

The Ambiguity of Weeping. Baroque and Mannerist Discourses in Haynes' *Far from Heaven* and Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*.

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Abstract

Although Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1954) and Todd Haynes' *Far from Heaven* (2002) are both characterized as melodramas, they address their spectators differently. The divergent (emotional) reactions towards both films are the effect of different rhetorical strategies: the first can be seen a typical example of baroque discourse and the latter as a specimen of mannerist discourse. The reference to the terms melodrama, mannerism and baroque does not imply that these films are just formal repetitions of historical periods or that they thematically and structurally refer to historical styles, but that they are characterized by opposing discursive strategies which came to the foreground in a specific historical time and constellation. Because these discursive strategies return in other historical periods and social-political circumstances in different guises and with different aims, they can be compared to what Aby Warburg calls *Pathosformeln* (pathos formula). The expressive forms, gestures and discursive modes of melodrama, baroque and mannerism can thus be understood as trans-historical (gestural) languages of pathos that recur in history.

Résumé

Bien que *All that heaven allows* (1954) par Douglas Sirk et *Far from heaven* (2002) par Todd Haynes se caractérisent nettement comme un mélodrame, les deux films adressent leur public de manière fondamentalement différente. La divergence au niveau des réactions (émotionnelles) envers ces deux films, résultent d'une différence au niveau des stratégies rhétoriques auxquelles ils font appel : alors que le film de Sirk semble être un exemple type du discours baroque, l'autre serait plutôt un spécimen du discours maniériste. La référence aux termes de mélodrame, de maniérisme et de baroque ne suggère certes pas que ces films se limiteraient à une répétition formelle d'une période historique ou qu'ils référeraient thématiquement et structurellement à un style historique. Plutôt ils se caractérisent de deux stratégies discursives opposées qui se sont articulées dans un contexte historique très spécifiques. Puisque ces mêmes stratégies réapparaissent dans d'autres périodes historiques et d'autres contextes socio-politiques, sous d'autres guises et avec d'autres finalités, elles peuvent être comparées à ce que Aby Warburg qualifiait de *Pathosformeln*. Les formes et

gestes expressives du mélodrame, du baroque et du maniérisme, ses modes discursives peuvent alors être évalués comme des ré-interprétations trans-historiques des langages du *pathos*.

Keywords: (Neo-)Baroque, Mannerism, Melodrama, Pathosformeln, pathos formula, Aby Warburg, Douglas Sirk, Todd Haynes.

Introduction

Far from Heaven (2002) is generally seen as one of Todd Haynes most acclaimed and successful films as it won many awards and got four Academy Award nominations. Although most critics were positive about the film as whole, they differed about its emotional appeal. Rob Gonsalves for instance ends his review with the remark that “what's missing is the shameless emotional punch we associate with the old melodramas; Haynes, as brilliant as he sometimes can be, is simply too distant a director to pull out the stops and wring our tears” and Stephen Hunter states in *The Washington Post* that nowhere in the film ‘dense emotional states’ convince the viewer and that it’s all there “upheavals, discoveries, the piano going berserk, the leaves whirling madly off the trees, the whole grammar of '50s studio symbolism (...) perfectly executed, based on hours of research – and it's dead as a doornail”. Some critics claim that they were deeply moved and cried while seeing *Far from Heaven*. Ella Taylor remarks in her review “Get Out Your Handkerchiefs Todd Haynes' postmodern tearjerker” that she really ‘filled in’, Andrew O’Hehir speaks about ‘Kleenex-mandatory scenes’ and Richard Dyer confesses that during the first viewing “there were moments when I could not see the screen for crying” (174). Others acknowledge that *Far from Heaven* is a weepie or a film to cry, but don’t mention whether they were actually moved. All critics agreed about one thing, namely that *Far from Heaven* is a perfect imitation of Sirk’s aesthetics and therefore: ‘camp’ (Bradshaw), ‘filmed film criticism’ (Hoberman), ‘pastiche’ (Dyer; Lim), ‘Imitation of *Imitation of Life*’ (Hunter), a ‘cinematic position paper’ (Gonsalves), or simply ‘postmodern’ (Patterson). While most critics experienced *Far from Heaven* as ‘emotionally engaging’ and others rejected it as “a cerebral, meticulously designed and incipiently postmodern revisiting of relatively recent, though in many ways inaccessible, distant and foreign, cultural history” (Danks) they all agreed to the fact that they perceived the film with a reflexive distance but contend happily that the film never resorts to pure intellectual play, camp, irony or parody.

Far from Heaven is Todd Haynes’ homage to Douglas Sirk’s melodramas of the 1950s.

It is a remake of Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1954) and tells the story of the suburban housewife Cathy Whittaker (Julianne Moore) who lives in 1957's Hartford, Connecticut. Her model life as ideal homemaker and wife of Frank (Dennis Quaid), a successful executive at the television company Magnatech, falls apart after she discovers that her husband Frank drinks and struggles with his homosexuality. She seeks solace with the black gardener Raymond Deagan (Dennis Haysbert) who takes care of her and her garden while Frank falls in love with a younger man and seeks to divorce her. Her marriage in ruins, Cathy's love for her black gardener is disapproved of as well by the white as by the black community of the small town and above of all, by her own children. To avoid further troubles Raymond, the black gardener, decides to leave town and the film ends with the lonely Cathy who sees off Raymond at the railway station and gives him a silent goodbye.

