

The Main Feature



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US	2015
118 minutes	cert 15
Director	Todd Haynes
Screenplay	Phyllis Nagy
Music	Carter Burwell
Cinematography	Edward Lachman

Cast

Cate Blanchett as Carol Aird
Rooney Mara as Therese Belivet
Sarah Paulson as Abby Gerhard
Jake Lacy as Richard Simco
Kyle Chandler as Harge Aird
John Magaro as Dannie McElroy
Cory Michael Smith as Tommy Tucker
Carrie Brownstein as Genevieve Cantrell
Kevin Crowley as Fred Haymes
Nik Pajic as Phill McElroy

Carol is based on Patricia Highsmith's 1952 semi-autobiographical romance novel *The Price of Salt*. The novel was originally published under the pseudonym "Claire Morgan" after Highsmith's publisher Harper & Brothers rejected it. Highsmith agreed to republish the novel in 1990 under her own name, retitling it *Carol*. The story was inspired by a brief encounter Highsmith had with a blonde woman in a fur coat, Kathleen Senn, while working at Bloomingdale's in New York City in 1948.

"What still strikes me now [about the novel], is how radical it was in terms of its overall conception — two central figures not giving a rat's ass about sexual identity. No one frets about being gay; others fret on their behalf ... I also found Highsmith's notions of what makes a good mother to be quite radical — the choices that people have to make in order to make the lives of their children better seemed really fresh, and radical. And still do, to this day, actually." Phyllis Nagy

Todd Haynes first got wind of the fact that someone was hoping to make the film from his friend and long-term collaborator, the "insatiably brilliant" Oscar-winning costume designer, Sandy Powell. It was 2012, and the two of them were appearing at a 10th anniversary screening of *Far From Heaven* at a New York museum. "She told me she'd been doing all these guy movies," he recalls. "Then she said: 'But there is a frock film coming up: it's an adaptation of *The Price of Salt* [the original title of Highsmith's novel] and Cate [Blanchett] is attached.' It sounded right up my alley."

Director Todd Haynes said: "The first film that I thought of when I read [the script] was *Brief Encounter*. And it made a real direct impact on some changes in the structure of the story. So we repeat that same structure in *Brief Encounter* that begins and ends with the same scene. The difference is that in *Brief Encounter* you realize that this is Celia Johnson's story



Although it's tempting to use his 2002 film *Far from Heaven* as a point of reference for *Carol*, this is a very different film. While the earlier picture was intended as an overt tribute to the films of Douglas Sirk, *Carol* feels like a love story rooted in a recognisably real depiction of 1950s America, shot in muted tones by the great Ed Lachman (who shot Haynes' *Far from Heaven*, *I'm Not There* and mini-series *Mildred Pierce*) and with performances that don't feel stylised.

Instead of looking to greats like Sirk for inspiration this time, the 54-year-old filmmaker talks enthusiastically about a little-known film from 1956 called *Lovers and Lollipops*: "It had a female character at the centre of the story and the way she moved, and her range of gestures, was quite different from the way actresses from movies in that time behaved, and yet it was still quite codified and very particular to the time," Haynes explains. "It just felt more like a documentary, like it wasn't filtered through Hollywood language, and that was very interesting. I felt like there were aspects of femininity that had gone away, and that I wanted to be really true to."

Carol is Todd Haynes' first film since 2007's *I'm Not There* (although, he did shoot a five-part mini-series for HBO in 2011, *Mildred Pierce*) and the first work he's ever done without being credited as a screenwriter. He was asked about why he chose Rooney Mara for her role.



"You know, I first saw incredibly diversity and range, but she has almost exclusively been used for in your face characters, like in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. I have always had an interest in performers who play against the most obvious of expectations and are able to find something secret, something withheld, and some level of restraint. I find that so many of her choices are interesting. When I saw *Side Effects*, the [Steven] Soderbergh film, where she's having to play up the reality and the ruse at the same time, that the effects of depression through prescription drug addiction, I saw a kind of reserve of

despair and a full emotional range. From that performance, I just knew that she could also play someone who's emotional range is sort of unformed, young, uncertain and awkward. I knew that we could watch Rooney evolve into something else in the course of the film, and that was what I most wanted for Therese, a finding of her own identity."

Is it any wonder that more independent filmmakers are taking the opportunities offered by television? After all, Haynes found the experience of making the miniseries *Mildred Pierce* in 2011 to be an extremely rewarding one. "The more open dramatic form of the miniseries was already an exceptionally different and interesting challenge, but you have to shoot so many pages a day for TV and that was the biggest daily challenge," he recalls. "But I *loved* working with HBO, and once we all agreed on the budget and were greenlit I felt a kind of security under me that I hadn't felt before."

Part of Haynes' attraction to television is that there seems to be a lot more space for the kind of stories he wants to tell. "There are probably more and more dramatic programmes with female characters. Showtime seemed to specialise in women-driven stories for a while and HBO is catching up a bit, but all of that is helping competition and broadens what we get to see, and that has not been the case in independent filmmaking."

Quizzed about film budgets, Hanes remarked "It has really narrowed because people just don't go to the theatres to see those movies as much, so financing has dried up. And DVD sales, that whole ancillary part that supplemented independent filmmaking for so long, has now gone away with streaming and the way we watch things today."

