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AMERICAN CINEMA PROJECT/New York Center For Visual
History

"ROMANTIC COMEDY"
Host narration open
11/17/94
1:20

Hello, I'm John Lithgow. Welcome to American Cinema.

The best American romantic comedies are bright, witty,
silly -- and loaded.

In 1934, the motion picture "It Happened One Night"
broke Hollywood records and won 5 academy awards. Its
appeal was in its very modern version of romance, which
played with certain acts, themes, words and
implications. That same year, the Motion Picture
Production Code was instituted, which explicitly
prohibited certain acts, themes, words and
implications.

The Code didn't mean you couldn't have romance. It
meant there were limits. Writers enjoyed testing the
limits, changing the battle of the sexes into a playful
intrigue that turned on double-meanings and double-
dealings, launching a decade of fast-talking romantic
comedies known as screwball. Some of the most elegant
actors and actresses in Hollywood did their best work
making wise-cracks and taking pratfalls, proving the
battle of the sexes is best when it is a battle of
equals.

From the Screwball comedies of the 30's and 40's to
their resurgence with contemporary films like When
Harry Met Sally, we'll see there is a lot going on
beneath the breezy dialogue and ridiculous slapstick of
"Romantic Comedy."

THE NEW YORK CENTER FOR VISUAL HISTORY
AMERICAN CINEMA PROJECT
ROMANTIC COMEDY

Continuity Script
10/21/94

QUICK CLIPS -
ANIMALS COURTING;
REACTION SHOTS FROM
ROMANTIC COMEDY FILMS:
WOMAN OF THE YEAR
BRINGING UP BABY
THE LADY EVE
THE MORE THE MERRIER
BROADCAST NEWS
THE THIN MAN

MUSIC: "WHY DO FOOLS
FALL IN LOVE"

NARRATOR

Boy meets girl... boy loses girl. Love conquers
all. It's a timeless story.

QUICK CLIPS -
ROMANTIC SLAPSTICK
OF VARIOUS ERAS:
BRINGING UP BABY
NOTHING SACRED
LOOK WHO'S TALKING
SOME LIKE IT HOT
BULL DURHAM
LOOK WHO'S TALKING
THE LADY EVE
THE MORE THE MERRIER
WHEN HARRY MET SALLY
DESPERATELY SUSAN
& BIRDS MATING

NARRATOR

From the screwballs of the 1930's... to the
smash hits of today... what makes romantic
comedies great is not their visual style or historic

setting, but what they reveal about each era's battle of the sexes.

GARRY MARSHALL INTERVIEW.

MARSHALL

The myth of romantic comedy is you will find the person for you. Out there is a person for you. Everybody will find the person they fit with. I think that's why movies are made... [Laughs] to tell people, and give them hope.

AMY HECKERLING INTERVIEW.

HECKERLING

I don't believe that love goes on forever, that there's one person for anybody, I don't believe that weddings are like, you know, should be the end of a woman's life, I don't even think bride gowns look that attractive. I don't believe any of that. I don't believe in marriage, I don't believe in eternal love, I don't believe in any of the stuff that will probably be the ending of all of my movies.

SUSAN SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW.

SEIDELMAN

As the relationships between men and women have gotten more complicated, and in some ways more strained, we've become much more conservative, and I think we're longing for the

kind of easy romanticism of the 30's...

FILM CLIP: ARCHIVE, COUPLE
KISSING BY PICKET FENCE.

SEIDELMAN (VO)

...when things were a lot simpler.

ZEMECKIS (VO)

When you're in a tough spot..

ROBERT ZEMECKIS INTERVIEW

ZEMECKIS

I mean, the best thing to do is go back and see
how the old masters handled that situation.

FILM CLIP: **TOM, DICK & HARRY**
COUPLE WATCHING FILM OF
A COUPLE DANCING.

FILM CLIP: **PHILADELPHIA**
STORY

ZEMECKIS (VO)

What we tried to do when we were making a film
was have the audience feel that these two people
should get together... that they're attracted to
each other, that they can complement each other
through life.

Romantic ideas are laid into the film, so we want
them to get together at the end.

ED SIKOV INTERVIEW

SIKOV

We want to see the story of our sexual desire
and frustration enacted over and over and over,

in all kinds of different ways; it does not go out of style.