The title *Far from Heaven* is of course a reference to Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* which tells the love affair between an elderly widow Cary (Lana Turner) who falls in love with the young gardener Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson). Cary's children and suburban friends disapprove of her future marriage with Ron and Cary breaks up the engagement. After a while she realizes that her children only care about their own lives and she decides to return to Ron. When she rushes to his country house to tell him that she comes home, Ron falls from a rock and is severely hurt. While she nurses Ron, both reconcile and declare their mutual love. Haynes reconstructed Sirk's style meticulously with beautiful interiors, painstakingly reconstructed streets and polished houses, colourful cars and lavish dresses.

Almost ten years after the release of the film, Glyn Davis confesses in her monograph on *Far from Heaven* that she thought the film after the first viewing "far from heavenly" and that after many re-viewings she could barely believe her "initial response to it (let alone bring myself to confess it out loud)" (1). The film moves her now so deeply that even the sound of the DVD menu brings her to tears. What is at stake with this film? Why does it provoke such contrasting emotional trajectories, even within one person? Why is the emotional appeal of *Far from Heaven* constantly compared with that of *All That Heaven Allows* and why do the critics state that *Far from Heaven* is not a real Sirkian melodrama?

The following is neither a study in audience response, nor a comparison of how critics and the (historical) public reacted to both films, nor is it an exercise in (historical) anthropology of crying and tears. It tries to explain that the divergent (emotional) reactions towards both films are the effect of different rhetorical strategies: *Far from Heaven* can be

seen a typical example of mannerist discourse while *All That Heaven Allows* is a specimen of baroque discourse. Although both films are characterised as melodramas they address their spectators differently. Referring to the terms mannerist or baroque does not imply that the films are formal repetitions of a historical period style or that they thematically and structurally refer to historical styles, but that they are characterised by opposing discursive strategies which came to the fore in a specific historical time and constellation (see Mathieu-Castellani, “Discourse Baroque, Discours Maniériste. Pygmalion Et Narcisse” 40). Because these discursive strategies return in other historical periods and social-political circumstances in different guises and with different aims, they can be compared to Aby Warburg’s *Pathosformeln* (pathos formula). Warburg coined the concept *Pathosformel* to account for the fact that artists took over certain moving patterns, forms or gestures from Antiquity, such as the dancing Nymphs of Spring with their fluttering hair and flapping clothes in Sandro Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*. Warburg characterised these forms of exterior movement in his earliest publications as ‘bewegtes Beiwerk’ (moving accessories), later he spoke about pathos formula in which the formalised exterior movements of gestural expressivity also express interior emotions of pathos and suffering. At the end of his life Warburg introduced the term ‘Engrams’ (traces or imprints) to account for the fact that these emotive forms are also expressions of the energies of ‘social memory’. Although these pathos formula are strongly conventionalised, they sometimes ‘invert’ the poles of the emotional energies and appear in different guises: “the dancing Salome from the Bible appears as a Greek maenad, or when a female servant carrying a basket of fruit in Ghirlandaio rushes by in quite conscious imitation of the Victory of a Roman triumphal arch” (Warburg, *The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past* 278). Pathosformeln are more than simple formal repetitions of heightened expressive motifs of movement and emotion, they are pathetic forms of expression and gestures in which, as Warburg remarks

one should seek the mint that stamps the expressive forms of extreme inner possession on the memory with such intensity—inasmuch as it can be expressed through gesture—that these engrams of affective experience survive in the form of a heritage preserved in the memory. They serve as models that shape the outline drawn by the artist’s hand, once the extreme values of the language of gesture appear in the daylight through the formative medium of the artist’s hand (278).

The expressive forms, gestures and discursive modes of melodrama, baroque and mannerism can thus be understood as trans-historical (gestural) languages of pathos that recur

in history.

The melodramatic mode

The term melodrama is often used pejoratively and refers to cheap sentimentalist entertainment ('weepies' or 'tearjerkers'), exuberant performances or an artificial, unrealistic narrative style. Something is called melodramatic when it is excessively emotional, formulaic, sentimental or old-fashioned. Melodrama originally refers to a typical 19th century French theatrical genre in which the narrative (the drama) was accompanied by music (the melos) - hence the name melo-drama. The music heightened the emotional impact of the dramatical scenes and at the same time helped to propel the dramatic action by linking the (often) separate *tableaux*, which represented extremely improbable plot developments. The themes of the melodrama were spectacular, highly emotional and often taken from popular novels, sensational newspapers, or current events. They dealt with extreme emotional states such as crises of human emotion, illness, domestic dramas, orphans, tragic lovers, fallen women and villains but also with railroad disasters, financial wreckage, volcanic eruptions, ship foundering and brute crime.

Melodramas were a very popular genre in the 19th century, *Rue du Temple* the centre of melodrama theatres in Paris was renamed into *Boulevard du Crime* before it had to make room for *Place de la République* during the renovations of Paris by Baron Haussmann in 1862. Melodramas were in contrast to serious theatre perceived as vulgar dramas that moved the spectators to tears by merging music and action, opposing good and evil, and by an emphatic, exaggerated and often outrageous acting style. The rapid scene changes and spectacular effects such as fires, volcanic eruptions or railway accidents were produced with help of the latest machinery and technological innovations. Melodrama is a genre typical of the industrialising society and the rise of the bourgeoisie and urban capitalism (Brooks 1995; Hays and Nikolopoulou). The genre gave a cultural answer to such issues as the growing split between work and personal life and the 'happy endings' they provided gave the spectators a temporary relief from the conflicts between home and the outside world.

