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PUTTING ON THE RED DRESS: Reading Performative Camp in Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*

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Camp comes into being as a performative vernacular when naturalized constructions of gender and sexuality are questioned through the enactment of their inherent contradictions. As subjects that are feminized through heteronormative ideology, both women and gay men may have a similar attentiveness, or what Keith Harvey describes as a "semiotic awareness," for the signs that are inscribed upon them and through which they negotiate their place in society (Harvey, 407). When this predilection for signs is acted out in the ironic performance of camp, as an artistic vernacular that expresses the ways in which women and gay men suffer as bearers of the passivity, emotionality and inactivity inscribed upon them, the performance may in turn become a radical site of destabilizing activity.

With this in mind, the film genre of the melodrama, and in particular the work of Douglas Sirk, provides an interesting site for exploring representational traces of the inter-subjective positioning of women and gay men for two central reasons: [1] as a genre that is well known for narrativizing the pain and suffering of women, it may have something to say of the conditions which propel this pain and suffering; and [2] the work of Sirk, as a director who relied heavily upon distanciation, or distancing effects, to highlight artifice, demonstrates incongruencies between naturalized and constructed versions of heteronormativity much in the same way as camp does when utilized as a performative vernacular.

In discussing the films of Douglas Sirk's, Laura Mulvey describes how the "melodrama can be seen as having an ideological *function* in working certain contradictions through to the surface and re-presenting them in an aesthetic form" (Mulvey, 79). This process of aestheticization is achieved primarily through the use of wide shots, in drawing attention to the *mise-en-scene*, as well as heavily nuanced lighting, costume and set design that appear excessive when compared to dominant mainstream

cinema of the time. In an effort to consider how these mechanisms of distanciation play out within the Sirkian melodrama I will focus on the 1955 film *All That Heaven Allows*, taking into account the ways in which gender and sexuality are performed through the film in such a manner that demonstrates conflicts surrounding hetero/homo binaries within representations of the period that can be productively read within a matrix of performative camp.

All That Heaven Allows portrays the trials and tribulations of wealthy widow Cary Scott (Jane Wyman) as she attempts to transgress the restrictions of bourgeois society through a love affair with her gardener, Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson). In an inversion of coming out narratives (in the original sense of the term, denoting a girl's entry into society-life) through her relationship with Ron, Cary is introduced to the *Walden*-inspired counter-culture of Ron and his friends. As the narrative develops, Cary undergoes a series of conflicts, both internally and externally; Cary suffers a near melancholic silence at times, trapped by her own indecision of whether or not to sacrifice her bourgeois privilege for her relationship with Ron; facing ostracization by her family and community whenever she attempts to demonstrate her 'lowly' desire to choose her own fate. The shame, struggle and turbulence of the oppressive conditions perpetuated by bourgeois values and norms are filmically expressed by heavily nuanced color systems, enacted through the use of lighting, set design and costuming.

Exploding with color, the film saturates the screen in golden autumnal trees, provocative red costuming and accentuating strokes of stage lighting that glow in hues of lavender, periwinkle blue and deep forest green. There are perhaps few other films in which colors 'speak' so loudly of the internal emotional states and desires of its characters. As Rainer Werner Fassbinder simply put it, "Douglas Sirk's films are descriptive" (Fassbinder, 96). Accordingly, his films are unyielding to any prescriptive imperative, offering instead a view into the shame-drenched claustrophobic world of heteronormative bourgeois convention, encouraging empathy over identification and privileging showing over telling.

Cary's alienation from the upper class suburban world in which she dwells is established through an excess of expression, using costuming, stage-lighting, set design and music. As these modes of expression are heavily emphasized in scenes of social

gathering, this analysis will consider the ways in which they take up an aesthetic of performative camp, to invoke irony, ambivalence and theatricalization surrounding heteronormative value systems, particularly in terms of traditional binary oppositions of male/active - female/passive and male/outside - female/inside.[1] These scenes also provide a vital site for analysis in that they present conflicts between characters within the public sphere, thus illuminating tensions between collective convention and individual interests and desires.

