



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Carol

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Patricia Highsmith's 1952 lesbian love story *Carol*, originally a pseudonymously published million-selling pulp fiction, *The Price of Salt*, is the only non-crime novel she wrote. Yet Todd Haynes's masterfully intelligent and meticulous screen adaptation links it smartly to her transgression-packed oeuvre from the get-go. For love is the crime here. Wealthy housewife Carol and callow shopgirl Therese's slow-burning passion is an offence against society, for which they are hunted, and Carol punished.

Haynes's continuing fascination with women trapped by social norms runs back as far as *Safe's* life-allergic trophy housewife, through *Far from Heaven's* doomed interracial love and *Mildred Pierce's* class tensions. In *Carol*, which is to some extent a companion piece to *Far from Heaven*, the master of postmodern melodrama and loving pastiche has created instead a swooning yet adroitly understated love story. A knowing, heartfelt lesbian do-over of the Old Hollywood template for impossible romance, *Carol* wears its yearning as stylishly as Cate Blanchett's patrician Carol sports Sandy Powell's gorgeously fitted 50s costumes, her popping red hats, scarves and curvy mouth hinting at banked fires.

Elegant restraint is the film's watchword – it seduces its audience as nimbly as it does Rooney Mara's awestruck Therese. We're reeled in by the exquisite dance of gestures exchanged over a crackling martini-fuelled lunch or an elaborately innocent upstate New York visit: darting eye meets, questioning glances, shared smiles. This low-key courtship is daringly unhurried but deftly punctuated with tiny eroticised details that keep it bubbling. When it boils, the lovemaking is a decorous, retro flurry of bare backs and tumbled heads, the women's intimacy kept private from us. In this enjoyably deliberate film, each shot and scene is carefully composed to pay homage to 50s cinema, yet infused with an emotional ambiguity which feels decidedly contemporary.

The other fine romance is that of Highsmith and Haynes, or perhaps it's a love triangle once you've factored in Phyllis Nagy's fine, spare script. Faithful to the book's plotting, the film makes its own heady mood, distinct from the loucher, more sardonic feel of the novel. Nagy's script nimbly opens up Carol's home life and her confident carapace, and subtly swings around late on to make her the needier partner. Like *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), this is a recreation that deepens and even enriches its source material.

Eschewing *Far from Heaven's* Sirkian Technicolor, Haynes's early-50s is a more sober, post-war vision, with a subdued but intense colour palette, pitch-perfect New York settings and bustling, wet-street feel inspired by New York

photographers such as Saul Leiter. Carter Burwell's swelling Philip Glass-ish score and Ed Lachman's cinematography frame the reserved lovers eloquently. Often gazing through internal windows or doorways to separate or distance characters, the camera is elaborately watchful. Capable of dissecting a stifling Wasp party in a single shot or dwelling lovingly on a curvy Packard, Haynes skewers as well as limns the 50s here. Men are the era's moral enforcers – chiefly Carol's controlling country-club-catch of an ex-husband Harge, who tears her away from Therese and into therapy for 'deviancy' to retain access to her child. Casting Kyle Chandler (effectively America's ideal husband after TV's *Friday Night Lights*) is a sly but inspired stroke. Watching him grab, slur and threaten is the women's picture equivalent of Henry Fonda's shock villainy in *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968).

But the film is overwhelmingly sustained by the two excellent performances at its heart. Blanchett's is the more studied portrayal – playfully predatory, with blond furs, deep voice and slanting eyes. Her Carol has a screen-siren allure, keeping both camera and lover rapt, even when nerves and misery shake her fine facade. Gazing despairingly at a phone during a forbidden call, she's almost Garbo-esque. Her sleek opacity is beautifully complemented by Mara's tender, enraptured timidity, gradually emboldened by love and suffering. Swinging between hope and fear as their risky liaison unfurls, she's astonishingly good.

Fans of the exuberantly po-mo, subversive and self-referential Haynes will have to dig deep to find what they love in *Carol*, but it's there. The cerebral, playfully cinephile archness of *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) and *Far from Heaven* (2002) has become a game of subtle signals. There's a narrative bookending that blows a big kiss to *Brief Encounter* (1945), as do the couple's damped down emotional encounters. Sparks of Joan Crawford camp erupt in Carol's growl – 'Just when you think it can't get any worse, you run out of cigarettes' – and in her grandstanding defiance of an all-male custody meeting. 'The Gaze' is consciously manipulated through every cheekbone-grazing close-up. But it's all resolutely in the service of the film's intoxicating love story, and Haynes pulls it off magnificently. Nowhere more so than in the last scene, where his leading ladies create a wordless but glorious finale that outdoes even Highsmith's high note.