FILM CLIP: SEVEN YEAR
ITCH

MAN

Yes? What is it?

WOMAN

I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but I forget the key to my friend's door, so I had to ring your bell. I feel so silly.

MAN

It's perfectly all right.

GARRY MARSHALL INTERVIEW

MARSHALL

The basic romantic comedy is, two people of different sides of the tracks get together. You know... so this is part of what you do all through the ages, you know. Cross-dresser who meets fashion designer. You know, you can do anything...

MOLLY HASKELL INTERVIEW

MOLLY HASKELL

Well, the basic storyline is of a man and a woman finding each other.

FILM CLIP: THE LADY EVE
B/W WOMAN & MAN @
RESTAURANT, SITTING
@ TABLE

WOMAN

Not good enough.

MAN

What did you say?

WOMAN

I said they're not good enough for him.
Every Jane in the room is giving him a
thermometer and he feels they're just a waste of
time...

HASKELL (VO)

The whole idea is that you talk or you sing or you
do all of these things before you consummate the
romance.

WOMAN

Watch his head turn when that kid goes by.
Won't do you any good, dear. He's a bookworm,
but swing him anyway. Oh, now how about this
one? How would you like that hanging...

HASKELL (VO)

It's a game. You play all sorts of games.

WOMAN

What is your weakness, brother? Holy smokes, a
dropped kerchief! That hasn't been used since
Lily Langsley. You'll have to pick it up yourself,
Madame. It's a shame that he doesn't care for

the flesh, he'll never see it. Oh, you don't like her either? Well, what are you gonna do about it? Oh, you just can't stand it anymore, you're leaving. These women don't give you a moment's peace, do they? Well, go ahead, go sulk in your cabin. Go soak your head and see if I care!

SHE STICKS OUT HER
FOOT AND TRIPS HIM.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

You introduce the man and the woman in the beginning of the movie, and then you complicate it for the next, you know, sixty, seventy minutes, and you know they're gonna get together at the end, but it's fun to watch how they keep missing each other.

HECKERLING INTERVIEW

HECKERLING

It's kind of a tough thing, because if you say, here's a romantic comedy and I'm trying to ...

FILM CLIP: LOOK WHO'S
TALKING

HECKERLING (VO)

... keep the tension alive... except the audience comes in, they know who's in it, so they know

they're gonna get together. So you always
throw in these obstacles to keep people apart.

ZEMECKIS (VO)

The stakes in the story kept getting higher, and ..

ZEMECKIS INTERVIEW

ZEMECKIS

... the reaction that the audience has watching
one of these films, I believe, is ...

FILM CLIP: SOME LIKE IT HOT

ZEMECKIS (VO)

... "My God, how are they ever gonna get
together?"

HECKERLING (VO)

You're walking a fine line between having the
reason to each other, and with like ...

HECKERLING INTERVIEW

HECKERLING

... real obstacles so that even though that reason
exists and we know they love each other, that ...

FILM CLIP: BULL DURHAM

HECKERLING (VO)

... they're going to stay apart until some other
thing is resolved that's bigger than the two of
them.

**HE PUSHES DISHES OFF
THE TABLE AND CLIMBS
ON TOP OF THE WOMAN.**

MAN

Yes.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

It's emotionally satisfying, because you get that cathartic moment at the end when they do come together; and it's intellectually satisfying because the plot is always twisting in on itself.

ZEMECKIS INTERVIEW

ZEMECKIS

It's all this, this grand mystery, it always has been. And I think that's why it works so well in this, in a film form. I just think characters change, their attitudes change, their politics change, their intellect changes... but, you know, not to sound too romantic, but maybe their heart stays the same.

QUICK CLIPS: B&W
SLAPSTICKISH SCENES
HOLIDAY
THE LADY EVE
THE AWFUL TRUTH
BRINGING UP BABY
THE AWFUL TRUTH
ADAM'S RIB
THE AWFUL TRUTH
THE THIN MAN
THE AWFUL TRUTH
THE LADY EVE
THE AWFUL TRUTH (3)
IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT

NARRATOR

The golden age of romantic comedy was the screwball era.

Made primarily between 1934 and 1944, screwball comedy presented characters with wit, sophistication and elegance.