Red as Signifier in 1950s America

The color red, between the 1940s and the late 1950s, circulated widely within American culture as a signifier for Communism, evident in popular anti-propaganda films such as *The Red Menace* (1949) and *Red Planet Mars* (1952). Senator McCarthy's conflation of the communist threat and homosexual threat (termed under the auspice of 'perversion') worked to stimulate a national culture of paranoia surrounding the 'corrosive' effects of both non-normative political and sexual interests on traditional value structures. As David Gerstner notes:

> A color is assigned to the homosexual, like the Communist, in order to talk about the sexual/juridical anxiety which threatened to seep into sacrosanct American politics. Pink and Red in 1950's America marked the invisible space of fear that urgently needed to be made visible. (Gerstner, 31)

Similarly, the color maintained a place within the codified networks of gay camp performance as a signifier for male-male desire, most often enacted through the wearing of a red necktie. As Shaun Cole has noted, "in an area of conservative clothes a red tie inevitably announced unorthodox tastes, but unorthodox taste only to those in the know" (Cole, 33). In a more general sense, prior to the 1960s, red was considered a provocative color, which denoted or became a site of projection for difference, anti-establishment

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[1] I have utilized here Richard Dyer's definition of camp as "a characteristically gay way of handling the products of a culture through irony, exaggeration, trivialization, theatricalization and an ambivalent making fun out of the serious and respectable." Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers,* (London: Routledge, 2002), 250.

values and sexual provocation, particularly in terms of feminine desire. In discussing the woman's film/melodrama *The Bride Wore Red*, starring camp icon Joan Crawford, Jeanine Basinger explains:

> Women's movies usually go beyond using clothes for characterization, transformation and escape and end up using them as real plot devices… The trouble with *The Bride Wore Red* (1937), for instance, is simply that she wore red… Actually, this particular bride never gets to the altar, but she does have one fashion indicator of why things will not work out for her in her desire to trap a rich husband: that red, red dress in her closet. (Basinger, 131)

As Basinger aptly documents, central to the problematic inscribed on the color red was its use as an index of desire that must remain hidden and concealed. With this also comes the implication that red can be used, actively, to signal a refusal to hide and a provocation to normative standards. Within the tropes of classic Hollywood cinema, this almost always necessitates a punishment, which seeks to correct the representation of non-normative desire, the refusal of marriage in *The Bride Wore Red* being one such example.

However, certain filmic techniques may illuminate incongruencies in the prescriptive tropes asserted. distanciation is a particularly useful technique in making non-normative potentialities more apparent in film, while stimulating ambivalence towards the punishment enforced by Hollywood's regulation of generic tropes (as was strictly enforced by the Hay's production code).[2] In describing Sirk's use of distanciation, Paul Willemen writes: "by stylizing his treatment of a given narrative, he succeeded in introducing, in a quite unique manner, the distance between the film and its narrative pretext" (Willemen, 270). The following analysis will consider the ways in which Sirk makes use of non-normative associations with the color red throughout *All That Heaven Allows*, establishing an unspoken inter-subjective semiotics between Cary and Ron as desiring subjects that transgress heteronormative imperatives.

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[2] For more on how the production code and its restrictions impacted the making of Hollywood cinema, and gay and lesbians in particular, see Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981). The chapter entitled *Struggle* gives specific examples of how its implementation impacted the representation of both women and gay men, often resulting in the alteration of scripts prior to filming.

Flashes of Red – Drawing Attention

In one of the film's earliest scenes, Cary prepares to meet the socialite demands of a cocktail party at the Stoneybrook country club. Up to this point, she has been dressed formally, in a black and grey woman's suit, while Ron has been dressed in a beige work uniform. In contrast, Cary's choice of a fire-engine red, low cut dress for the party asserts her autonomy as someone who dresses against the grain. Further, the significance of her performative transition from subdued to excessive is delineated in the chain of events that transpire at the club.