Kate Stables, *Sight & Sound*, December 2015

CAROL

Director: Todd Haynes
©: Number 9 Films (Carol) Limited,
Channel Four Television Corporation
A Karlsen/Woolley/Number 9 Films/Killer Films production
In association with: Larkhark Films Limited, Compton Investments
Developed with the assistance of: Film4, Good Machine
Developed with the support of the: BFI Film Fund
Produced by: Larkhark Films Limited
Presented by: Film4, StudioCanal, INfilm
In association with: HanWay Films Ltd, Goldcrest, Dirty Films
Executive Producers: Tessa Ross, Dorothy Berwin, Thorsten Schumacher,
Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Danny Perkins, Cate Blanchett,
Andrew Upton, Robert Jolliffe
Produced by: Elizabeth Karlsen, Stephen Woolley, Christine Vachon
Co-produced by: Gwen Bialic
For Number 9 Films: Head of Production: Joanna Laurie; *Head of*
Development: Kate Lawrence; *Business and Legal Affairs:* Kate Wilson;
Accountant: John Morgan; *Production Legal Services:* Sheridans, Robin
Hilton, James Kay, Nick Mahara
For Goldcrest Films: Head of Production:
Gretchen McGowan; *Head of Business Affairs:* Claire Warnes
For Film4: Head of Film Finance: Harry Dixon; *Head of Production:*
Tracey Josephs; *Head of Editorial:* Rose Garnett; *Senior Development*
Editor: Eva Yates; *Head of Commercial and Brand Strategy:* Susie Bruce-
Smith; *Brand and Marketing Executive:* Hannah Saunders
For Studiocanal: Head of UK Development:
Dan McRae; *Head of UK Legal and Business Affairs:* Stephen Murphy
Unit Production Managers: Gwen Bialic, Karri O'Reilly
Production Co-ordinator: Meredith Nunnikhoven
Production Accountant: Shellie Gillespie
Location Manager: Deirdre Costa
Post-production Supervisor: Gretchen McGowan
Researcher: Jim Warren
1st Assistant Director: Jesse Nye
2nd Assistant Director: Kyle Lemire
2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Derek Rimelspach
Script Supervisor: Belle Francisco
Casting by: Laura Rosenthal
Screenplay by: Phyllis Nagy
Based on the novel The Price of Salt *by:* Patricia Highsmith
Director of Photography: Ed Lachman
A Camera Operator: Craig Haagensen
B Camera Operator: Jeff Barklage
Gaffer: John Deblau
Key Grip: James McMillan
Stills Photography: Wilson Webb
Visual Effects Producer: Chris Haney
VFX from: Goldcrest, The Mill
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Kenneth Coulman Jr
Film Editor: Affonso Gonçalves
Assistant Editor: Perri Pivovar
Production Designer: Judy Becker
Art Director: Jesse Rosenthal
Art Department Co-ordinator: Deborah Stratus
Set Decorator: Heather Loeffler
Buyer: Sarah Young
Property Master: Daniel Fisher

Costume Designer: Sandy Powell
Assistant Costume Designers: Meghan Corea, Christopher Peterson
Costume Supervisor: David Davenport
Department Head Make-up: Patricia Regan
Make-up Artists: Ashley Flannery, Jeni Dinkel
Department Head Hair: Jerry DeCarlo
Key Hair Stylist: Anne Taylor
Title Design: Marlene McCarty
Colourist: John Dowdell
Music: Carter Burwell
Music Supervisor: Randall Poster
Production Sound Mixer: Geoff Maxwell
Sounds Designer/Mixer: Leslie Shatz
Sound Effects Editor: James Redding
Supervising Dialogue/ADR Editor: Eliza Paley
Foley Editor: Lidia Tamplenizza
Special Effects Consultant: Dieter Sturm
Dolby Sound Consultant: Steve F.B. Smith

Cast

Cate Blanchett (*Carol Aird*)
Rooney Mara (*Therese Belivet*)
Sarah Paulson (*Abby Gerhard*)
Jake Lacy (*Richard Semco*)
John Magaro (*Dannie McElroy*)
Corey Michael Smith (*Tommy Tucker*)
Carrie Brownstein (*Genevieve Cantrell*)
Kevin Crowley (*Fred Haymes*)
Nik Pajic (*Phil McElroy*)
Kyle Chandler (*Harge Aird*)
Trent Rowland (*Jack Taft*)
Sadie Heim, Kennedy Heim (*Rindy Aird*)
Amy Warner (*Jennifer Aird*)
Michael Haney (*John Aird*)
Wendy Lardin (*Jeanette Harrison*)
Pamela Haynes (*Roberta Walls*)
Greg Violand (*Jerry Rix*)
Michael Ward (*shipping clerk*)
Kay Geiger (*McKinley Motel manager*)
Christine Dye (*landlady*)
Deb G. Girdler (*motel clerk*)
Douglas Scott Sorenson (*male party guest*)
Ken Strunk (*Ritz bartender*)
Mike Dennis (*Frankenberg security guard*)
Ann Reskin (*Florence*)
Annie Kalahurka (*embarrassed mom*)
Linnea Bond (*Drake hostess*)
Steve Andrews (*New York Times clerk*)
Tanya Smith (*Fred Haymes' secretary*)
Ryan Gilreath (*NYC waiter*)
Chuck Gillespie (*Oak Room waiter*)
Jeremy Parker (*Dorothy*)
Giedre Bond (*party girl #1*)
Taylor Marie Frey (*party girl #2*)

UK/USA 2014©

118 mins

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