

Imitation of Life (1959) Douglas Sirk

P Michell, 2024

Aspiring actress Lora Meredith meets Annie Johnson a homeless black woman at Coney Island and soon they share a tiny apartment. Each woman has an intolerable daughter, though Annie's little girl Sarah Jane, is by far the worse. Neurotic and obnoxious, Sarah Jane doesn't like being black; since she's light-skinned (her father was 'practically white'), she spends the rest of the film passing as white, much to her mother's heartache and shame. Lora, meanwhile, virtually ignores her own daughter in a single-minded quest for stardom.

[alfiehitchie \(imd.com\)](#)

When Sirk retired after *Imitation* (he was to make only one more feature length film, in German, in 1963), his reputation was that of a second- or third-tier director who turned out glossy Hollywood soap operas, a sort of second-rate [Vincente Minnelli](#) without the saving grace of Minelli's undeniable genius for musicals. In the sixty years since, Sirk has become one of the most revered of Hollywood's auteurs.

Sirk's films have been quoted in films by directors such as [Rainer Werner Fassbinder](#) (whose *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* is partly based on *All That Heaven Allows*)^[15] and, later, [Quentin Tarantino](#), [Todd Haynes](#), [Pedro Almodóvar](#), [Wong Kar-wai](#), [David Lynch](#), [John Waters](#) and [Lars von Trier](#).

More specifically, Almodóvar's vibrant use of color in 1988's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* recalls the cinematography of Sirk's films of the 1950s. while Haynes' *Far from Heaven* was a conscious attempt to replicate a typical Sirk melodrama—in particular *All That Heaven Allows*.^[16]

Selective Creative Personnel:

Douglas Sirk – Director (48 credits)

Born Hans Detlef Sierck on April 26, 1900, in Hamburg, Germany, to a journalist.

Studied Law, but quickly became engulfed in Berlin theatre milieu.

By the 1930s Sirk had become one of Germany's leading stage directors, with a list of credits that included a production of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*. Sirk joined [UFA](#) (Universum Film AG) studios in 1934, where he directed three shorts, followed by his first feature, *April*, *April* (1935), which was filmed in both German and Dutch versions. His exotic [melodramas](#) *Zu neuen Ufern* and *La Habanera* made a star of the Nazi cinema out of Swedish singer [Zarah Leander](#).

His reputation, which was breathed to life by the French nouvelle vague critiques who developed the "auteur" (author) theory of film criticism, casts him as one of the cinema's great ironists. In his American and European films, his characters perceive their lives quite differently than does the movie audience viewing "them" in a theater. Dealing with love, death and societal constraints, his films often depend on melodrama, particularly the high-suds soap operas he lensed for producer [Ross Hunter](#) in the 1950s: [Magnificent](#)

[Obsession](#) (1954), [All That Heaven Allows](#) (1955) and his last American film, [Imitation of Life](#) (1959).

[Douglas Sirk](#) worked gently with his actors. Rather than dictating the way a scene should be played, he would take each actor aside, suggest what he wanted and asked how he or she felt about it.

Senses of Cinema by Tom Ryan:

Much of Sirk's critical reputation currently rests on four of the melodramas he made during the 1950s: *All That Heaven Allows*, *Written on the Wind*, *The Tarnished Angels* and *Imitation of Life*. Some recognition has been given to three other films from this period, including *All I Desire* (1953), *There's Always Tomorrow*, and *A Time To Love And A Time To Die*. And four of the films he made in Germany – *Stutzen der Gesellschaft*, his 1935 adaptation of Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*, *Schlussakkord*, the Australia-set *Zu Neuen Ufern* (*To Distant Shores*, 1937) and *La Habanera* – have received a limited amount of critical attention.

Excellent article here:

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/great-directors/sirk/>

In the early 1970s a new generation of film scholars, notably Thomas Elsaesser, Paul Willemen, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, and Fred Camper, “rediscovered” Sirk's films, hailing them as supreme examples of a subversive critique of postwar American society expressed through stylized mise-en-scène drawing on irony and Brechtian alienating devices. [This was taught to Media Studies students at RMIT in mid 1970s.]

Sirk's work has influenced many subsequent filmmakers including Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Martin Scorsese, John Waters, Pedro Almodóvar, Jonathan Demme, and Todd Haynes."