Peter Brooks characterises the *melodramatic imagination* or the *melodramatic mode* in his seminal study on 19th century melodrama (Brooks 1995) as the quintessential fact of modern sensibility in the post-sacred era. Melodrama as a theatrical genre comes into being after the French Revolution with the demise of the traditional Sacred and its institutions, the

radical historicising of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of traditional society and its aesthetic forms such as tragedy and comedy (16). Melodrama emerges in “a world voided of its traditional Sacred, where the body of the ethical has become a sort of *deus absconditus*” (12). Melodrama is therefore

not only a moralistic drama but the drama of morality: it strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to ‘prove’ the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of judgment, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men (20)

What Brooks calls the melodramatic mode and which came into being in the historical context of the 19th century theatrical genre of the Melodrama, has become a pervasive cultural form and “inescapable dimension of modern consciousness” (vii). The melodramatic mode comes to the foreground in 19th century theatre, novels and in modern mass entertainment such as film melodramas or soap opera and is characterised by highly personalised moral dilemmas, melodramatic characters with little psychological depth and the impossibility of final reconciliation because there are no longer any clear transcendental values to be reconciled with. Melodrama, argues Brooks, can be seen as an attempt to re-sacralise life not in transcendental but in personal and individualist terms.

In his seminal essay *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama* Thomas Elsaesser introduced independently from Brooks the terms *melodramatic imagination* and *melodramatic mode* to describe the persistence of melodramatic techniques of presentation across different artistic forms and in different epochs. Elsaesser explains how cinema developed its own melodrama mode of expression in which the dramatic *mise-en-scène* is more important than intellectual content or story value:

this type of cinema depends on the ways 'melos' is given to 'drama' by means of lighting, montage, visual rhythm, decor, style of acting, music that is, on the ways the *mise-en-scène* translates character into action (...) and action into gesture and dynamic space (1995 78).

The [funeral scene](#) in Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* is an almost archetypical example of a highly dramatised melodramatic scene in which the dramatic conflict and the emotional and psychological predicaments of the characters cannot be contained anymore in the conventional codes of filmic realism and are sublimated into the decor, colour, gestures, framing, music and camera movements (76). *Imitation of Life* is Sirk's last film before he

'retired' and went back to Europe. The film is about a white actress Lora Meredith (Lana Turner) and her black maid Annie Johnson (Juanita Moore) and their two daughters, respectively Susie (Sandra Dee) and Sarah Jane (Susan Kohner). Sarah Jane, the daughter of a black mother and, in her mother's words, a 'practical white' father, has a very light skin. To conduct her own life and to escape the position her mother lives in, she wants to pass for a white girl. Doing so she rejects her mother who dies of sorrow. The funeral scene starts with a gathering in the Church, the camera moves from the legendary gospel singer Mahalia Jackson who sings the breathtaking gospel *Trouble of the World*. Lora, Susie and her boyfriend Steve (John Gavin) sit in the church benches, Sarah Jane is missing. When the coffin of Annie is being carried out of the church and put into the funeral carriage, the camera shows Sarah Jane clearing herself a way through the mourning public, shouting "Let me through, Please, please let me through". Her voice reverberates on the black wet macadam before her when she runs over the empty road between the silent mass of black people who pay tribute to Annie and the funeral carriage. While she runs towards the funeral carriage, she is withheld three times, by a policeman on his horse, a policeman on the street and one of the carriers of the coffin. She cries with a muffled voice, full of tears "It's my mother. I tell you, it's my mother". Reaching the carriage, she opens the doors, clings to the coffin and lays her head on the white flowers. "Mother". A cut back shows how Lora, Susie and Steve look up. Lora runs towards Sarah Jane to comfort her and Sarah Jane cries, "Mama, 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." Finally she whispers, "Miss Lora, I killed my mother, I killed her...". Lora takes her to their limousine and the film ends with the four together, but this time without Annie. The happy end the film ends with is according to Sirk no happy end at all:

In *Imitation of Life*, you don't believe the happy end, and you're not really supposed to. What remains in your memory is the funeral. The pomp of the dead, anyway the funeral. You sense it's hopeless, even though in a very bare and brief little scene afterwards the happy turn is being indicated. Everything seems to be OK, but you well know it isn't. (Halliday and Sirk 151)

The emotional power of this climactic scene is typical for Sirk's melodramas: an excessive visual style, expressionist *mise-en-scène* and lavish colours, an emotional musical score, the continuously moving camera and the histrionic acting emphasise the emotional weight of the scene and move the spectator to tears.

Melodramatic pathos of tears and crying

Douglas Sirk's 1950's melodramas were considered as real tearjerkers or weepies as Ted Gallagher recalls in an article on Sirk: "When we came out afterward, most of us were crying. The theatre owner's wife was standing in the lobby with a box of Kleenex. Many people gratefully took a tissue to dry their eyes". Sirk considered himself not directly what he called a 'weepie man' and although he had sometimes difficulties with the sentimentality of these films, he had to struggle with it because the films would otherwise collapse (Halliday and Sirk 153). In the famous interview series with John Halliday, Sirk recalls that the producer Russ Hunter asked him during the production of *Magnificent Obsession* (1954) continuously "Doug, Doug, make them weep! Please make them weep!" And every scene where I was trying to do something, he'd say, 'I want 500 handkerchiefs to come out at this point'" (106-107). That it worked testifies Antony A. Botto, a former projectionist: when he was back in the 50's projecting *Imitation of Life*, he would "hear the start of a swell of sniffles, and tears come up like a rising tide in theater in that last reel every night. That was when audiences showed emotion openly".

