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## The Runaway Bride: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1930s

*Elizabeth Kendall*

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**Elizabeth Kendall : The Runaway Bride: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1930s** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Runaway Bride: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1930s:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Hollywood Romantic Comedy, Right-OnBy R. BonoThis book is focused upon the emergence of the female star personality, and how the directors integrated and evolved their personas into romantic comedies, filled with prescient social meaning. I say emergence, because actresses like men, had to fight for status and recognition in a Hollywood that was literally inventing itself. Kendall's chapters on Claudette Colbert: Capra and "It Happened One Night"; Katharine Hepburn: Stevens and "Alice Adams"; Ginger Rogers: Stevens and "Swing Time"...to name just three...are sharp and originally insightful. And the chapter on my favorite screwball comedienne, Jean Arthur, and the wonderful Myrna Loy, like the others, is noteworthy for its clarity, contrast, and precision. The whole effort is a real contribution to understanding of the rise of the star-actress, in what was then, the "man's world" of classic Hollywood. In this regard, highly insightful, is her take on "Stage Door", where Katharine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers work off each other's characters...or, is it their own selves...to support La Cava's vision of a stunning ensemble of spirited depression era women, struggling, and wise cracking, their way towards independence....financial, professional, and personal. Aside from her right-on understanding of the Stevens/Rogers partnership, I have one quibble regarding Sandrich/Rogers in "Follow the Fleet". Kendall writes that the film (and its writers), "never bothers to show us (her) disappointment, or anger" at Fred's bumbling interference....causing her,

twice to lose her job. In fact, she not only gets angry, she GETS EVEN! She tricks Fred into jealousy, with an out-of-uniform officer...which lands Fred in a fountain, dripping wet, and into "the brig"...as she walks off with the officer arm in arm. In addition, Sherry also puts Bake's wise-guy persona to the test, by linking her acceptance of him, to his help with her sister's fate. A pretty tough cookie, Sherry is. I think that Stevens "went to school" on "Follow the Fleet". He even does his own imaginatively bright version of Ginger's firing, just as he completes Fred's deconstruction, that Sandrich began. However much he belittled her, Sandrich cracked the door, that Stevens and Rogers walked through. [I take special attention to this because, I think "Follow the Fleet", just before "Swing Time" in 1936, is one of the quietly great films of the series...and because it has one of the most, almost supernaturally beautiful, and memorably elevated...pantomime, acting, song, and dance-of-courtship numbers, of any film ever made...in "Let's Face the Music and Dance". It's a human victory over despair and doubt...a powerfully evocative and blindingly elegant paired dance, that exudes pure courage, mutual empathy, dignity, and strength...right in the teeth of the Great Depression...the living national drama, stewing outside the movie house doors. Note that in this dance, Fred is a gambler-in-tux, who, as in "Swing Time", has no money, meets Ginger by chance...and together, resolve their unhappy situations, and exit, arm in arm, stage right.] This quibble notwithstanding, the book is a most stimulating read, especially for those familiar with the films. It's food for further thought and appreciation...clearly written, well researched, and full of good information, careful analysis; with no agenda to sensationalize. It does what all good criticism does: It provides solid information and deepens understanding. The true-to-life individual narratives, of the actresses and the film makers, have plenty of zip and spunk, to make such typically exaggerated exercises redundant. Kendall is now a proven master of the genre, and this book demonstrates it. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Depression heroine comes to life

By S. Smith-Peter This book is a tremendous amount of fun, especially if you watch the movies as you read the book. Elizabeth Kendall argues that at the beginning of the Depression, movie makers and watchers didn't know how to portray a heroic man any more. The bottom had just fallen out, and old-style heroes didn't make sense. So the heroine came to stand for the needs and hopes of the audience. The key movie was *It Happened One Night*. The analysis of this movie is worth the book alone. It focuses on how both the leads have to grow in order to be worthy of each other. (Compare this to much 1940s comedy, where that was the woman's responsibility and hers alone). The analysis of *Stage Door* is also extremely insightful, as it notes that through the process of improvisation, the movie ends up being a romantic comedy with Ginger Rogers and Katherine Hepburn playing the cross-class leads that were so important to Depression romantic comedy. Improvisation is stressed here, and the connection between the director and the leading lady is the key structuring feature of the book. This follows on Kendall's interest in dance and similar dynamics within modern dance companies. It is so refreshing to read about these movies from a woman's point of view. *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* is a case in point. Although many critics like it, Kendall points out that it demotes the heroine to a supporting part to the drama of Mr. Deeds. This would become ever more prominent in Capra films. She notes that Mr. Deeds, both the character and the movie, shows a sexlessness and a rejection of sexual tension in favor of a strangely maternal relationship between the leading lady and the hero. Kendall relates this to Capra's quasi-breakdown and conversion to Christian Science before filming *Mr. Deeds*. That really helps me to understand the difference between *It Happened One Night* and Capra's later films, which aside from *It's a Wonderful Life*, tend to hit you over the head with their Message. Give yourself a treat and read this book.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. When women were smart, sexy and funny