<http://www.theyshootpictures.com/sirkdouglas.htm>

Ross Hunter– Producer (60 credits)

Original name Martin Fuss. Actor before becoming a producer. Over 40 years with partner Jacques Mapes (producer/set decorator – did the sets for *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) but not for Sirk films).

60 films mostly for Universal.

Most of his films tended to be bright confections - with stars such as [Debbie Reynolds](#), and [Julie Andrews](#) - or 'three-hankie' remakes of films such as [Imitation of Life](#) (1959), which resurrected the career of [Lana Turner](#). His production principle was that audiences should leave the theater either laughing or crying. His biggest success was the film [Airport](#) (1970), for which he received his only Oscar nomination. It was such a success that in 1973, he noted that "for three years, Universal's been living on Airport."

Quotes: *"The films weren't great, but they weren't supposed to be ... I gave the public what they wanted a chance to dream, to live vicariously, to see beautiful women, jewels, gorgeous clothes, melodrama."*

“The way life looks in my pictures is the way I want life to be. I don't to hold a mirror up to life as it is. I just want to show the part which is attractive.”

Frank Skinner – composer (401 credits)

Worked mostly for Universal. Famous for Sirk melodramas & horror films! Started off in Hollywood as arranger for The Great Ziegfeld filmed at MGM (1936). His 'Oh Shenandoah' from the film (1965) became popular. Wrote many books on composing and arranging.

Rusell A Gausman - Set decoration (738 credits!) & Julia Heron (126 credits)

Both did Spartacus (1960) and Heron did Lubitsch's To Be or Not to Be (1942) and much TV work inc Alfred Hitchcock Presents – 44 episodes.

Eleanore Griffin - Co - Scriptwriter (adaption) (24 credits)

Work includes 'Harvey Girls (1946), Only Angels Have Wings (1939)

Her contribution to Universal's 1959 remake [Imitation of Life \(1959\)](#), [Fannie Hurst's](#) novel, was largely forgotten due to the film being almost wholly attributed to [Douglas Sirk](#), a main beneficiary of the auteur theory that elevated the director to the status of a film's sole author (which is rather ridiculous within the industrial paradigm of Hollywood film, particularly in a factory such as Universal, which ground out product for the Big and little screens like so much sausage).

Griffin worked as a screenwriter for almost 30 years, but ironically, "Boys Town"(1938 co-written with Dore Schary) would remain the summit of her achievement. Part of this was due to the exigencies of studio production, in which even a highly paid screenwriter would win an Oscar one year and be penning B-picture potboilers the next. However, it was the vertical integration of the studios, which was complete by the time she established herself in Hollywood in the late 1930s, that likely limited her career, as it did all women from the mid-1930s to the turn of the century.

Much more of this excellent biog here:

http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0341178/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

Russell Metty - Cinematography (168 credits)

One of Hollywood's 'grand masters' of cinematography. Skilful practitioner in both B&W and colour. Worked with Sirk on 10 films at Universal.

Known for Spartacus (1960) [academy award], Touch of Evil (1958), Bringing up Baby (1938), Flower Drum Song (1961), The Misfits (1961).

A superb craftsman who worked with such top directors as John Huston, Stanley Kubrick, Steven Spielberg and Orson Welles, was born in Los Angeles. Entering the movie industry as a lab assistant, Metty apprenticed as an assistant cameraman and graduated to lighting cameraman at RKO Radio Pictures in 1935. Metty's ability to create effects with black-and-white contrast while shooting twilight and night were on display in two films he shot for Orson Welles, [The Stranger](#) (1946) and the classic [Touch of Evil](#)

(1958), the latter showing his mastery of complex crane shots. (Metty shot additional scenes for Welles' second masterpiece, "The Magnificent Ambersons", whose lighting cameraman was [Stanley Cortez](#) but had the look of "Citizen Kane", which was shot by [Gregg Toland](#).) His collaboration with director Stanley Kubrick on [Spartacus](#) (1960) proved troublesome.

Lana Turner – Lora (58 credits)

Famous Hollywood actress known for roles such as: *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1976), *Johnny Eager* (1941), *Madame X* (1966), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952). Career is in two parts – before and post *Imitation of Life*.