Upon entering a gigantic hall of women dressed in subdued yellow, cool blue and soft grey gowns, she meets an onslaught of confrontation in response to her attire. One woman dressed in a black satin dress charges, "It's indecent to have two grown children and look as young as you do, isn't it. Of course there's nothing like red for attracting attention, is there?" Moments later she is pulled outside by Harold, a flamboyant bachelor, who attacks her with a kiss and proposes, "why don't we meet in New York? I know a place." Thus, Cary's dress is perceived within her social milieu as an index of excessive expression of feminine autonomy and desire that must be contained and taxonomized through assigning her a lowly status as either an unfit mother or an attention-seeking, sexually-available jezebel.[3]

Upon her return home from Stoneybrook, Cary is shown cloaked from head to toe in a black formal coat, her red dress safely concealed underneath, marking the first of many such instances where clothing in the film acts to either conceal or reveal female expression. As she gets out of the car to begin the walk to her doorstep, the *mise-en-scene* echoes this tone of concealment, etching her covered figure in shadows and streaks of deep blue light – contrasting the potentiality of her encounter with Ron in the sun-drenched garden with a sense of punishment, closure and arrest. The moment strikingly resembles a prisoner being returned to a cell after escape, with Cary's head tilted slightly down as she is walked to her door. It goes without saying that this is the last time Cary

[3] A similar problematic is played out in William Wyler's film *Jezebel* (1939), where Bette Davis, portraying a Southern belle, is socially ostracized for wearing a red dress.

will wear red in the film.

The following morning Cary talks with a neighbor in the driveway. She remains cloaked, but now by a beige coat, which pulled up tightly conceals her neck. As she chats in the foreground, the color red punctuates movement in the background, drawing attention to Ron as he goes about his yard-work, revealing a transposition of color themes since Ron and Cary's first meeting. A wide-angle shot of Ron working unveils what is to be his signature costume for the remainder of the film; a bright red Pendleton flannel work shirt, smoothly pressed and tucked neatly into beige khaki trousers, polished brown leather work boots, accented at the top by the red wool socks pulled snugly over his trousers, and a matching brown leather belt. Although he is dressed to a tee as a worker, there is no sign of work anywhere on him. Instead, his cleanness appears over-determined – his hair slicked and styled (slightly Elvis-like), his skin evenly tanned and perfectly clean, etc. – producing Ron's masculinity as constructed and artificial as opposed to naturalized or 'believable.' In a case study of performative camp enactments of masculinity, Martin P. Levine describes:

> Frank looked like a well-groomed lumberjack. Everything he wore was tailored and matched. His jeans and plaid Pendleton shirt fit perfectly. His black, wool watchman's cap matched his black Levis and the black in his shirt. His red thermal undershirt matched the red in his shirt. The brown in his leather belt matched the brown in his hiking boots. No real lumberjack ever looked so well put together, so coordinated in color, his outfit fitting so perfectly. Frank then *signified* the lumberjack – appropriating the gender conformity that is traditionally associated with lumberjacks … (Levine, 61)

Congruently, Ron's difference from heterosexual norms is enacted and performed through the over-determination of his dress, marking an excess of attention to masculine artifice that exceeds the (restrained) norms of male dress, just as Cary acted in excess of feminine norms with her red dress. This transgression is further demonstrated as Ron and Cary join in the yard to talk.

As Cary approaches Ron, the shot jump cuts from a wide-angle panoramic view of the yard to a reverse-angle shot in which Ron's red shirt fills half the screen. As they

begin to converse, Ron speaks in a forced-sounding low baritone voice (a staple of Rock Hudson's acting technique) that, in accordance with his costuming, amplifies his performed masculinity.[4] Directing the viewer's attention to Ron's attire, Cary repeatedly shifts her eyes away from Ron's gaze and towards the surface of his shirt, giving the effect of a confrontation with Ron's shirt (it actually appears for several moments as if she is talking to his shirt). From this point forward, the color red comes to punctuate all of Cary's interactions with Ron and denote Ron's position as a character existing outside the heteronormative sphere, circumventing the interiority of the feminine and the domestic sphere, along with Cary's struggle to escape its oppressiveness.

