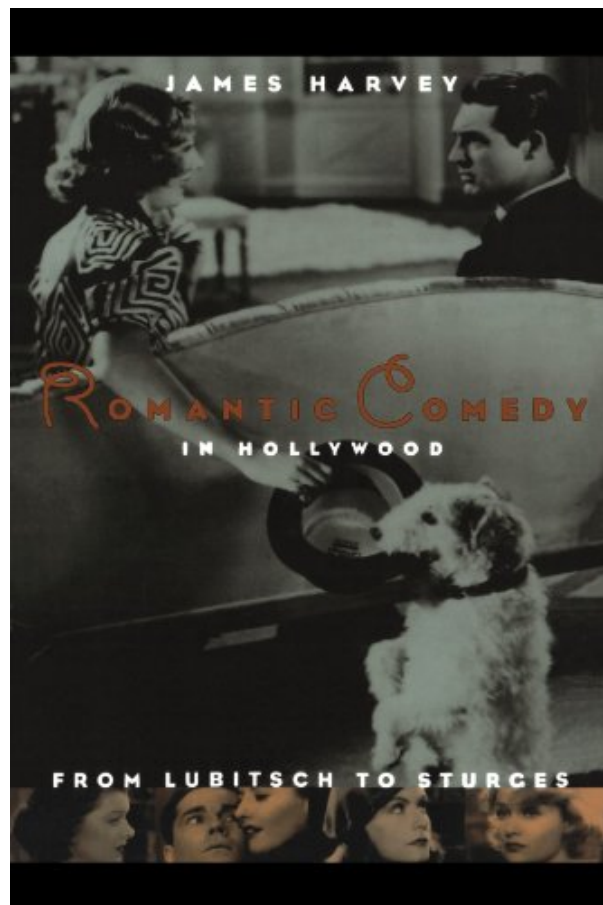
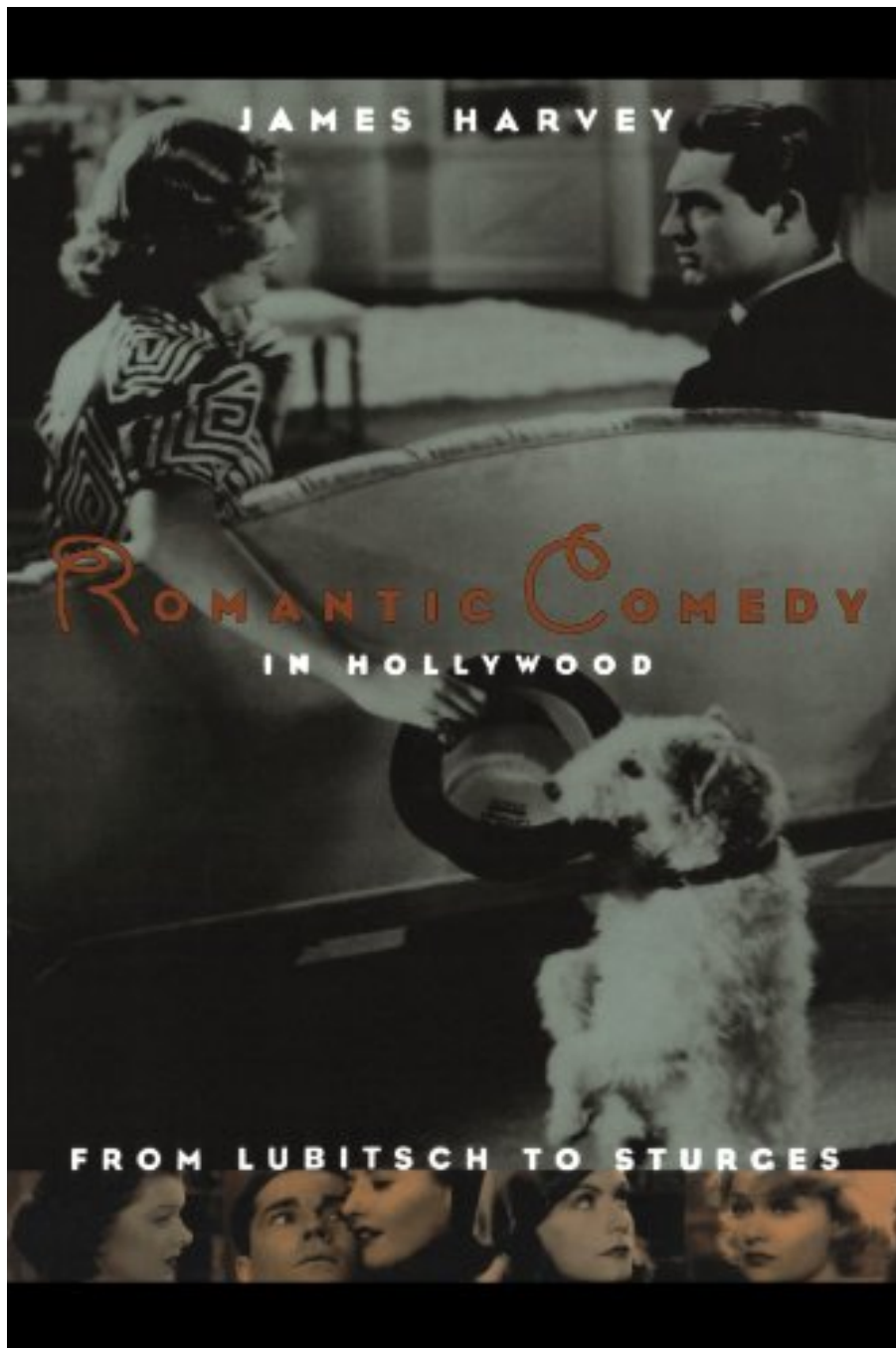