Their irreverent behavior offered an unsentimental vision of love that was powerfully romantic and distinctly modern.

ED SIKOV INTERVIEW

SIKOV

In baseball, a screwball pitch goes in the opposite direction to the one that the batter expects. The same thing happens in screwball comedies.

These are comedies of inversion; the world is turned upside down in them. Rich people get to act like children; men, often seen in Hollywood films as being very strong, come out as very weak; and conversely, women, being often very weak in Hollywood films, come out as very strong.

NORA EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

For the most part, the woman was upper-class, and the man was not lower-class but not to the manor born. And that was the difference

between them, that was what... that was the false impediment to their love taking place.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

Of course, this was during the Depression, '34 was the depths of the Depression...

STILL PHOTOS:
STARLET LOUNGING,
w/NEWSPAPER "STOCK MARKET IN PANIC"

MAN HOLDING TRAY OF
CHAMPAGNE GLASSES

HASKELL (VO)

...but these films ran counter to it in every way, because these were about men and women who weren't in trouble economically, that were magically free...

STILL PHOTOS:
STARLET SMILING

B/W COUPLE IN EVENING WEAR
TOASTING w/CHAMPAGNE

HASKELL (VO)

They were about this world that was rarified, that was the champagne and caviar world.

QUICK CLIPS:
UNEMPLOYMENT, POVERTY.

NARRATOR

It was America in the early 1930's, and though stocks were down, unemployment was up, and there was nothing much to laugh about...

QUICK CLIPS: JAZZ,
BRIGHT LIGHTS.

NARRATOR

...New York, America's culture capital, was thriving.

Broadway was booming. The hoity-toities and the swells partied hearty.

Until one day, a telegram from a Hollywood agent arrived at the home of a New York writer.

SIMULATED TELEGRAM

BEING TYPED OUT. AUDIO: TYPING.

"HECHT: WILL YOU ACCEPT \$300 PER WEEK TO
WORK FOR PARAMOUNT PICTURES? ALL EXPENSES PAID.
THE 300 IS PEANUTS. MILLIONS ARE TO BE GRABBED
OUT HERE AND YOUR ONLY COMPETITION IS IDIOTS.
DON'T LET THIS GET AROUND. MANKIEWICZ."

QUICK CLIPS: PEOPLE
IN A HURRY.

NARRATOR

Hollywood needed writers, cause talkies needed dialogue.

So New York writers raced West, bringing their sophisticated lifestyle with them.

PEOPLE ON TRAIN,
ARRIVING AMONG
PALM TREES.

NARRATOR

Where they found Hollywood in its natural habitat: by the pool.

BALES OF PAPERS BEING
LOADED ON A TRUCK.

NARRATOR

While New York writers delivered the witty repartee, the Hollywood directors supplied the pratfalls.

STILL PHOTOS:
DIRECTORS ON SET

NARRATOR

...Frank Capra... Gregory Le Cava... Leo McCary... and George Stevens...

QUICK CLIPS: ABBOTT
& COSTELLO, KEATON

NARRATOR

...got their training in the slapstick studios of the 1920's.

NEWSPAPER HEADLINE:
"SCREWBALL IS BORN" -
PHOTO OF BABY

NARRATOR

And it was this new form that combined high and low comedy - classy chatter and physical highjinks - that give birth to America's sweetheart: the screwball.

HEADLINE: "FILM EXPERTS
PICK WINNERS FOR 1934"

FILM CLIP: **IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT**

NARRATOR

And in 1934, It Happened One Night, the first screwball comedy, ran away with five Academy Awards.

**FILM CLIP: IT HAPPENED
ONE NIGHT**

CLAUDETTE COLBERT

Aren't you going to give me a little credit?

CLARK GABLE

What for?

COLBERT

Well, I've proved once and for all that the limb is mightier than the thumb.

GABLE

Why didn't you take off all your clothes? You could have stopped forty cars.

COLBERT

Oh... I'll remember that when we need forty cars!

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

Screwball comedies, I think have lasted so well because they're very sophisticated; they're very unsentimental; of all the genres that were being produced in the 30's and 40's, they're the most modern...

FILM CLIP: THE THIN MAN

HASKELL (VO)

...because they center around the idea of equality of the sexes.