Everything's Gone Red

The second party scene acts in stark contrast to the rigid heteronormative expectations imposed at the country club, as Ron introduces Cary to his friends at a 'clam-bake.' Arriving at her house to invite her to the party, Ron - like Cary earlier - is covered in a black coat, zipped all the way to the top. Upon entering the party, Ron throws the coat on to a chair, revealing an even brighter red flannel work shirt than he previously wore. As the shot moves to a wide-angle view of the room, the color red begins to sprinkle the screen: a bowl of red apples sits in the foreground, Ron's friend Alida sways cheerfully around the room in a bright red paisley dress, red books line the fireplace mantle, cherry-oak furniture composes the sitting area and red flowers grace the window sills. As they sit down and pick up frosted red glasses of liqueur, a crescendo effect is achieved by the accents of red multiplying and saturating the screen.

As Ron and his friend Mick leave the room, Cary and Mick's wife Alida are left to chat alone. The ensuing scene continues the provocation signified in Cary's wearing of the red dress at the country club, this time indicating the non-normative social relations shared between Ron and his friends, particularly in respect to anti-capitalist ideology and male-male relations. Curiously picking up a copy of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, Cary reads a short passage, reciting the lines "if a man does not keep pace with his

[4] In the produced for television documentary *Hollywood Legends*, Jane Wyman recalls that Universal Studios taught Hudson how to lower his speaking voice. *Hollywood Legends: Rock Hudson: Tall, Dark and Handsome*, dir. Unknown. Narrated by Jane Wyman. Aired August 19, 1990, Channel 4.

companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer." Following this, Alida and Cary discuss the *Walden*-esque bond shared between Ron and his friends:

> Alida: You see, Ron's security comes from inside himself. And nothing can ever take it away from him. Ron absolutely refuses to let unimportant things become important and that's what Mick and I were doing. We were. In fact things got so bad between us right before he went to Korea we were thinking of a separation… Our whole life was devoted to keeping up with the Joneses. But when Mick was wounded and had a lot of time to think, he decided to get off that merry-go-round. When he came back he put it right up to me.

Working within a register of performative camp, the color red becomes a tonal signifier for the non-normative social and political positions explored in Cary's and Alida's conversation, reinforced by the fact that in the same year the film was produced, McCarthy ordered all copies of Thoreau's *Walden* to be removed from overseas American libraries as part of his infamous book burning campaign, believing the book to be ideologically dangerous.[5]

The coupling of the red in the *mise-en-scene* along with the conversation, creates a connotative chain, using: [1] ambivalence - Cary seems anxious about the counter-cultural ideology she is presented with and fluctuates between enthusiasm and apprehension, [2] theatricalization - both Cary and Alida move across the room, preparing for the party and pausing in different spots to talk, in a way that recalls theatrical stage-blocking, and [3] exaggeration – the color red has been contained up until this point; it now saturates the screen. These elements work together in a performative register, emphasizing the artifice of Cary's feminine naiveté when confronted with the fact that there are people who choose to live out the things they believe in and desire, regardless of normative standards. As Thomas Elsaesser notes:

> The emotional extremes [in the Sirkian melodrama] are played off in such

[5] The PCC Library: Banned or Challenged Books. http://www.pcc.edu/LIBRARY/news/banned2006.htm. Accessed 12-1-2007.

> a way that they reveal an inherent dialectic, and the undeniable psychic energy contained in this seemingly so vulnerable sentimentality is utilized to furnish its own antidote, to bring home the discontinuities in the structures of emotional experience which give a kind of realism and toughness rare if not unthinkable in European cinema. (Elsaesser, 66)

This esoteric combination of realness, toughness and sentimentality underlie both camp performance and the Sirkian melodrama in that they work to heighten and elevate ambiguity surrounding prescribed roles. Unlike a solo drag camp performance, however, the melodrama disperses these qualities amongst performers and objects, creating a sort of collective performance that cumulates in the *mise-en-scene*. In this way, the feminine artifice of the drag performer, enacted through gesture, style and dress, is congruent with the use of feminine artifice in the *mise-en-scene* – home decor, colors, lighting and characters all become performative, enacting roles which expose their inherent construction. Just as the drag act makes use of the stage as a site to play out femininity, the melodrama, as Laura Mulvey puts it, "takes the space of the home, turning narrative space inward, lifting the roof off the American home" (Mulvey, 54-55).