Without a doubt her private life was a threat to her public career. She was married eight times. She also battled alcoholism. In yet another scandal, her daughter, [Cheryl Crane](#), fatally stabbed Lana's boyfriend, gangster Johnny Stompanato, in 1958. It was a case that would have rivaled the [O.J. Simpson](#) murder case. Cheryl was acquitted of the murder charge, with the jury finding that she had been protecting her mother from Stompanato, who was savagely beating her, and ruled it justifiable homicide. These and other incidents interfered with Lana's career, but she persevered. The release of [Imitation of Life \(1959\)](#), was Lana's comeback vehicle. Her performance as Lora Meredith was flawless. The film was a box-office success and proved beyond a doubt that Lana had not lost her edge.

Juanita Moore – Annie Johnson (83 credits)

Known for this, *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962), *The Singing Nun* (1966), *Two Moon Junction* (1988).

Film, television, and stage actress. She was the fifth [African American](#) to be nominated for an [Academy Award](#) in any category, and the third in the Supporting Actress category at a time when only a single African American had won an Oscar.

Moore was a [chorus girl](#) at the [Cotton Club](#) before becoming a film [extra](#) while working in theater. After making her film debut in *Pinky* (1949), she had a number of bit parts and supporting roles in [motion pictures](#) through the 1950s and 1960s. However, her role in *Imitation of Life* (1959), won her a nomination for an [Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress](#). She was also nominated for the [Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture](#) for the role.

Although she has the second largest role in the film, [Juanita Moore](#) was billed seventh, behind actors with much smaller roles. As some form of compensation, her on-screen billing reads "presenting Juanita Moore as Annie Johnson," but that credit didn't make it into the film's advertising.

The film includes many young and older actors who were household names of the time: Sandra Dee – Susie (aged 18); John Gavin – Steve [Trivia – is Mexican]; Robert Alda – Allen [father of Allan Alda]; Troy Donaghue – Frankie (Sara Jane's abusive boyfriend);

Susan Kohner – Sara Jane (aged 18) (30 credits)

Now almost ninety! Daughter of Sirk's Hollywood agent – Paul Kohner. Was also an agent for clients like [Ingmar Bergman](#), [John Huston](#) and [Billy Wilder](#).

Susan retired from acting in early 1960s. *Imitation* considered her best film. She duly had children inc a son – Paul J Weitz. Is a very successful director (23 credits), writer and producer (34 credits) inc *Mozart in the Jungle* (2014).

Trivia:

Lana Turner's 'comeback' movie. She took a much smaller salary, than her usual \$25,000 per week and worked for 50% of the film's profits, which earned her over \$2 million (setting a record for an actress at the time).

[Douglas Sirk](#)'s last Hollywood film before he retired back to his native Germany.

[Ross Hunter](#) insisted on maintaining a lavish production, despite a tight budget. He always used real flowers on the sets, and the jewelry was the real thing, too, supplied by Laykin et Cie. It was appraised at \$1 million.

Juanita Moore appeared as Annie Johnson in this Douglas Sirk film. Many years later, the Sirkian Technicolor 1950s melodrama homage ***Far from Heaven* (2002)** would star the similarly named Julianne Moore.

The scene of a white doctor treating a black patient would have been daring for the time---even in the greater NYC environs.

After the 1950s the film was often condemned as racist, especially for casting a white actress as Sarah Jane.

Fun but awful ... In 1980 the organizers of the Cannes Film Festival wanted Sirk to be President of the Jury. The telegram sent to their Hollywood office was to read, "Request Douglas Sirk for jury". However, a typo and an extra comma resulted in it reading, "Request Douglas, Kirk for jury". [Kirk Douglas](#) became the President of the 1980 jury.

Interesting

Notes from the landmark book 'Sirk on Sirk' by James Halliday (1971):

Talking about film titles (pp 198):

"... *Imitation of Life* is more than just a good title, it is a wonderful title:, I would have made the picture just for the title, because it is all there – the mirror, and the imitation, what I was saying about Strindberg.

"tried to make it into a picture of social consciousness – not only of a white social consciousness, but of a Negro one, too. Both white and black are leading imitated lives ... There is a wonderful expression: seeing through a glass darkly. Everything, even life, is inevitably removed from you. You can't reach, or touch, the real. You just see

reflection. If you try to grasp happiness itself your fingers only meet glass. Its hopeless.

