

Handout on Sirk/*Mise-en-scene*
Fall 2008
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All That Heaven Allows (USA, 1955)

Director: Douglas Sirk
Producer: Ross Hunter
Screenplay: Peg Fenwick
Based on a story by Edna L. Lee and Harry Lee
Director of Photography: Russell Metty

Cary Scott – Jane Wyman
Ron Kirby – Rock Hudson
Sara Warren – Agnes Moorehead
Harvey – Conrad Scott
Alida Anderson – Virginia Gray
Kay Scott – Gloria Talbot

Mise-en-scene which means, literally, “putting into the scene,” refers to all of the elements the director places in the film frame before the viewer in order to elicit an emotional response. Mise-en-scene has a lot to do with how film makes meaning (and how this meaning is bound up with emotion).

One of the most important aspects of *mise-en-scene* in this film is Jane Wyman’s performance as Cary Scott. Pay attention to her facial expressions (including her eyes), and the way she responds to others. Notice how Sirk frames her in relation to other characters, showing us how they view her and, by extension, how she *internalizes* their perceptions of her (including the ways others literally look at her). Pay careful attention to the setting, lighting, color, costumes, props or motifs, as well as the staging (acting and movement) in the film (these are the major aspects of mise-en-scene). (Hint: for a sense of the importance of this, notice the flowers on the table in one of the opening scenes.) Note that the film was shot on a soundstage and Hollywood lot—*it’s all fake*, or rather *constructed*. Make note of what you see in the film. (Hint: there are important scenes with windows, mirrors, screens, shadows, nature etc.) Pay attention to how these aspects of framing—the *artifice* of film—create *meaning*.