Within this 'dollhouse' view of Mick and Alida's home, encapsulated in the wide shots and voyeuristic camera motions (the camera follows at a distance as if it could be a person looking on from a corner or nearby room), we are offered a direct contrast to the subdued traditional furnishings and color schemes of Cary's suburban home. Thus a space is created in order to play out expressively the feelings presented within it, most importantly here, the way in which its characters challenge heteronormativity. Thus, Ron becomes an inversion of the male/outside, female/inside opposition, as Alida describes how "his security comes from inside himself." Similarly, Alida and Mick overturn their hegemonic gender assignment as male/active, female/passive, as she describes how Mick's being "wounded" in the war led to their decision to leave behind the pressures of the capitalist "merry-go-round." Asserting her autonomy to make choices within their relationship, she explains that upon his return, "he put it right up to me."

Consequently, Mick and Alida's home becomes a sort of fun-house, both literally and figuratively, while Cary's nervousness plays out as both fear and excitement. By the time the guests arrive and the party moves into full swing, in a total reversal of classic

Hollywood tropes, Ron becomes the spectacularized sexual object, singing and playing piano, while the frame provides a point-of-view shot from the position of Cary's gaze. As group dancing and drinking take over the party, the color red shifts in meaning, from expressing Cary's fear to signifying, as it did at the film's start, her joy, desire and excitement.

Corrective Coloring

In accordance with the heteronormative tropes of classic Hollywood cinema, the third and final party scene acts to correct the destabilization of norms that occurs at the previous party. However, with the use of camp, the scene does just the opposite, instead enacting the oppressiveness of these norms. In classic Sirkian fashion, the stage is set for the pain that Cary and Ron are about to experience prior to its enactment. The viewer is introduced to a colonial mansion packed with guests anticipating their arrival. In stark contrast to the red-saturated world of the clam-bake, the *mise-en-scene* performs the rigidity of bourgeois domesticity; the color palette is subdued in hues of light brown oak walls, beige curtains and wallpaper (identical to the tone of Cary and Ron's clothing in earlier scenes, where their desire is rendered invisible, masked by their 'appropriate' apparel). Similarly, female guests are costumed in subdued grey and blue gowns, with male guests in black suits and blue and grey ties.

Upon Cary and Ron's arrival, the guests rush to the window, pulling aside a white curtain to watch them come up the walk. In a fast-paced rap of performative camp vernacular, the dialogue playfully mocks the hypocrisy of the guests:

> [Society woman:] It's always the quiet ones isn't it?
> But she's certainly the last person you'd expect to –
> Howard: Always pretending to be so prim and proper.
> [Society woman #2:] Well Howard did she turn you down?
> [Howard sits down looking frustrated and defeated]

Without pause, the shot cuts to Cary and Ron's entrance through two massive colonial style doors. Cary has corrected her earlier provocative attire with a black satin formal dress and pearl necklace while Ron is dressed in a black suit – making obvious their concerted effort to blend in with the crowd. However, upon closer inspection, Ron's

status as an outsider remains signified by the color red, albeit this time partially restrained in the wide stripes of a blue and red tie, while the 'society' men around him sport ties of subdued greys, blues and blacks. As the two move around the party at their most congenial, making polite conversation, the surrounding guests make it clear that no matter how hard they work at it, they cannot and will not be accepted.