Ever since Cannes, people had been asking Haynes if the long slog of getting *Carol* funded can be attributed to the fact that its characters are gay. But he isn't convinced. The truth, if anything, is even more depressing. "It's a movie about two women," he says. "Cate and Rooney are in every single frame. It has no lead men." And what about those moments of "silence and drifting"? His film refuses to tell its audience what to think. Didn't anyone try to persuade him to make it more literal or faster paced?

“Actually, I have to say I was so supported by my production team and ultimately by Harvey Weinstein . He wasn’t around on set. He just had a pick-up deal [ie to distribute it], and he waited until I was ready to show him a cut. He saw it only once, and he gave us hardly any notes. He knew exactly what to do with it, he knew what potential it had. It was the first of my films that he knew exactly how to market, and he was delighted. But then, to his credit, there have been films of mine that have been more structurally complicated, with less commercial potential, and he has always kept coming back.”



Would he stand his ground in a fight with Weinstein, or anyone else? “I would. I have absolutely been in that position before. Some directors do recut their films, but I don’t, if I disagree, and what you suffer is a less passionate marketing campaign, less investment in the film at the other end, which is... fine. I get it.” So he’s able to take criticism? “Oh, yeah. A key part of the process for me is having screenings: not official test screenings, just gatherings of people, some I know and some I don’t. We ask what is working, and what isn’t. So it’s not as if I’m shutting out input. You have to be somewhat ruthless with your work. You have to let things go. Even your favourite little part might not work in the end.”

Carol was shot in Cincinnati, Ohio, over the course of 35 days: “The state had newly introduced tax rebates for film-makers, so it was a financial decision first of all. But then we went there, and we were like, *oh, my God.*” The city had everything he needed, 50s-wise, including a well-preserved but gloriously empty department store. “It had all its original skin and bones. We even found a lot of glass cabinets on the premises.” But there was more.

“Oh, the extras. These were Cincinnati folks, non-union extras. At first, I thought: uh-oh, aren’t they going to be really self-conscious? But it was the opposite of that. They looked like real people, they moved like themselves, they had a normal, messy human way that came through.” The effect of the city and its denizens on cast and crew alike was, he says, hugely important. “Cate and Rooney continue to talk about the way it took them someplace else.”

His stars didn’t know each other well before shooting began, though they chose to take – not every film actor does – two weeks of rehearsal. “They’re similar in lots of ways,” he says. “They come well prepared, are attentive to detail, conscientious, hardest on themselves, and kind to the people working with them. But the fact that they didn’t know each other, and that we also spent a lot of time shooting them apart – we see Therese’s world, and then Carol’s, before we ever see them together – supported the differences between their two characters: differences not only of class and age, but of knowledge. It’s a gulf, and you need to feel it. The fact that they weren’t hanging out on set together every day probably helped that.”

Carol is a truly striking cinematic achievement, artfully exploring themes that resonate still with powerful force today. It is a creamily sensuous, richly observed piece of work, handsomely detailed and furnished: the clothes, the hair, the automobiles, the train carriages, the record players, the lipstick and the cigarettes are all superbly presented.

Oh, and it also has two tremendous lead performances.

Iain McGlashan

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Reactions to: **All My Sons**

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	2	5	9	8	2	1
Total received –	27			Average Score – 7.22							

Your Comments:

A good story, well acted in the style of the time

They don't make them like that any more

Typical forties background music

I found it rather confusing but understood it at the end

Arthur Miller – very skilled playwright

It must happen but..... (brilliant acting by Edward G)

Good (wartime) storyline, some good acting, except Burt!

A case of money being the root of all evil – stands the test of time well

A good old film, although I found the sound poor. The film had a story. So many today are all “stunts and action” with very little thought. Thanks

A good way to end the season – powerful storyline

Magnificent

Powerful stuff

A powerful film

Excellent story!

Typical Arthur Miller – but brilliant

Position	Film	Average Score
1 st	Testament of Youth	8.25
2 nd	Pride	8.08
3 rd	Selma	8.03
4 th	Belle	8.00
5 th	The Theory of Everything	7.84
6 th	Like Father Like Son	7.38
7 th	Le Clan des Sicilian	7.27
8 th	Son of the Bride	7.25
9 th	All My Sons	7.22
10 th	Rebel Without a Cause	7.16
11 th	Get Santa	6.8
12 th	The Cameraman	6.72
13 th	Dallas Buyers Club	6.5
14 th	Love is Strange	6.37
15 th	The Band's Visit	5.88
16 th	She Done Him Wrong	5.38
17 th	Stations of the Cross	5.0
18 th	The Spirit of the Beehive	4.9

Our next film on 22 September

“Bridge of Spies finds new life in Hollywood's classic Cold War espionage thriller formula, thanks to reliably outstanding work from Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks.”

“This is an incredibly well-made film that should be applauded for its craft and controlled tone, and will appeal to those looking for something more mature than a Bond film.”

“The genius of the casting is in the contrast: Hanks, the richly sympathetic screen actor, and Rylance, no less colossal a talent but one comparatively untried in cinema.”