The ability of melodramatic film to move its public, is according to Steve Neale not only the affect of the excessive *mise-en-scène* but also of the narrative structure he calls *if only*: "if only this character realised the other's worth, if only she or he were aware of the other's existence, if only they had met in different circumstances in a different time, in a different place, 'if only you could have recognised what was *always yours*'" (10). It is the recognition that it is indeed too late but that things might have been different, that moves the spectators to tears. The melodramatic experience is paradoxically the experience of tears *and* pleasure: "the pleasure of being touched and giving way to tears" (6, 20). The central emotion of melodrama is therefore pathos, a suffering that entails excessive emotions that often hurt and cause sadness, pity or sorrow. The text roll-overs in the [trailer](#) of *All That Heaven Allows* proclaim: "Love was not gentle with these two// Unwise... Irresistible... // it was both torture and ecstasy// (...) *All that stirs Your Emotions to new depths*//" (Sirk). Melodramatic pathos is according to Mary Ann Doane a textual effect that

implies a closeness, an immediacy, and hence an uncritical spectator - one who is taken in, often to the point of tears. It entails a loss or fading of subjectivity in the process of signification, full immersion in a discourse (13).

It is therefore remarkable, states Doane, that *Far from Heaven* lacks this kind of pathos

because “the spectator is simultaneously overly involved and disconnected” (14). Pathos in *Far from Heaven* seems to be only signified:

Far from Heaven, a film that is, in a sense, doubly accessible, as a naive yet excessive discourse about a particular historical moment suffused with tensions drawn from the present, and as an extended quotation of a specific film, Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*. (5).

That pathos is only signified is corroborated by its highly stylised [trailer](#), which, instead of focussing explicitly on melodramatic pathos in which ecstasy and suffering merge, emphasises that truth, feelings and passions are hidden beneath the surface. The text roll-overs start with a fade-in of a word (lie, hide, desire). The moment these words fade into a sentence they change: Lie -> What Lies Under the Surface?// Hide -> What Hides Behind the Walls!// Desire -> What Imprisons the Desires... // ...Of the Heart?// (Haynes). The trailer does not announce the explicit showing of extreme passions in the film but the distanced telling of hidden and repressed feelings.

Far from Heaven is not a ‘traditional’ remake of *All That Heaven Allows* like Sirk’s *Imitation of Life* was a remake of Joseph Stahl’s 1934 adaptation of the Fanny Hurst homonymous novel (Hurst). The film is, as Richard Dyer argues, a perfect example of what he calls a *pastiche*. Dyer defines a pastiche as an unconcealed “aesthetic imitation” not of real life (reality or nature) but of an artwork (1-2). A pastiche is a self-conscious imitation of an imitation and is therefore often linked with negative connotations such as artificial, trivial, inferior, emptiness or lifeless. Because a pastiche imitates and quotes prior art works it is also always a collage, *bricolage* or collation of (elements of) other works. *Far from Heaven* quotes for example scenes from Sirk’s *Imitation of Life*, Max Ophüls’ *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Ali. Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) which itself is a reworking of *All That Heaven Allows*. Which means that to appreciate the film, the public should be aware of the fact that the film is a palimpsest of several other films and it should have knowledge of the echoes, references, quotations and imitations. *Far from Heaven* is therefore a self-reflective film full of textual markers, contextual and paratextual information, and aesthetic judgements about its being an imitation. Because a pastiche is only a pastiche and works only as a pastiche when the audience knows it is a pastiche, it requires a savvy spectator and it is always perceived as middle or high brow, if not elitist art (2-3). Exactly because a pastiche constantly communicates on a meta-level, it is usually very negatively assessed as

“superficial, disconnected from the real, and especially, from feeling” (2). A real pastiche, argues Dyer, is not necessarily artificial, death and lifeless but can be full of life and feeling because “it imitates formal means that are themselves ways of evoking, moulding, and eliciting feeling” (180). Experiencing a pastiche is thus based on a complex dialectics between thought and feeling, reflection and affect: by referring to a past world and aesthetics *Far from Heaven* simulates a 1950s melodrama. At the same time, because it deals with issues of interracial marriage and homosexuality in a way that was impossible in the 1950s and because its image quality (no Technicolor), cutting ratio and dialogue style are modern, it signals that it is not 1950s melodrama. The most valuable aspect of the pastiche is according to Dyer “its ability to move us even while allowing us to be conscious of where the means of our being moved come from, its historicity” (138). He goes even further by stating that “the pastiche of *Far from Heaven* not only makes the historicity of its affect evident but also allows us to realise the historicity of our own feelings” (178). Hence, when Dyer confesses that he cried when seeing *Far from Heaven*, he actually cried about the film as a pastiche: *Far from Heaven* as a simulation of melodramatic emotions and feelings which simultaneously reflects on the fact that these kind of films are not made anymore and that culture has changed.

Dyer is not the only scholar who mentions this dialectic of sameness and difference, closeness and distance in *Far from Heaven*. Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky for instance, states that critics who unproblematically presented the film as a melodrama did not realise that “what happens in the film is sad but we may also be sad for there not being films that do sadness like this anymore” (113). The affect of the film is according to her caused by nostalgia, not the nostalgia for a past period Dyer refers to, but a more political nostalgia “for the moral clarity of a time when unpleasant social realities seemed visible, on the surface of things, and in clear violation of the explicit ideals of American democracy” (113). Doane contends that the spectator of Haynes films is “simultaneously overly involved and disconnected” and speaks about “the pathos of distance (...) which not only reconciles these two effects but reveals them as mutually sustaining” (14). This dialectics of immersion and distance is a probable explanation for the enigmatic subtitle of Patterson’s review in *The Guardian*: ‘Patterson wipes away a tear of joy’. He weeps because the film was according to him “emotionally sincere” and lacked irony on the one hand and because Haynes was able to take “the outward forms of a Sirk melodrama and bent them to his own postmodern purposes” on the other hand.

