

## Study Questions on *All That Heaven Allows*

HUM 425 Spring 2017

These questions do not replace those on the old “Handout” on the film but are meant to add to them.

1. As Fassbinder writes: “Douglas Sirk's films are descriptive films. Very few close-ups. Even in shot/countershot sequences, the partner is always partly visible in the frame.” This happens throughout the film. Pay attention to how Cary (Jane Wyman) is framed in relation to others. This framing highlights how others view her, and how she views herself in relation to others (i.e. internalizes things); in short, an entire social world (thus, the emphasis is on society, and not on the individual).
2. Remember, this film is from 1955. It is not cut (edited) the way films are today. It is going to be slower. This is going to be more difficult for you to watch. Pay attention to all of the elements of *mise-en-scène* outlined in the handout. That should keep you occupied. Get lost in the artifice of the film. Pay attention to how that artifice relates to what the director is trying to convey.
3. The narrative is going to trick you. Look for ways the narrative says one thing and Sirk's staging shows us something else entirely. This is particularly important when looking for what is referred to in the interview as the “prison iconography” of his films. Pay attention to that “prison iconography”—and, generally, anything that would indicate separation.
4. The studio loved the title of the film because it thought God was wonderful, bountiful, and allowed everything. Sirk thought the exact opposite: that heaven was “stingy” with what it allowed women in society. Thus, the titles in his films often have dual meanings that are intentionally subversive. Keep this in mind when watching the film.
5. Note Cary's interest in Ron's work and life in the opening scene (a still from which is on page 80 of the Fassbinder essay). Why does she say she wonders if she should take up gardening? What is it that Cary wants that Ron has?
6. Pay attention to how Cary and her friend Sarah talk about what women have in this society and the things they have to fill their lives with; the things they are “allowed” to have or do.
7. Remember: Sirk could not come out and critique American society in the narratives of his films. He had to hide it (in the *mise-en-scène*). This is why there is a divergence between the narrative (on the surface of things) and what is shown.