(pp 214/5) Underlying hopelessness right at the start ... you don't believe the happy end. And you're not really supposed to. What remains in your memory is the funeral. The pomp of the dead, anyway the funeral. You sense its hopeless, even though in a very bare and brief little scene afterwards the happy turn is being indicated They're all sitting in the limousine together – until everything starts to go wrong again, which it would for sure

Reviews:

[Imitation of Life \(from Slant Magazine\)](#)

ED GONZALEZ ON JULY 2, 2003

Rainer Wener Fassbinder and Todd Haynes made it cool to reference Douglas Sirk. But if the esteemed Andrew Sarris hadn't championed the incisiveness of the German-born director's dark humor inside the pages of *Film Culture*, there's no telling if Sirk's rank as one of cinema's premiere auteurist heroes would be as steadfast as it is today. [This does not make reference to the French 'discovery' by Truffaut and Godard.] Sirk's journey to wide critical acceptance has fascinatingly mirrored the very biting irony of his distinctly feminine melodramas. These misunderstood masterpieces (among them *All That Heaven Allows*, *Written on the Wind* and *Imitation of Life*) were often dismissed as salient, weepy "women's pictures" by critics (no doubt the same ones who easily embraced the more masculine melodramas of Vittorio de Sica, Nicholas Ray, and Sam Fuller) too afraid or unwilling to look beneath their complex surfaces.

In Hollywood, Sirk worked with controversial figures like Albert Zugsmith on *Written on the Wind* and, more notably, gay Hollywood producer Ross Hunter on classics like *There's Always Tomorrow*, *Imitation of Life*, *Magnificent Obsession* and *All That Heaven Allows*. But before turning to film in the 1930s, Sirk made a career for himself as a successful theater director in Germany, staging works by the likes of Shakespeare, Shaw, Pirandello, Ibsen and Brecht. Today it's almost impossible to look at Sirk's films without turning to Brecht, whose innovative theories on distancing and alienation are all over films like Fassbinder's *In a Year of 13 Moons*, Sirk's *Imitation of Life* and Lars von Trier's upcoming *Dogville*, a film inspired in part by a song from Kurt Weill and Brecht's famous *Threepenny Opera*, which Sirk had staged in Bremen in 1929.

Brecht's theater looked to move away from the expressionistic works that were popular during his time period. In his essay "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," Brecht details his fascination with the Peking Opera and a Chinese form of performance art that actively rejected Western forms of realism in theater. This self-conscious form of acting stresses theatricality and demands active involvement from both the actor and the spectator. With the fourth wall dutifully dismantled, the audience develops an observant relationship to the play's action that's extremely volatile. In estranging the audience from the material, Brecht believed they could approach a play's many themes seriously and critically. Brecht observes, "We see this theater as uncommonly precious, its portrayal of human passions as schematized, its idea of society as rigid and wrong-headed."

1959's sardonic *Imitation of Life* deals with blond bombshell Lora Meredith's rise to fame and her complicated relationships with a series of carnivorous men, her hot-headed daughter, and her angelic African-American maid Annie Johnson (Juanita Moore). Though Lora (Lana Turner) shuns the love of Steve Archer (John Gavin) and lies in order to further her career, she's still a sympathetic character because Sirk understands that she is just as much a victim as her darling Annie. Lora's seedy agent Albert Loomis (Robert Alda) feeds on her desire for fame, pointing out that she's no spring chicken before suggesting she prostitute herself for success. She's hyper-conscious of her dangerous ambition yet she continues to push away the people around her. "Maybe I should see things as they really are and not the way I want them to be," she acknowledges early on.

The film opens with a shot of diamonds slowly falling into a glass container and filling the frame from top to bottom. Sirk immediately and deliberately acknowledges the precious and artificial nature of the film and, much greater, the film's metaphoric, almost pathological obsession with surfaces (from mirrors to the color of the characters' skins). Both Lora and Steve make a career out of representing the world around them via their art: Lora finds success in the theater with a series of collaborations with playwright David Edwards (Dan O'Herlihy) while Steve lands a major gig at a beer company after selling a picture he took of Lora's daughter Susie (Terry Burnham) and Annie's daughter Sarah Jane (Karin Dicker) on the beaches of Coney Island. Not surprisingly, their art is every bit as grotesquely overwhelming as Sirk's ravishing *mise-en-scène*.