By J. Churchland Elizabeth Kendall's book analyzes a very specific and short-lived period of classic hollywood movies, coinciding in large part with the great depression. Many of the great movies of this era are notable for the strong, nuanced and mature representation of women that they portray, as distinct from films that came both before and after. Kendall explains this as a product of both the individuals (directors and actors) involved in forming these movies, and the effect the prevailing social conditions had on audience taste. Among the films that Kendall discusses in detail are 'Ladies of Leisure', 'It happened one night', 'Alice Adams', 'Swing Time', 'Mr Deeds goes to Town', 'My Man Godfrey', 'Stage Door', 'The Awful Truth', 'Love Affair', 'Penny Serenade', 'The Lady Eve' and 'The Palm Beach Story'. This is an interesting and thought provoking read about a wonderful period of movies, and it gave me some great ideas of movies I have not seen to seek out.

In the 1934 classic *It Happened One Night*, heiress Claudette Colbert races away from the altar and a conventional marriage and throws herself into a wisecracking rough-and-tumble affair with Clark Gable. The new brand of movies following in the wake of Capra's kooky masterpiece-and the women starring in them-are the focus of Kendall's *The Runaway Bride*, a look at the films that mirrored the climate of the Great Depression while at the same time helping Americans get through it. Kendall details the collaborations between the romantic comedy directors and the female stars, showing how such films as *Alice Adams* (with Katherine Hepburn), *Swing Time* (where Ginger Rogers enjoys "A Fine Romance" with Fred Astaire), *The Awful Truth* (with Irene Dunne), and *The Lady Eve* (wherein Barbara Stanwyck's shapely leg repeatedly trips nave millionaire Henry Fonda) came to be, and what they said about the 1930s. Written with erudition and enthusiasm, *The Runaway Bride* is a trip through some of Hollywood's most memorable moments, and a key to the national issues of an era as revealed in its films.

From Publishers Weekly Depression-era romantic film comedies starring Jean Arthur, Claudette Colbert, Irene Dunne, Katharine Hepburn, Carole Lombard, Myrna Loy, Ginger Rogers and Barbara Stanwyck are enthrallingly appraised here by social historian Kendall ( *Where She Danced* ). The formula for these movies--lightly making a virtue of personality traits usually thought of as feminine, a moral subtlety, an unashamed belief in the validity of emotions--was originated not at the big Hollywood studios, but by directors on the margins of the industry: Frank Capra, Gregory La Cava, Leo McCarey, George Stevens and Preston Sturges. Their genuine interest in women, and in romance imagined from a woman's point of view, resulted in *It Happened One Night* , *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* , *My Man Godfrey* , *Stage Door* , *The Lady Eve* and other film classics perceptively described and analyzed in this enjoyable book. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* Kendall's 1990 volume examines the screwball comedies that flourished during the 1930s as a means of countering the harsh realities of the Great Depression. Many of those films featured women either married or betrothed who revolt against the men in their lives, with their stories at the core of such hits as *It Happened One Night*, *The Awful Truth*, and other Hollywood gold. The text is supported by numerous monochrome portraits of the stars and some behind-the-scenes shots. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. [The *Runaway Bride* offers] intriguing analysis of some of the era's most fruitful director-actress collaborations. [Kendall] writes with flair and intelligence about the creators and works she fancies. (The New York Times) Studies so immediate and insightful they take on the luster of the films themselves. (Smithsonian)