

Cinéaste. Queer. Portlander.

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The era of idyllic black characters à la Sidney Poitier preceded the current moment of perfectly likable gay characters in movies—like Rupert Everett or something, who is sort of devoid of any real sexual life of his own but is just the perfect emblem of charm and grace to sort of flatter the female character or whatever in the movies that they're in. They bear a lot of resemblance to each other, those redemptive historical revisions—basically, our great liberal tradition in Hollywood.

I wasn't trying to be overly critical of [Frank] either; I just wanted him to be human. I wanted you to feel at least how really impossible a place he was standing in—that there was no model for him, no example for how to experience what he was experiencing. He was an exemplary father in terms of everything he'd tried to create in his life, but he gave all of that stability up to go do something unavoidable inside himself.

But that would make him a real bitch to be around sometimes, as it would anybody. It would be really tough, and you often take it out on the people closest to you, and sometimes the people nicest to you get you the most irritable. That's just really human, you know? So I wanted him to be painfully human.

CM: Do you have hopes for *Far from Heaven* in terms of reaching a wider audience?

TH: I do, I really do. Not for personal gain—in fact, that part kind of scares me a bit—but simply because I just want people's moms and grandmothers to go, I really do.

I think what's so curious about this movie—and what already seems to be evident—is the crossover in the press from very mainstream press to more erudite, highbrow sectors who have been more the people who have followed my work, which is very unusual for me and very exciting and demonstrates a range of ways that people can enter into this movie.

CM: I really hesitate to call this a message film, but did you want people to think about certain issues?

TH: Well, I think it's pretty much on the surface what the issues are, which is, again, unusual for my movies, except it is on the surface in a very radical way.

The reason why it's not a message film is that there is no articulated message. Message movies, and most movies today that are dramatic where we expect a kind of resolution or realization at the end, require a character to articulate what they've learned and how

I mean, I had wonderful, creative friends in New York, but you get very boxed in there, and you guard your time and space in a way that you don't as much in other places. People, even when they know my work, it's just not the first thing they have to talk about. They don't ask, "What do you do?" first like they do in New York. It's nice. It's like they trust you first as a person here, and that's great.

CM: Are you loving Portland enough to stay?

TH: Oh, yeah, I bought a house! I'm here! I live here. I have an Oregon driver's license...I contribute to the economy...and it's been great; it's really good.

CM: *Far from Heaven* is obviously inspired by the films of Douglas Sirk. Tell me about your first exposure to his work.

TH: It was at Brown University, where I was involved in the film program.... My professor, Michael Silverman, showed them in some class. I think the first one I did see was *All That*

Above: Todd Haynes creates the perfect 1950s American family—complete with skeletons in the closet—in *Far from Heaven*. Below: What imprisons desires of the heart? Racism and homophobia.

Heaven Allows, and I was immediately taken by the look of them, and I didn't know exactly how to approach them emotionally or intellectually right away. You know, there was something going on there that was really definitive and intense and a little foreboding because these worlds are so claustrophobic and so self-reflexive, so it took a little time to [pauses] figure them out, I guess, for myself.

But they stuck with me for sure, and they definitely spilled into my immediate interest in [queer German filmmaker Rainer Werner] Fassbinder, who had died around that time, and who you were seeing a lot of back then because there were a lot of retrospectives and stuff. So the Sirk/Fassbinder link became pretty well pronounced for me.

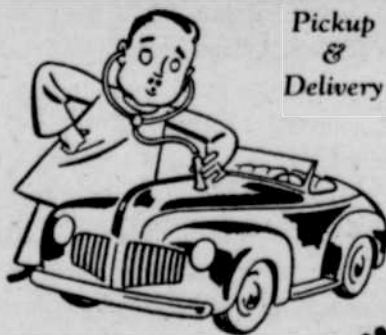


CM: The character of Frank in *Far from Heaven* is a gay man engaging in domestic violence and being dismissive of "Negro rights." Was this your signal that gay liberation is not the end-all—that there are other issues, and you can't really have one without the other?

TH: There was a little bit of that wanting to kind of challenge the liberal drive to redemptive depictions of minorities, whoever and whatever they are.

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