Indeed, just as Steve's picture of young Susie and Sarah Jane balancing a bottle on a sleeping man's fat stomach is a frightening representation of a seemingly innocent day at the beach, beneath the surface of *Imitation of Life* lies the reality of what Sirk rightfully believed was a seriously deranged American society. He is particularly critical yet sensitive to the light-skinned Sarah Jane's dilemma, who prefers her absent father to her dark-skinned mother because "he was practically white," and goes to great lengths to disguise her mixed race. However ghoulish her rejection of her mother may be, Annie sees the opportunity that her daughter's deceptive skin tone permits. Just as Annie resigns herself to a lifetime of subjugation because of her skin color, Sarah Jane looks to give herself a chance at life by emancipating herself from that skin.

The film isn't only revolutionary for its aesthetic rigorousness but its rare fascination with white America's difficulty relating to people of color. Because it embodies so much of Sirk's key themes and aesthetic truths, there's no sadder scene in the film than a dying Annie visiting an older Sarah Jane (Susan Kohner) in Los Angeles after the girl takes a job as a dancer at a club called Moulin Rouge. Sirk's camera violently pans to one side—just as it does earlier when Sarah Jane's white boyfriend beats her after finding out her dirty secret—and forces the girl to look at her face in a mirror as she rejects her race. Despite her overwhelming pain, Annie allows herself to abort her relationship with her daughter because she understands the lonely freedom promised to Sarah Jane by distancing herself from her race. Like Annie says early on in the film: "She was born to be hurt."

Imitation of Life is drunk on the lies and gross assumptions of its characters and the way they feed off of deceptive surfaces. "We didn't know," says a schoolteacher to Annie when she comes looking for her daughter in the woman's classroom. And later when Sarah Jane's friend enters her hotel room, she assumes Annie is a hotel maid and subsequently reads off a list of demands. Because no one asks her about her race, Sarah Jane doesn't feel inclined to speak the truth. Annie is understandably hurt by the girl's don't-ask-don't-tell policy, but Sirk is quick to balance the scales, subversively cutting to a shot of Lora taking Susie's temperature. "Well, you're practically *normal*," she says as she read the thermometer.

It's important to observe *Imitation of Life*'s stifling, mid-point rhetorical shift. As the film flashes forward a decade, the montage of marquee signs celebrate her roles in *Sweet Surrender*, *Happiness*, *Always Laughter* and *Born to Laugh*. Lora, though, looks to branch out into dramatic acting and ditches David for a new drama with a "colored angle" called *No More Laughter* (a self-reflexive wink on Sirk's part to the emotional windfalls still to come). The debonair Steve is back in the picture but feels slighted once more when Lora chooses him over a budding film career. To a certain degree, Steve is a chauvinist but he also recognizes her almost sadistic ability to reject happiness at every turn.

"What you're after isn't real," says Steve to Lora early in the film. He acknowledges his love for her and just as they're about to kiss, a nearby doorbell rings. She pulls away and when she draws close again, the phone inside her apartment rings. And the interruptions continue on and on. Lora seems to always look for a reason to tear away from happiness, and Sirk is more than willing to point out her pathology by repeatedly teasing her with his *mise-en-scène* and the film's sound design. During the film's especially rigorous second half, Sirk frames his characters beneath imposing edifices or shoots them in such a way that he emphasizes their emotional separation from each other (when Susie reveals to Lora that Annie has always been more of a mother, a bed pillar bisects the frame). Every object in the film also seems to point out that everyone here is always in performance mode: the drama masks on the walls of a seedy dance club that reference Sarah Jane's tortured identity and the sad clown paintings that decorate the whole of Lora's home.

Every word and image in the film comes with a double meaning. "My camera could have a love affair with your face," says Steve to Lora not long after they've first met. This sentiment would normally come across more maudlin, but because this is a Douglas Sirk film it carries a subversive undertone. As for the pretty things the nurturing Annie loves to take care of, she's obviously talking about more than Lora's dainty belongings. "Oh, Annie, what would I do without you?" says a selfish Lora to her ailing maid. Sirk never questions Lora's love for Annie but he is critical of the self-centeredness of that love. Despite Annie's devotion to the clueless Lora and her daughter, Lora knows next to nothing about the woman. In order to emphasize this distance, Sirk also chooses to reveal next to nothing about Annie's personal life to the spectator as well. All of this makes the film's final scenes that more emotionally wrenching.