Far from Heaven as mannerist discourse

Far from Heaven is in Dyer's opinion a perfect example of a pastiche because it imitates the genre of 1950's melodrama perfectly, tells a 'modern' 1950 story as if it were a 1950's story, creates the intense feeling of distance and historicity through sameness and difference, connects us with the feelings of the past and tells us at the same time that these feelings are artificially and culturally produced. Dyer nowhere mentions the fact that a pastiche, as an imitation of other works and composed from fragments extracted from other works, is a typically mannerist device. Gérard Dessons asserts that "the relations between the genre of the pastiche and the manner are historical; they follow anyhow the avatars of the word manner" (60). *Far from Heaven* is in other words as a pastiche a typical example of what Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani calls a mannerist discourse (Mathieu-Castellani 1986; Mathieu-Castellani 2006). A mannerist discourse is according to her deceptive and artificial because it represents what is already represented. As a mannerist discourse *Far from Heaven* is a representation of representations or a construction of an object-simulacrum: on the director's commentary track of the DVD Hayes states that he did not do much additional research for the film and drew almost everything from what he calls "the hermetic world of the film language, film stories and film scenarios" (Haynes). As the word 'mannerism' already exemplifies, the mannerist discourse is the materialisation of *la maniera*, the manner or individual style of the artist. The mannerist work is the expression of virtuosity by its creator who wants to be admired as a virtuoso. The period of the mannerist art (1570 to 1640) is the period in which the modern conscious artist emerges as an individual who expresses himself in his own subjective style and manner in his works. Paradoxically, to show his originality the mannerist artist quotes and copies the work and style (*maniera*) of old masters like Rafael and Michelangelo as precious ornaments into his own work. The mannerist work is, like the pastiche, self-reflexive and aims explicitly at itself as construction, investigating the possibilities of its medium. To admire the work and to be astonished and surprised by it, the spectator/reader/listener has to know that the work is not real but just an artifice, with the consequence that the mannerist universe always keeps its spectator at a (critical) distance. Haynes overtly declared that he wanted to keep the spectator at a critical distance because admiration, feelings and meanings can only be produced by "an ignited, electrified distance that can happen with a certain kind of representational experience" (Lim). He compares this experience to the performance artist John Kelly performing Joni Mitchell (hence a 'representation of a representation'):

He sounds just like Joni Mitchell, he imitates her stage banter, he's in drag and looks

like a ghoulish version of the little pixie Joni Mitchell from the '60s. (...) If the real Joni Mitchell was up there, you'd be going, oh god she's older, oh she can't hit that same note — you get caught up in all the discrepancies of the real. There's something about a beautiful surrogate that opens up this wealth of feeling that you wouldn't have with the real thing. And to me, the best kind of cinema is not about the real — it's about a distance that you fill in, participate in with your life experiences, your memories, and your associations. (Lim)

The mannerist discourse is thus in the ground a sceptical discourse which presents itself openly as a simulacrum: you always know that it is not true and that it only is an illusion. *Far from Heaven* should, according to Haynes, be seen as a self-conscious play and experiment with the genre conventions:

The constraints are wonderful. There's nothing more creatively inspiring than a set of rules and limits that you work within. From the beginning in conceiving the script, nothing that would happen in this universe was going to come from anything other than a very prescribed series of gestures, colours, movements, narrative possibilities from a very specific world of film. That was great and amazing, it gave us this creative framework (Hebron).

This play with conventions and rules is probably the reason why the reviewers contend that *Far from Heaven* is an 'imitation of "Imitation of Life (Hunter)," a "full-bodied simulation of a genre" (Hoberman), or a simulacrum (DeFalco; Lim). As Mathieu-Castellani explains, the distancing introduces feelings of uncertainty, doubt and suspension:

the aim is not at all to reconstitute the truth, but only something that is plausible (vraisemblable), that is to say something that is possible and of which the criteria escape any logic because they are established by fantasy alone, by the mannerist 'folly' (Mathieu-Castellani 1986 68).

In *Far from Heaven* this mannerist folly comes to the fore in the use of colour, lighting and the meticulously reconstructed world of the fifties. The film is utterly anti-natural and artificial and explicitly puts style, manner, virtuosity and artificiality to the foreground: "The amazing thing about autumn is just how artificial it looks," says Haynes. 'But it's a natural phenomenon, the point where nature exceeds verisimilitude. (...) Those exterior scenes look more fake than anything we did on a set'" (Haynes in Taylor). On the commentary track on the DVD Haynes relates how he was inspired by Sirk's visual style but wanted to go further.

He told his crew that he didn't like "the Sirk films be bolder than we - let's go man - take it as an invitation to really try stuff - that most people are afraid of to try - not naturalistic, no natural source of the light, colours, you cannot explain it naturalistically, architecturally" (Haynes). The interpretation of *Far from Heaven* as a mannerist film contradicts Glyn Davis' claim that Haynes just uses movie history as "an extensive archive that can be plundered". Moreover, it contradicts the idea that the film is (just) an "intertextual pastiche" operating as a post-modern "de-authorisation strategy that undercuts Haynes' status as the movie's 'auteur' and controlling force", and threatening "to block out the creator's distinctive voice" (50, 60-61, 63). On the contrary, the mannerist discourse turns *Far from Heaven* into a stunning example of the *maniera* of Haynes as author. Instead of disappearing behind the quotations, simulations and imitations, Haynes uses them to show off that he is the real virtuoso in imitating an imitation of life.

