

Glitre, Kathrina. *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-65*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. 224pp.

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Kathrina Glitre's *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-1965* is part of a resurgence of scholarly interest not simply in film genre in general, but in previously unfashionable genres like the Hollywood romantic comedy in particular. The emergence of this body of work dedicated to examining the romantic comedy, likely driven by the mid-1980's resurgence of the genre itself, has, broadly speaking, tended to be characterised by two different strands of work, at least until recently. The first is dominated by an historical focus on early cycles of the genre, but especially the screwball cycle of the 1930s and 1940s, and is epitomised by texts like Elizabeth Kendall's *The Runaway Bride* (1990) and Duane Byrge and Robert Milton Miller's *The Screwball Comedy Films* (1991), two astute studies of the genre's inaugural cycle. The second, and more recent strand focuses on contemporary developments in the genre since its mid 1980's renaissance, typically with an eye towards the genre's changing mediation of gender and sexuality. Inevitably, the most recent examples of this strand are forthcoming and range from the broad—like Stacey Abbott and Deborah Jermyn's edited collection *Falling in Love Again: Romantic Comedy in Post-Classical Cinema* (2008)—to the more focused—like my own *When Carrie Met Sally: Lesbian Romantic Comedies* (2008).

Glitre's *Hollywood Romantic Comedy* is slightly different. She takes an historical focus, like the first strand, by looking at three early cycles of the genre: screwball, career woman, and sex comedies. However, instead of offering the (by now) standard historical overview of each cycle, Glitre teases out the differences between and within these cycles. In a bold move, she does this by focusing on one famous couple from each cycle and one socially relevant aspect of their 'union.' So, in the screwball comedies of the 1930s, Glitre looks at Myrna Loy and William Powell—a veteran rom com couple who appeared in more than 10 films together—and the representation of marriage; in the career woman comedies of the 1940s, she focuses on the inimitable coupling of Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy and the depiction of gender equity (an ostensible feature of the screwball); and, in the sex comedies of the 1950s and 1960s, she looks at Doris Day and Rock Hudson and the presentation of desire. In each instance, Glitre situates the genre's trends in depicting the relationship of its central couple within the context of larger social shifts in the conception of love and romance, from the emergence of companionate marriage (during the screwball era) to the negotiations of gender roles during the first World War (the career woman era)

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and the explosion of individual consumerism after (the sex comedies era). Glitre couples her examination of these films' (and their sub-genre's) engagement with their context(s), with a consideration of the celebrity of her six stars, such as through articles about or pictures of them in magazines like *Playboy* and *Life Magazine*. Taken together, Glitre's approach is comprehensive.

It's also genuinely insightful.

In taking such care to examine the details and nuances of the "union" of each couple, Glitre also destabilises many of the long-held assumptions about the genre. For instance, Glitre finds that the happy ending—the linchpin of the Hollywood romantic comedy's boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl narrative—is nowhere near as consistent or ideologically stable as earlier theorists have previously suggested, undermining work that has summarily dismissed the genre as conservative and trivial. Instead, Glitre offers an important reminder that, while the Hollywood romantic comedy does typically conclude with the union of a heterosexual couple and that that fact does reveal the genre's enunciation of certain socio-political discourses, the union of its couple nevertheless changes—from film to film—in the way it negotiates marriage, equality, sex, love, and romance and, as such, frequently offers particular subversions of or revelations about those conventions.

Glitre, a Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of the West of England, began researching the Hollywood romantic comedy genre more than a decade ago as part of a Masters degree-examination of the screwball cycle, before extending her interest into a larger doctoral project, on which this book is based. Glitre's long engagement with the genre shows: *Hollywood Romantic Comedy* is a valuable and accessibly written resource for anyone interested in the romantic comedy or in film genre in general. This is also one of the most interesting examinations of the Hollywood couple to emerge since Virginia Wright Wexman's landmark study, *Creating the Couple* (1993), though Glitre's is obviously a much more focused study, located as it is on three couples within the romantic comedy genre.

Hollywood Romantic Comedy is an insightful text that deserves a wide audience.