In an attempt to emasculate Ron, one man mockingly jabs, "So that's Cary's nature boy." Similarly, an older woman sardonically says to Cary "I guess it is unusual when someone your age gets married. But I think your friend's awfully lucky" – refusing to recognize Ron's status as her fiancé, relegating him to simply a "friend."[6] Throughout these attacks, Ron remains completely composed and collected. The camera angle, positioned at Ron's height, creates a parodic effect, punctuating the pettiness of the guests, looking small and mousy, as Ron fills much of the frame and confidently towers above them. Richard Meyer remarks:

> Yet for all his emphatic bigness, Rock Hudson's (out-)size did not harden his screen persona into the 50's machismo of Marlon Brando or Kirk Douglas …What distinguished Hudson from the other male stars of his day was not just the fact (or fantasy) of his largeness, but the way he tempered that big body with a measure of safety, of "gentle giant" reassurance. (260)

Accordingly, in a period in which representations of men in mainstream cinema were polarized between 'hard,' straight, masculinity at one end of the spectrum and sensitivity, effeminacy and gayness at the other, Hudson's combination of physical "largeness" and emotional softness brings contradictory forces into his portrayal of Ron. This radically destabilizes and ironizes gender norms, in effect producing that which should not be able to exist: excessive male physicality (rendered through camera positioning that emphasizes his stature) and the gentleness and sensitivity associated with the feminine.

Just as Cary must be shamed and humiliated for asserting her autonomy, for being an *active* female, Ron must be abjected for remaining passive and constrained in the face

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[6] It is worth noting here that there is a long history within heteronormative society of referring to the partners of gays and lesbians as 'friends,' thus invalidating and de-legitimizing gay and lesbian relationships within the social sphere.

of insult. The performance of camp vernacular in *All That Heaven Allows* is nowhere else more recognizable than in this instance: Ron *is* a deeply ironic construction; he is active because he is able to *handle* the insults, while simultaneously presented as passive because he also must *bear* these insults.[7] This particular transgression of heteronormativity has, throughout the twentieth-century (and into the twenty-first), been met with extreme forms of hetero-aggressive violence.[8] It is precisely when the visibility of gay male representation becomes too apparent that anxiety is inspired in the heteronormative sphere. Ron's ability to bear - a trait historically inscribed as feminine - yoked with his capacity to handle - to maintain restraint - implicitly ridicules the absurdity of homo/hetero – masculine /feminine binaries, and as a result, he must be punished and expelled.

However, once this riddle of self/other distinction is disrupted, it cannot easily be re-established, creating a chaotic site of anxiety that gets acted out against the feminine in an effort to assert the masculine. Because Ron has already debunked this system of binary signification, there is no attack, no punishment which can undo this act, the cat has been let out of the bag, so to speak, and any further attention to it will bring the heteronormative male further into question. (This is perhaps why gay-bashing occurs, most often and at its most violent, away from public sight.)

The inter-subjective relation of the non-normative male position and the woman's position, as similarly oppressed subjects under heteronormative patriarchal masculinity, is dramatically enacted as the final party scene reaches a frenetic close, when Howard stages a second, more violent sexual attack on Cary. He begins exclaiming: "I guess you played me for a prize sucker that night at the club, huh? Goin' into that perfect lady routine. Makin' me apologize." Pouncing on her and then tumbling over drunk into a

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[7] Earl Jackson, Jr. has acutely delineated the intrinsic absurdity of active/passive gender roles and the particular position that gay male representation takes up in problematising this binary, in his discussion of male-male anal sex in the film *Take It Like a Man*. Using the inherent contradiction in the film's title as a departure point, Jackson writes: "Dominant male agnostics are suspended in a paradox: any man who refuses a challenge is not a true man; but any man who meets *this* challenge is no longer a man." Although this specific example is of a psychosexual nature, it carries over well in metaphoric terms, to describe the contradiction of how Ron both takes and bears emasculation in *All That Heaven Allows*, making him, paradoxically, both less of a man and more of a man. Earl Jackson, Jr., *Strategies of Deviance*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 20.

