissistic gratification of exercising so much power. In reality, there is no sequence here; rather, there is a single, satisfying representation of a separation painful to both the mother and the child. In other words, mastery is simultaneous with self-punishment; a fantasy of omnipotence and autonomy (the child both controls the mother's movements and doesn't need her) is inseparable from a repetition of pain.¹⁷

That both hero and male spectator derive a great deal of "narcissistic gratification" from exercising—directly or vicariously—power over the female subject is one of the basic assumptions of feminist film theory. That

the exercise of this power and the witnessing of a "satisfying representation" of the woman's suffering may be *painful* to the male subject has not been sufficiently considered. And yet, in *Notorious* Devlin's position as passive spectator is clearly one which causes him a great deal of anguish—an anguish which he nevertheless seems determined to intensify on a number of occasions. It is almost as if he sends Alicia into the arms of Sebastian for the *purpose* of watching her, as if he stages her suffering so that he can increase his own distress. At the end of the film, Devlin makes explicit the idea that "mastery is simultaneous with self-punishment" when he apologizes for his cruelty to her and explains, "I couldn't see straight; I was a fat-headed guy filled with pain."

But if it is important for feminist film theory to recognize the masochistic urge at the heart of man's relation to his mother and to his subsequent love objects (and it is part of my project in this book to argue that it is), we must not suppose that there is the equality in suffering that Bersani's text seems to imply ("a separation painful to both the mother and the child"): if Devlin says he couldn't see straight because he was in such pain, it is Alicia's vision that the film consistently *shows* to be distorted, partly as a result of her self-destructive masochistic activities (her drinking) and partly as a result of other people's destructive treatment of her. If Devlin is "filled with pain," she is filled with pain *and* poison.

For Oedipus *does* finally intervene. The fact is, Devlin has the full power of the law behind him, as Alicia has not. The inequality of power relations means that, as I argued in the introduction, the man—hero or spectator—gets to displace his masochistic urges onto a female victim and can therefore maintain a mastery which enables him to deny his suffering while at the same time safely indulging it. For this reason, it is obviously absurd to replace the feminist emphasis on male sadism in film narrative with a "masochistic aesthetic." If *Notorious* suggests the importance of recognizing male masochism, it equally demonstrates the ease with which this masochism may be repudiated, and, most importantly, it reveals the potentially dire consequences for women of this repudiation. It is for *this* reason that a notion of male masochism must be factored into feminist theories of narrative and spectatorship and *not* in order to depoliticize the issues by pronouncing suffering to be part of the human condition—something we all do and enjoy equally.

Similarly, feminist theory must challenge the idea that femininity is a simple matter of (simple) masochism, of pleasure in one's objectification. Again, *Notorious* suggests the extent to which female masochism embodies and expresses hostile and subversive impulses. Of course, it is crucial to recognize that these impulses are aimed at the self as well as at the oppressor; but it is equally important to understand that they exist at all and

are not simply the prerogative of the feminist critic who consciously and ironically distances herself from the images on the patriarchal screen.

My analysis of *Notorious* may stand, then, as a kind of prolegomenon to a *politicized* deconstruction of the binary oppositions informing feminist film theory: those oppositions clustered around the constellations male/subject/knower/sadist, woman/object/known/masochist. On the one hand, women at the movies are already engaged in an active, knowing and rebellious activity of spectatorship; and, on the other hand, as Hitchcock never ceases to fear, men are constantly in danger of having their power undermined—of being deprived of the keys to their secrets by women who, though notorious, can never be completely subdued or fully known.