

Grindon, Leger. *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History and Controversies (New Approaches to Film Genre)*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 978-1-4051-8265-2

Review by Betty Kaklamanidou

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Whenever I write about the romantic comedy film genre, I start by underlining the absence of adequate academic references, especially regarding contemporary films. Fortunately, during the last two decades a limited number of academic titles have begun to fill in this gap, providing a long-overdue systematic analysis of a culturally significant body of films and one of the most durable film genres in cinematic history. Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, there are only four titles that take a holistic approach to the genre, examining it from the screwball comedies of the 1930s to the contemporary filmic texts of the 2000s: Claire Mortimer's *Romantic Comedy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), Celestino Deleyto's, *The Secret Life of Romantic Comedy* (Manchester University Press, 2009), Tamar Jeffers McDonald's *Short Cuts: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), and *Cherry Potter's I Love You But...* (London: Methuen, 2002).

Therefore, as a film scholar and especially one that specializes in romantic comedy, I was excited to read and review the most recently published contribution to the romantic comedy (rom com) genre's bibliography: Professor Leger Grindon's 2011 *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History, Controversies* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing). Grindon's book consists of thirteen chapters and aims to cover the history as well the inherent complexities of the genre from the beginning of the sound era to the present in a readable manner, which is also perfectly suitable for a teaching environment.

In "The Introduction," the author provides an overview of the main structural ingredients that are found in the majority of the genre's examples and proceeds by examining them separately under the following headings: "Conflicts," "Master Plot," "Characters," "Masquerade," "The Setting," and "Love and Laughter." Grindon's structural "anatomy" of the genre is succinct, helpful, and well-founded. The author also delves into the sometimes-ignored aspect of laughter and humor in a genre whose combination of love discourse and the comic constitutes its *raison d'être*.

In the second chapter, "History, Cycles, and Society," Grindon charts the history of the genre and establishes the following nine cycles and clusters: the transition to sound cluster (1930-3); the screwball cycle (1934-42), the World War II cluster (1942-6); the post-war cluster (1947-53); the comedies of seduction cycle (1953-66); the transition through the counter-culture cluster (1967-76); the nervous romance cycle (1977-87); the reaffirmation of romance cycle (1986-96); and the grotesque and ambivalent cycle (1997 to the present). This categorization is based on specific time and societal criteria; Grindon's taxonomy is interesting and constitutes a valuable methodological tool that can be used and/or amended by future researchers of the field. Furthermore, the author's analysis of each cycle or cluster contains a lot of insightful comments on characterization, plot, and societal relevance of the genre in specific time periods.

In the third chapter, "Thinking Seriously about Laughter and Romance," Grindon draws mainly on Northrop Frye's work on comedy, and examines how jokes, humor, and laughter are intertwined in the genre and also inextricably associated with the journey of the heterosexual couple towards a blissful union. The author then proceeds by discussing the political dimension of the genre, and concludes by showing how the romantic comedy "exhibits a wide-ranging capacity for political expression rather than a predetermined ideology" (81). Grindon's clear writing style makes complex theoretical issues easily accessible to every reader—from the first-year undergraduate student and/or romance enthusiast to the foreign scholar—and thus facilitates not only the reading process, but also the understanding and assimilation of concepts that can sometimes remain abstract or confusingly undetermined.

The next ten chapters are dedicated to the close reading of a single film from each of the nine cycles and clusters the author defined in his second chapter (there are two films from "the grotesque and ambivalent cycle"). The majority of the films Grindon discusses are paradigmatic instances of the genre, such as *His Girl Friday* (1940), *Adam's Rib* (1949), *The Graduate* (1967), *Annie Hall* (1979), and *When Harry Met Sally* (1989). Although most of the films in Grindon's book have already been meticulously examined in various rom com and/or genre anthologies, the author adds to the discussion with his perceptive analysis, and it is very useful to the film/media student/scholar, the romance scholar/enthusiast to have all these canonical texts in a single volume. The model readings Grindon provides could also be of great use to anyone interested in writing on something less canonical or at the borders of the genre.

The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History and Controversies does not try to offer a new, comprehensive theoretical or sociopolitical account of this popular genre. Rather, as its subtitle suggests, this slim, two-hundred-page volume takes a practical, teachable approach to the romantic comedy genre. However, in emphasizing the practical and pedagogical use of this book, I do not mean to suggest that those with an extensive scholarly background will not learn from it as well. Quite the contrary: Grindon's analysis of the importance of humor and laughter cover a much needed theoretical aspect of the genre's structure, whose importance and narrative function constitute a fruitful terrain for future scholarly discussion. What is more, his readings of less examined and/or non-canonical romantic comedies, such as the almost scatological *There's Something About Mary* (1998), or the little known independent gem *Waitress* (2007) offer astute observations that illuminate the reader and stimulate the scholar.

Grindon's contribution to the romantic comedy film bibliography is a valuable

addition to the limited number of similar scholarly endeavors, and it seems well-designed for classroom use—not just for teaching the particular films he discusses, but also for teaching methodology. The romantic comedy genre has rarely received the sort of academic recognition it deserves, but students, film scholars, romance scholars, and rom-com enthusiasts all over the world will find *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy* a fine introduction to this culturally and politically significant film genre.