[8] For a comprehensive and recent account of types of violence against gays, many of which occurred as a result of transgression of gender norms, see *Hostile Climate: Report on Anti-Gay Activity*. Lead Researcher, Kareem Murphey (Washington D.C., People for the American Way Foundation, 2000).

chair, he draws the attention of the other guests. As Howard attempts to get up for a second attack, Ron approaches and simply asserts, "Maybe you better stay where you are." As Cary and Ron quickly exit the party, a society woman gasps and exclaims (about Ron), "Why, that man was positively murderous." As Norman Bryson notes:

> In tracing to their imagined source the signs of deviant desire, the gaze must itself come to the same knowledge of the sign-language of this Masonic brotherhood that its members and initiates themselves possess; the gaze must leave the zone of decency and respectably and venture out into the zone of forbidden and clandestine communications. (Bryson, 10)

Thus, Ron's resistance to interpellation by heteronormative binaries; his unwillingness to establish his heterosexuality through hetero-aggressive interaction - to take up the fight, so to speak - establishes his presence as a danger to those around him. Accordingly, the guests taxonomize Ron as Other, as a deviant and 'murderous' man, in order to resist implication, for to sympathize with Ron's positions would risk recognizing ("entering the zone" of) the existence of their own potential non-normativity.

Following the party, Cary, back at home, experiences further confrontation from her teenage children. Before storming off, her son Ned exclaims "How can you even think of marrying a man like Kirby when you've been Father's wife?" Once upstairs, Cary finds her daughter Kay crying in her bedroom, in the glow of a (rather psychedelic looking) spotlight coming through a circular, draped window, and beaming stripes of bright red and periwinkle blue across the bed. Sitting down to talk to Kay, Cary's face is covered in a beam of red, denoting her transgressive status, while Kay's is covered in blue, showing the effects of her transgression on her daughter. Kay charges, "You love him so much you're willing to ruin all our lives?" As Kay's talk disintegrates into an alarming extra-diegetic orchestral crescendo, Cary leaves the house to go end her relationship with Ron.

By the film's final scene, both Ron and Cary are exhausted from the succession of confrontations they have been forced to undergo. While Cary has faced rejection by her family and her peers and decided to distance herself from Ron as a result, Ron has sunk into a melancholic state of illness, after a near fatal accident (he falls off a roadside cliff, chasing after Cary, below in her car) leaves him bedridden. Having returned to her

formal grey suit dress, Cary is shown pacing around her darkened living room, her sadness punctuated by a midnight blue light seeping through draped windows. As Ron's friend Alida arrives to inform Cary of Ron's condition, she rushes off. Arriving at Ron's, Cary finds him asleep and under the care of a nurse. Just like Cary's, his house is also drenched in dark blue shades of light. Cary decides to stay that night and in the morning, under a wash of 'natural' daylight pouring through Ron's floor-to-ceiling window, the two reconcile to live their lives together as Cary delivers the film's final line "Yes, darling, I've come home."

Although the couple completes the required tropes of classical Hollywood cinema in their decision to unite by the film's close, the preceding hour and a half of film calls into question and destabilizes this trope to such an excessive degree that any prescriptive imperative the trope might hold is undoubtedly undermined. Barbara Klinger notes:

> like opera, a form prone to camp appreciation, the anguished machinations of such plots can appear so excessive as to create the kind of clash with plausible dramatic logic enjoyed by the camp practitioner. (145)

However, the camp practitioner may do far more than simply enjoy *All That Heaven Allows:* in recognizing how the film works within a register of performative camp vernacular, its incongruencies offer more than an implausible logic. Through the process of distanciation, the film draws attention to highly specific and meaningful incongruencies, specifically in regards to challenging hegemonic heteronormitive ideology.

Vitally, though, *All That Heaven Allows* not only reveals the ways in which this ideology oppresses and limits the gay subject in representation, but also demonstrates important links between the oppression of the woman and the gay male as existing in inter-related, inter-subjective relationships to one another. While both the film and its title invoke ironically the restrictions, limitations and oppression of heteronormative bourgeois life, they can also be read as a provocation to consider - all that heaven could allow, if its subjects so desired.

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