ROMANTIC COMEDY IN HOLLYWOOD: FROM LUBITSCH TO STURGES BY JAMES HARVEY



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Amazon.com Review

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Why is a book titled *Romantic Comedy* such a depressing read? Two reasons: with the disappearance of the nation's revival houses and the movie studios' hesitation to put all but the most popular classic films of the '30s and '40s on video, many of the marvelous movies Harvey describes here are virtually unavailable to contemporary viewers; and, sadly, they don't make them like they used to. A State University of New York teacher, Harvey is an enthusiastic student and devotee of the genre, and he has assembled a wealth of information about its leading directors and performers. But as hard as he tries in his detailed film descriptions, he can't recreate the unique spark that characterized screwball comedies and their antecedents. Of course he can't generations of filmmakers have failed to revive the screwball spirit, whose kinetic blend of polish, pacing and personality cannot possibly be captured by print alone. Nevertheless, like too many writers on the topic of film, Harvey attempts the impossible, and loses readers in a jumble of transcribed entrances, exits and asides that, regrettably, do not play on the page. This is aggravated by Harvey's tendency to spend his analytical energies on attempts to articulate viewers' reactions to the films he discusses trying to pin down exactly how we feel about Barbara Stanwyck in *The Lady Eve*, for example which ultimately

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In 1934 four movies—It Happened One Night, Twentieth Century, The Thin Man, and The Gay Divorcee—ushered in the golden age of the Hollywood romantic ("screwball") comedy. Slangy, playful, and "powerfully, glamorously in love with love," the films that followed were unique in their combination of swank and slapstick. Here are the directors—Lubitsch (Trouble in Paradise), Capra (It Happened One Night), Hawks (Bringing Up Baby, His Girl Friday), McCarey (The Awful Truth), La Cava (My Man Godfrey, Stage Door), Sturges (The Lady Eve, The Palm Beach Story, The Miracle at Morgan's Creek)—and their stars—Carole Lombard, Irene Dunne, Cary Grant, Fred Astaire, Clark Gable, Barbara Stanwyck, William Powell, Myrna Loy, among others—all described and analyzed in one comprehensive and delightful volume.

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Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

one of the best movie books ever

By A Customer

This book is so wonderful, I can't recommend it highly enough. It's making me fall in love with movies all over again. The writing is lucid and intelligent, and Harvey is such a great viewer of films that he makes scenes spring right out of the page. I'm renting lots of movies I've never seen based on his writing about them, and re-watching old favorites with a whole new understanding. If you love movies, buy this book. You won't be sorry.

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

A brainy, articulate romp through Hollywood's golden age ...

By Laurie Eno

... Harvey's book brims with the kind of keen, enthusiastic observations that lovers of the screwball genre will embrace with glee. He casts a thoroughly knowing and intelligent eye on the films, the actors, the directors and the milieu that define what, for many film buffs, was Hollywood's real golden age.

For my money, this is THE de facto handbook to that great twenty years' worth of cinematic Americana. I have loved these old movies for a long time, but Harvey deconstructs why it is that these movies worked well and continue to entertain and draw admirers some seventy and eighty years on. Harvey's engaging prose is steeped not only in an obvious love of these movies, but is remarkably fine in and of itself; this man can write, really write, adroitly sidestepping a swathe of cliches in favor of original thinking and insights that will get and keep you reading, hoping the chapter -- and the book -- will never end.

Reading this book is nearly as much fun as watching the films he writes about with such affection and insight. Rare is the book of film study that affords a measure of tangible pleasure anywhere near that of

watching the films themselves. The best of film criticism gets readers to re-thinking films seen perhaps dozens of times; Harvey's Romantic Comedy accomplishes not only that, but provides an irresistible impetus to revisit the entire canon of films post haste. And not a moment too soon.

Justly lauded, and terrific stuff. A five star-plus recommendation for this terrific tome!!!

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

Defines what's missing from today's comedy

By Ron Dionne

James Harvey does a wonderful job of conveying the ebullience, spirit, humanity and grace of the lightest of golden age Hollywood fare--the romantic comedies. I studied under Prof. Harvey at SUNY Stony Brook and his courses on these films and others (particularly film noir and the films of Robert Bresson) have stayed with me nearly twenty years later, like beacons of taste and good sense. What this book does is describe a mode of being that comes from the studio system. I often rue the fact that today's good movies are almost always "one-shots," utterly individualistic enterprises that seem unrelated to each other in any meaningful way. You can't group today's movies the way you could the films of Lubitsch, Sturges and Hawks. There may indeed be in our time a palate of stars that could rival Cary Grant, Irene Dunne, Barbara Stanwyck, James Stewart, and character actors like William Demarest, Eugene Palette, Al Bridge and Felix Bressart--but they don't have the school of movies to appear in. It's a shame, but it's great that we have those old movies to look at, and books like this one to remind us that there really was a time when adults with grace and wit were simply terrific on the screen.

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