All That Heaven Allows as a baroque discourse

If Haynes' *Far from Heaven* is a specimen of mannerist discourse, than Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* is an example of a typical baroque discourse. The word 'baroque' here does not refer to its common sense, suggesting that Sirk's film would be a lavishly decorated film with elaborated camera movements, overt sentimental music and filmed in an exuberant style. *All That Heaven Allows* is an example of baroque discourse that, in contrast to the mannerist discourse, is intentionally directed towards its receiver (*destinataire*):

the baroque discourse (...) tends to convince or to persuade, in any case to influence its receiver (*destinataire*), to act forcefully on the receiver to get his or her intellectual or affective adhesion, in short, to try to get, with help of all available deliberative or juridical rhetorical devices, the consent of the reader/listener/spectator. (Mathieu-Castellani 1986 58)

The baroque discourse is a rhetorical discourse, which explicitly and intentionally employs rhetorical devices to influence its spectator, to move the spectator intellectually and more importantly affectively. The baroque discourse tries to convince the spectator that the discourse is true and believable with the aim to "lure" the spectator into action. This implies, argues Mathieu-Castellani, that the baroque discourse "constructs the image of its receiver, on which it doesn't stop 'imposing directions' (*indications de régie*) which are at the same time 'reading rules'" (1986 58). The effectiveness of this discourse is thus not measured by the

degree in which its cognitive content has been understood but by the pathos and the passionate reactions it provokes. The baroque discourse is effective when the spectator cries, laughs, hates or contemplates, when the spectator believes that the world created is true and veracious and when its message is correctly understood.

On a superficial level, the baroque and mannerist discourse look the same: *Far from Heaven* and *All That Heaven Allows* are both characterised by a melodramatic mode: they use the same motifs and themes, and rely upon the same excessive style and aesthetics. Nonetheless they differ fundamentally in their discursivity as will become clear in the analysis of two comparable scenes in which the widow meets the gardener and falls in love with him.

The scenes with the gardener

Cary the widow and Ron the gardener meet each other *All That Heavens Allows* in the very [first scene](#). We see Cary and her friend talking and we understand that Cary is a widow and her friend advises her to look for a new relationship. While she walks back she encounters the gardener who offers her to help carrying her stuff. Because her friend could not stay, she invites him for lunch. She offers Ron a chair at the garden table. The camera, which is continuously following both, 'takes place' at the table with the two protagonists. The whole scene is built around the unfolding conversation and love between Cary and Ron. Initially the camera focuses on the face of the widow and exposes us to the blossoming of her feelings for the gardener who is only shown in profile. The first shot of the gardener is a beautiful close-up from the point of view of the widow and conveys her growing fascination and feelings for this young man. This close-up emphasises the 'emotions' of the woman, which in turn are underlined by the music that starts the moment the gardener remarks that he has not finished his work and has to come back a second time. This of course opens the possibility of a second meeting.

The moment the gardener stands up to cut a branch of the golden rain tree to give it to her with the words "they say that it only thrives near your home when there is love," the music changes into the piano theme which will be linked to their love during the rest of the film. The camera moves to the left and shows Cary at the other (left) side of the frame. A dissolve to the golden rain tree branch in a vase on Cary's makeup table fills the open space Ron left. The camera moves slowly backwards and unveils Cary in front of her mirror. When her glance moves from the mirror to the tree branch, the piano music abruptly stops and we

hear the voices of her grown-up children. The mirror reflects the image of the children who will force her to break up with her new lover. While Cary stands up to greet them, the camera stays focused on the mirror and shows the meeting reflected in the mirror. The dense interplay of formal cinematic means such as the elaborated staging and decor, the acting, the close-ups, editing and camera position and movement, and the musical score not only give expression to the feelings of Cary and Ron but reveal at the same time the problems they will be facing.

An analysis of a comparable [scene](#) in *Far from Heaven* (see figure 2, the link might be blocked in some countries), in which Cathy meets the black gardener Raymond, shows that this scene is built up differently. It is not constructed to address the spectator emotionally. On the contrary, it seems to put the spectator at a critical distance. At the beginning of the scene the camera moves up to the top of the house without any apparent reason and when Cathy and Raymond meet, they are filmed in relatively distanced two shots. The distancing is emphasised by music, which instead of guiding and emphasising the emotional trajectory of the protagonists, stops just before Cathy meets Raymond. The music starts again when Cathy is walking away. Not only in this scene but in the film as a whole there are almost no moments of “Sirkian” movement and intensification. Indeed, Haynes attests that he

deviated from Sirk in a nice way (...) The camera moves when actors move in Sirk, there are very few moments of a solitary camera tracking you [refers to Julianne Moore, j.p.]. But after you say that you've already let him go, we slowly move sort of around her a bit as she asks, "What happened at work today?" You feel a shifting of gears, and we let the camera help you with that in a way which probably would not have been true in Sirk. (Hebron).

Moreover, there are no close-ups in *Far from Heaven* and the omnipresent musical score nowhere supplants or amplifies the emotions of the characters. The composer Elmer Bernstein states in an interview with Stuart Jeffries that emotional restraint was very important for Todd Haynes because he didn't want to make “some derivative 1950s-style pastiche”. The best example thereof is according to him the scene near the end of the movie in which Cathy says farewell to Raymond. The score, recalls Bernstein, has a “muted quality [which] seems more powerful.” At moments there is no music at all and the only thing you hear are the sounds of the train engine and the steps of Cathy's shoes on the concrete when she walks along the railway station platform. Haynes decided to defer “the musical climax” in the most emotional scene of the film because these sounds say more than music. The deliberate use of colour in

