

Another Woman ★★½

Year of Release: 1988

Review by Randy Parker

Country: USA

Verdict: Skip It

Two unfortunate trends have reared their ugly heads in Woody Allen's recent movies: the first is a shift away from comedy, Allen's forte, and toward drama, and the second is Allen's reluctance to appear on-screen. *Another Woman* suffers from both of these problems.

Told through flashbacks, dreams, and first person narration, *Another Woman* is a somber and humorless psychological character study of a 50-year-old woman. Gena Rowlands plays the cerebral and emotionally reserved philosophy professor undergoing a mid-life crisis. In the film, she has rented an apartment so she can work undisturbed on a new book. The apartment turns out to be adjacent to a psychiatrist's office, and through a vent she can overhear his therapy sessions. As Rowlands tries to write her book, she becomes infatuated with eavesdropping on one of her neighbor's depressed patients, played by Mia Farrow. Listening to Farrow's emotional problems leads Rowlands to question her own life: her marriages, her childhood, her cold personality, and so forth. In short, she has a major mid-life crisis.

Rowlands gives a solid performance and is convincing as a woman incapable of expressing either warmth or passion, but, unfortunately, her character is not very likable. Rowlands appears in nearly every frame of *Another Woman*, and in not one of these frames do you ever really care about her. If

Allen wants us to invest our emotions in this character, he needs to expose the charismatic side of her personality in addition to the repressed side.

The movie has a fine (and sizable) supporting cast—including Martha Plimpton, David Ogden Stiers, and the late John Houseman in his final role. Betty Buckley instills a refreshing breath of life into the film during her one minute cameo appearance. However, Gene Hackman gives the most engaging performance in the film (as Rowlands' unsuccessful suitor), but his screen time is limited to only two scenes. Allen keeps the movie focused exclusively on Rowlands and does not develop any of the other characters; their sole purpose is to motivate Rowlands' introspective reevaluation of her life.

Although *Another Woman* is well-crafted and never boring, I had to ask myself during the film: "Is this all there is?" Allen's psychological character study of this confused woman does not seem especially enlightening or insightful. Perhaps you have to be a 50-year-old in a mid-life crisis to fully appreciate *Another Woman*. Then again, you didn't have to wake up 200 years into the future to appreciate *Sleeper*. Although *Another Woman* may be one of Allen's more successful attempts at pure drama, I can recommend it only to die hard fans who take pride in having seen every film he has ever made.