

## Carol

For those film fans with a taste for diligent literary adaptations *and* stunning period settings, look no further than Todd Haynes picture “Carol.” Based on a Patricia Highsmith semi-autobiographical novel “The Price of Salt,” this picture traces a forbidden affair between a haughty, but troubled, society dame Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett) and a department store clerk Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara) in the New York of the early 1950’s. This one is already proving to be a critic’s favorite as the movie year comes to an end.



After young, somewhat unfocused Therese is smitten when Carol appears at her store counter, the latter invites her to a downtown lunch, and then suggests she visit her at her posh suburban home in New Jersey, where Carol has become a bit of a captive after she and her anxious husband Harge (Kyle Chandler) have agreed to divorce. In her own life, Therese has dreams of becoming a photographer and wonders about an uncertain future with her bumptious boyfriend Richard (Jake Lacy).

Carol’s principal concern with the divorce proceedings is retaining some custody of her beloved daughter Rindy. Her other concern, less maternal, is seeing more of Therese, which results in the two of them undertaking a wayward, scandalous road trip to the Midwest. The trip allows them to finally consummate their love while at the same time providing an opportunity for a private investigator hired by Harge to catch them in flagrante, thereby smashing Carol’s sheltered life and overturning that of Therese. Whether the two women will ever get together is left open.

Director Haynes has carefully assayed this territory before, in his throwback masterpiece “Far From Heaven” (2002), which also has a 1950’s setting, so you can be assured that he gets the period couture, décor, and furnishings just right. There is plenty to admire in this regard with period cars, smart hats, mink coats, and elegant gloves (which prove to be a key prop). There is also an affecting, subliminal score from composer Carter Burwell. You can also count on the right bearing from Blanchett, who sports just the right makeup and wardrobe to go with her moneyed character, a chilly lady with latent potential for warmth (signaled by an earlier affair she has had with Abby, played by Sarah Paulson, now her best friend and confidante).

My only question is whether the chemistry ever really works between the worldly Blanchett and the naive Mara (best known for her feisty portrayal of “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”). In this film, the young actress certainly displays a vulnerable aspect, but her relative lack of spunk or spirit makes it hard to fathom Carol’s low-boil pursuit of her, unless it is as some kind of lackey. A crucial dynamic is thus missing for me, but one can always enjoy the accessories.

*(The film is rated “R” for nudity and sexual situations and runs 118 mins.)*