

Movie far from heaven



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FILM REVIEW: Far From Heaven: Todd Hynes. Far From Heaven is a period film by Todd Hynes, taking the viewer into the tabulations in the family as well as the lives of the people in the bourgeois society of the fifties. The normalcy of life of the days of the American dream seems to be very fragile as the society hides a lot of undercurrents with in. Like any other period film this film also forces the viewer to reflect on present social realities. One sees that though things have changed statistically, the under currents remain the same. The film is considered to be a tribute to the great master of Hollywood melodrama, Douglas Sirk. The period films not only remind one of a period past , of which one may have heard about or read about, but also makes one look at one's own times critically. Toad Hynes tries to portray the American life of the fifties. He does it by trying to replicate the American melodramatic movies of the fiftys. Thus his Far From Heaven is a period film in more than one sense. The theme of the film is the inner storms or under currents with in the seemingly happy families who represented the facade of normalcy in the social life during the days of the American dream. The happiness and normalcy that others see externally seem to be very fragile and superfluous and can disappear any time. The heaven is really far away. Cathy Whitaker (Julianne Moore) is living a seemingly perfect life . Her husband Frank (Dennis Quaid), who is TV salesman is well off by the standards of American middle class of the time. They have two children, suiting so well with the American dream with a comfortable home. Their son (Ryan Ward) is always eager to get the pop's attention. Their daughter (Lindsay Andretta) is a very obedient girl. They have a loyal maid, Sybil (Viola Davis). What the family lack as per the American dream norm is a dog. Frank enjoys his respectable job with a major corporation, socializing with high profile executives. Kathy is

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a caricature of domestic fulfillment. She drives her daughter back home from the ballet class and plans her annual cocktail party with her best friend, Eleanor Fine (Patricia Clarkson). But every thing turns upside down when Kathy finds out that her husband is a homosexual. He confesses about his homosexual feelings and promises to seek the aid of a psychiatrist to get out of it. But Kathy gets a shock of her life and gets distanced from his husband. At the same time she gets closer to a kind gardener, Raymond (Dennis Haysbart). The drama of the film is in the fact that Frank's homosexuality remains a secret while Kathy's affair with the black man that too a gardener becomes scandalous. The society comes down hard on her. The patriarchal society reacts against the woman, while the male goes scot-free with all his sexual aberrations. The passion and love she feels for the black gardener and the betrayal of her husband are of no concern for the society. Her relationship with him is more a sin because he is a black man. The racist attitudes of the society come out more open when Kathy's daughter is attacked by a group of white school boys. All characters in the film end up as lonely unhappy humans in spite of the external facade of normalcy and fulfillment. The actors who play the main roles Julianne Moore, Dennis Quaid, and Dennis Haysbart give excellent performances. The work of the cinematographer Edward Lachman is remarkable. He uses the same type of lenses as were used by the film makers of the fifties and the same lighting technique to recreate the visual mood and feel of the fifties. The color of the fall, the bright cloths that the characters wear, the baroque interiors of their houses all bring out a visual taste of the fifties so magnificently. Haynes film is a tribute to the great Hollywood film maker Douglas Sirk. . A German, he is one among the many German film directors who migrated to Holly wood

when Hitler came into power in Germany and mastered the craft of melodrama in Hollywood cinema in the fifties. Robert Philip Kolker calls him “an intelligent European film maker in an unintelligent American business, contracted to make unintelligent films” (Kolker, 1983, p240). Haynes pays a tribute to this intelligent master of melodrama through *Far From Heaven*, dealing with the hypocrisy of the bourgeois society, with all its splendor and pretensions . The film forces one to look into the contemporary social realities . Blacks are emancipated more than in the fifties, but the racial undertones in the society still stay. Women are empowered more. But the patriarchal attitudes remain. The period films turn one as in a mirror to the self and to the present day realities and *Far From Heaven* does the same.

----- Sources referred: Kolker Phillip Robert, *The Altering Eye*, Contemporary International Cinema, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983