When Lora tells Steve that she must pursue a part in an Italian director's next film

because it could be the best female role since Scarlett O'Hara. In 1940, Hattie McDaniel became the first African-American to win an Academy Award for her supporting role as Scarlett O'Hara's Mammie in the overblown Victor Fleming epic. Sirk is obviously critical of the Lora Merediths and Scarlett O'Haras of the world, women who've redefined slavery inside the domestic home by reducing their "mammies" to mere emotional sounding boards. *Imitation of Life* ends with Moore's Annie Johnson being dramatically hoisted into a hearse as an entire black community mourns her passing. It's a valiant, heartbreaking moment, but if you dig beneath the scene's giddy surface sheen, you may see that Sirk is asking for an instant moratorium on films that further subjugate the role of African-Americans in art and the world itself.

<http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/imitation-of-life>

A four-hanky masterpiece

--Shelly (imdb.com)

The conflict between mothers and daughters has long been a Hollywood plot device. Sometimes it is done badly ("Divine Secrets of the Ya Ya Sisterhood"), sometimes it can be campy (the immortal shriek fest "Mommie Dearest") and sometimes a film does it really well ("Mildred Pierce"). "Imitation of Life", Douglas Sirk's 1959 film starring Lana Turner and Juanita Moore, squarely fits into that last category.

Lora Meredith (Turner) is a young widow, a single parent and struggling actress. One day when she loses her young daughter Susie at the beach, and with the help of a photographer she encounters, Steve Archer (Gavin) she finds her with Annie Johnson (Moore), an African-American woman, and her own young daughter Sarah Jane. After Lora and Annie talk for a bit, we find that Lora is having a hard time juggling her career with having a young child, and that Annie and her daughter are newly arrived in town and do not have a place to stay, so after Annie asks to work for Lora in exchange for room and board, they strike up a close friendship, as do their daughters. The film spans about ten years, and during those ten years Lora becomes a very successful Broadway actress, and Susie is sent away to an exclusive boarding school. Meanwhile, Annie is still her loyal right-hand, having decided to continue working for Lora, even though she has been putting the money that she has earned away. Sarah Jane, however, a very light-skinned girl who is able to pass as white, cannot get past her hatred of her own race, and her embarrassment of her mother's color and position. She is continually scheming and running away in order to rid herself of her true heritage, which ends up literally breaking her mother's heart.

"Imitation of Life" is outwardly a very pretty film with gorgeous coloring, beautiful actors and costumes to die for. When this veneer is peeled back, however, the true nature of the film is revealed, and its conflicts are painfully apparent. Lora and Steve are clearly meant to be together, but her career repeatedly gets in the way until Steve is no longer able to sit by idly, waiting for her while realizing that he is always going to be low on her priority list. While Sarah Jane envies Lora and Susie's looks, money and ultimately, color, it quickly becomes clear that their problems are substantial. While they had a close

relationship when Susie was six, with the advent of Lora's career, the love Lora had for Susie did not diminish, but her attention and time for her did. When Susie returns home from a break at school, it is in her mother's absence that she latches on to Steve, (newly reunited with the family after ten years) and ultimately falls in love with him. In regard to Annie and Sarah Jane, there is nothing that the kind-hearted, completely selfless Annie can do to appease her daughter, a realization that is so hurtful that it makes her physically sick.

The great Douglas Sirk weaves all of these conflicts masterfully. Sirk, often marginalized as a "fluff piece" director due to the strong melodramatic content of his films, is at his very best with this film. "Imitation of Life" does not stray from his other films in terms of formula: We have a conflict that is socially relevant and somewhat inflammatory, beautiful actors and actresses playing the part, rich, lush colors throughout the entire production and loads of expensive jewelry and costumes. While there are Douglas Sirk movies that I really like for their camp value ("Magnificent Obsession" immediately comes to mind), "Imitation of Life" is so much more. Just when you're about to laugh at a line or a gesture that seems really over the top, Sirk beats you to it. The best example of this is when Lora and Susie are having a fight over the fact that Susie has fallen in love with Steve, after Lora announces their intention to marry. When Lora looks directly at the camera, puts a stoic look on her face and says in her best Joan Crawford imitation, "Then I'll give him up", Susie immediately says grimly, "Oh mother, don't act for me." The performances by the actors are all good, particularly the Oscar-nominated performances of Moore and Kohner. Here's a warning about the film, however – chances are, you'll cry.

"Imitation of Life" has both beauty and substance. It is a multi-layered film wrapped up in an exquisite little package, which is often cast away as fluff, but is really so much more. Watch it and judge for yourself, but this judge gives it a solid 8/10.