the film is another example of how Haynes was inspired by the, in his words, “extreme colour palettes” (Kaufman) of Sirk and at the same time willingly deviates from it. For every scene he created elaborated colour codings of which Sharon Willis remarks that the “film's hyper-refined, nuanced chromatic orchestrations” (152) are a “consistent amplification of Sirkian effects” (148). Cathy’s wardrobe for instance “produces hyper-signifying effects through its intra- and intertextual references” because “her colour spectrum both encodes the centrality as to the film’s structure and establishes her alternating relations to the diegetic world” (150). Exactly because the colour scheme departs from Sirk, they create in the words of Willis an “excessive overdetermination” (148). This is corroborated by a remark of Haynes in an interview with Amy Kroin: “I'm taking up the incredibly excruciating attention to visual detail in the films of Douglas Sirk (...) If anything, I wanted to make sure that we didn't hold back”. The result thereof is that the use of colour is not really subservient anymore to the construction of a diegetic world and seems to have a life of its own. Take for instance the scene in which Cathy meets her friends in the front of her house, the greenish and brownish costumes of the women blend neatly with the foliage colours of the autumn garden (see figure 2). Or the scene in which Cathy meets Raymond and his little daughter by chance in an art gallery (see figure 3). The light falls through a window with stained glass and throws a rainbow of colours in the space. A comparable [scene](#) in *All That Heaven Allows* in which Cary has an emotional and decisive discussion with her daughter and in which she realises that she is deeply in love with Ron and has made the wrong decision in leaving him, is lit from a small window with stained glass. The coloured light strikes the faces of the distressed mother and daughter with a myriad of colours which emphasises the ambivalent feelings, the confusion and changes of mood of both women. The colourful stained glass windows in *Far from Heaven* do not support the emotional trajectories of the characters in any way, they are just an embellishment or a symbol of the theme of the modern abstract paintings exhibited in the art show and the racial thematics of the film. Notwithstanding all efforts Haynes made to create lavish colour palettes for *Far from Heaven*, this film has, as Willis remarks, a “cool tonality” (152, 162) and lacks pathos. Its bold beauty of style does not want to seduce and immerse but is there to be admired, to create marvel and amazement.

Pure mannerist and baroque discourses obviously do not exist since both discourses interpenetrate each other. Both films make for instance intensive use of typical baroque and mannerist devices as mirrors and windows, but in slightly different ways. Take for instance the crucial [scene](#) in *Far from Heaven* in which Cathy’s husband Frank is seduced by the

young boy in the hotel (see figure 4, the clip might be blocked in some countries). The mirror is here an essential device in the narration of the seduction scene. Frank is in his hotel room and we see the reflection in the mirror of him moving around in the room from the point of view of the boy in the corridor. When Frank walks towards the mirror, he is not aware of the presence of the boy looking at him. The next shot shows Frank in front of the mirror, filmed from behind, the camera moves slowly to the right and shows us the reflection in the mirror of the boy in the door opening. The moment Frank sees the boy, the camera cuts to the point of view of the boy but this time filmed from behind his back. Through the reflection of Frank in the mirror, we see him looking at the boy. The camera cuts back to Frank's point of view who focuses on the boy. Frank is seen from behind on the left side of the image, we see his reflection in the mirror on the right side and in the middle the reflection of the boy in the mirror. The camera turns slowly away from the mirror to show the real boy standing in the door opening looked at by the real Frank. The next shot is a close shot of the boy, still from the point of view of Frank, who makes a seductive gesture and the scene ends with a long take of Frank in a close medium shot, in which he realises what is happening. He slowly approaches the boy and walks out of the image, leaving us with the image of an empty wall. Haynes uses the mirror in this scene very cleverly to realise Frank's seduction, as an elaborated way of telling the story, just as Haynes uses mirrors in other scenes with purely narrative aims. The mirror on Cathy's dressing table is used to convey the conversations between Cathy and Frank. They converse with the help of their images in the mirror, a speaking illustration of their inability to communicate and of the deterioration of their marriage.

Sirk uses windows and mirrors in *All That Heaven Allows* conversely. First of all almost every scene in the film that is linked to the house or life of Cary contains a mirror. Take for instance the big marbled mirror behind the fire place which is linked to her late husband and the father of her children, the reflections in the television screen of Cary and the fire place which express Cary's despair and loneliness, or the mirror on her dressing table which is clearly linked to Cathy's love for Ron. Mirrors in *All That Heaven Allows* reflect the claustrophobic interiors Cary lives in, the windows are the only place where she can escape. When in despair, the characters in Sirk's films walk to windows to stare in a world 'far away', a world that might symbolize, for example, the space Ron, a fervent reader of Thoreau's *Walden*, dreams of living in.

Far from Heaven is a simulation of representation and as such a fundamentally sceptical

film that never believes what it tells. It is aimed towards itself, does not want to be believed or to convince its spectator like the baroque discourse would do. As a baroque discourse *All That Heaven Allows* presents its conventional and artificial world as truth and the feelings and longings as true and real, although the spectator knows that the melodramatic world is in the end artificial and conventional. The fluent camera movements, the emotions of the music, the sumptuous colours, the play with the mirrors and windows and most of all the impossible happy endings, ultimately force the spectator to reflect on the representation. As Mathieu-Castellani states “no Baroque without a tragic conscience of the world” (1986 70). The lively, animated and passionate world the baroque discourse creates, presents itself as true and believable but at the same time refers to its impossibility, to its backside of death and decay. The baroque discourse is an affective, pathetic and emotional celebration of life and at the same time a very intellectual discourse that contains a meta-discourse about the impossibility thereof. As Sirk himself said about the happy end in *Imitation of Life*

They're all sitting in the limousine together - until everything starts to go wrong again, which it would for sure. Lana will forget about her daughter again, and go back to the theatre and continue as the kind of actress she has been before. Gavin will go off with some other woman. Susan Kohner will go back to the escape world of vaudeville. Sandra Dee will marry a decent guy. The circle will be closed. (Halliday and Sirk 152)

The ‘true life’ the baroque discourse strives for, in the end reveals itself to be impossible, hopeless and vain. As such baroque reveals its didactical touch: as a communicative and performative discourse it wants to teach the spectators a moral lesson about the relativity of it all.

Conclusion

The Mannerist reflexive distance differs from the Baroque reflection in that it lacks a tragic vision on the world and remains fully within the register of the artificial, the imitation and the simulacrum. All it wants, is to create an artificial world to surprise, astonish and dazzle as Haynes confirms: “the film was an attempt to make locations look like sets - and the set as detailed and beautifully constructed and lit”. Maybe that is the reason Haynes decided not to end *Far from Heaven* with a baroque Sirkian happy ending. Initially he wanted to end the film with a voice-over of Cathy, to give, so to speak, Cathy a voice at the moment she has lost everything. However, relates Haynes, “taking it away just allowed the emotions to kind of

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spill out all over us and not harness them to any specific ideas. And of course I found that ultimately the most devastating and poignant way to end the film” (Haynes). The pronounced false musical note the film ends with signals the deeply pessimistic and un-redemptive tone of *Far from Heaven*. In Sirk’s melodrama’s happy endings are crucial because melodrama is according to Sirk the only form of drama that has survived in modern times:

Drama used to be the belief in guilt, and in a higher order. This absolutely cruel didactic is impossible, unacceptable for us moderns. But melodrama has kept it. You are caged. In melodrama you have human, earthly prisons rather than godly creations. Every Greek tragedy ends with the chorus — ‘those are strange happenings. Those are the ways of the gods.’ (Stern and Stern)

Those things happen, but there is always the possibility, in film or theatre at least, to solve the unsolvable problems with a typical baroque device, namely the unexpected divine intervention or the ‘deus ex machina’:

‘Cary?’ says Ron at the end of *All That Heaven Allows* when he gains consciousness again. ‘Yes Ron... You’ve come home?’ ‘Yes darling, I’ve come home’

The spectator wants to believe them, really, they love each other. The spectator sees it, but knows better. The [camera](#) slowly moves upwards till the spectator sees the big window with the snowy garden and the deer pushing its nose against the window of Ron’s newly build home. Even in Ron’s country house appears a mirror and on the opposite wall a frame with pinned butterflies. With the mirror, the pinned butterflies and the deer as signs of tamed wilderness, we know that even the nature man Ron is finally tamed and caged.

Brooks and Elsaesser refuse to characterise melodrama as a trans-historical category, Brooks states that the term melodrama would lose its historical and cultural specificity when used for the work of Euripides, Shakespeare or Molière. Nevertheless both use the concepts of the *melodramatic imagination* and *melodramatic mode* in a trans-historical sense as an aesthetic mode which returns during the 19th and 20th century in different artistic forms and in different epochs (Elsaesser 1986 68) and is “vital to the modern imagination” (Brooks, 1995 xv, 14-15). Mathieu-Castellani argues that the discursive strategies of baroque and mannerism are typical for certain worldviews in France in the period from 1570 to 1640. The fact however that she defines these strategies as types of a more general discursive typology opens up the possibility to treat these baroque and mannerist discourses as specific modes of enunciation which can emerge in other epochs.

Take for example the funeral scene in *Imitation of Life* mentioned earlier. This is one of those archetypal melodramatic situations in which according to Elsaesser pathos is sublimated into the *mise-en-scène* and “the world seems totally predetermined and pervaded by ‘meaning’ and interpretable signs” (1986 85). It is one of those scenes of extremity in which according to Brooks “melodrama seeks to make the terms of the moral dilemma *visible*, (...) chooses mute gestures to express its most extreme meanings” (1974 552). Mathieu-Castellani would define this heightening of ordinary gestures as an example in which baroque discourse evokes emotions and passions and looks for an intellectual as well as affective adhesion of the spectator (2006 41).

These melodramatic, baroque or mannerist modes of expression get trans-historical significance when they are seen as specimen of what Warburg called ‘bewegtes Beiwerk’ or pathos formula in which moving accessories, gestures and movements express internal (e)motions of pathos. Pathos formula not only mark moments of passage in the art works themselves but also historical passages: the baroque discourse expresses some of the tensions of early modernity just as the baroque discourse in Sirk’s Hollywood family melodramas expresses notions of social crises and social change in private contexts in emotional terms (Elsaesser 1986 72). In other words, the baroque discourse returns in *All That Heaven Allows* as melodramatic imagination just like the mannerist discourse returns in *Far from Heaven* as pastiche.

Stephen Eisenman eloquently argues in his outstanding study on the Abu Ghraib effect that the photographs of torture taken at the Abu Ghraib prison are pathos formula. As forms of passionate suffering that are incorporated in our bodies and habits, they are the product of recurring structures of thought and form in the memory and the body of the guards (17, 54). The melodramatic imagination and the mannerist and baroque discursive strategies can be compared to the representation of the ancient pathos formula of suffering Eisenman studies in the Abu Ghraib photographs. Although both Sirk and Haynes are very erudite filmmakers, they act like the guards at Abu Ghraib, who “did not need to know about the Pergamon Altar to have enacted its language, its pathos formula - they knew it in their eyes and hands, they felt it in their muscles and bones” (100).

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Figures



Figure 1 – Far from Heaven, Meeting Cathy and Raymond in the garden



Figure 2 – Far from Heaven, Women in Garden



Figure 3 – Far from Heaven, Exhibition



Figure 4 – Far from Heaven – Mirror scene

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