MYRNA LOY

And how many drinks have you had?

WILLIAM POWELL

This will make six martinis.

LOY

All right... will you bring me five more martinis?

Leo, line them right up here.

POWELL

Yes, ma'am.

PETER BOGDONAVICH
INTERVIEW

BOGDONAVICH

What was interesting about 30's screwball
romantic comedies was that the... that..

FILM CLIPS: ARCHIVE,
AMELIA EARHARDT
WOMEN SMOKING

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

..it was the second full decade where women
had the vote... in other words, where women
were emancipated.

FILM CLIPS:
BRINGING UP BABY
MEET JOHN DOE
THE THIN MAN

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

The women, by and large, were the more
intelligent of the two in the plot. In fact, I think
it's significant that the women in the 30's had
the top billing.

HASKELL (VO)

The women give as good as they get in these.
They're active, and they're authoritative, or
they're wild, or they're uninhibited.

LINE OF WOMEN
WHISTLING AT MAN

FILM CLIP: **THE MORE THE MERRIER**
MAN & WOMAN IN CAR

WOMAN

Don't you shush me! You've been shushing me
for twenty-two months now... you've shushed
your last shush!

ED SIKOV INTERVIEW

SIKOV

The women in these films are very strong, and
they have a way of taking control of the
situation, of using men for their own uses, for
their own pleasures.

FILM CLIP: **THE LADY EVE**
SNUGGLING SCENE

ED SIKOV (VO)

Barbara Stanwyck, in The Lady Eve, takes Henry
Fonda for a ride.

BARBARA STANWYCK

And somebody breathing heavily... and then...

SIKOV (VO)

She enjoys watching him suffer at her hands.

STANWYCK

Ohh... ohhhh... You better go to bed, Hopsy. I think I can sleep peacefully now.

HENRY FONDA

I wish I could say the same.

STANWYCK

Why, Hopsy!

NEWSREEL CLIPS:
CENSORSHIP OFFICES

NARRATOR

Ironically, it may have been the industry's censorship code that was at the heart of what made screwball comedies so clever, subtle, and even sexy.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (VO)

To a Will Hays enforcement officer, Joel Breem, has gone the difficult job of making sure that no picture offensive to any race, class or creed shall reach the screen.

HASKELL (VO)

The movies' censorship body came in, in 1934, which was the time when the screwball comedy came into being. The Hays office had a whole set of codes against showing anything sexual or physical...

CLIPS: FILMING
OF MOVIE

HASKELL (VO)

...so it gave rise to this very imaginative and indirect kind of romance.

FILM CLIP: THE AWFUL TRUTH

MAN1

Oh, pardon me, Mrs. _____, you misunderstand. I am a voice teacher, am I not? For one year she has been my pupil. And from time to time I pat her on the back.

MAN2

Oh, that's nice.

MAN1

I mean I, I congratulate her, on her... development.

MAN2

Is that so?

MAN1

Do I express myself?

MAN2

Oh, you've been doing all right.

MAN1

But now my position must be considered. I have never yet been in a scandal.

MAN2

Never been caught, huh?

MAN1

No. I am a great teacher, not a great lover.

WOMAN

That's right, Armand. No one could ever accuse you of being a great lover.

MAN

Ah?

WOMAN

That is, I mean to say, well... well, who's to say whether you are or not? It's all so silly! But maybe I had better go.

EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

There's something delicious about there not quite being sex in a movie... that all people do is kiss, there's something fantastically romantic about that.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

That's what makes a screwball comedy very American, because there is something Puritanical in our society, and there... and we are more comfortable with squabbling and fighting and verbal sparring than we are, as we've seen... I mean, the films that are done now that have outright sex are very rarely very sexy, are not

erotic, and these films in their own way are more erotic and more charged than films that have all-out nudity or sexuality.

FILM CLIP: BRINGING UP BABY

WOMAN

Oh... um... would you mind if I asked your professional opinion about something?

MAN

Not at all.

WOMAN

Well, now... what would you say about a man who follows a girl around...

MAN

Follows her around?

WOMAN

And then when she talks to him, he fights her.

MAN

Is the young man your fiance?

WOMAN

Oh, no, I don't know him, I never even saw him before today.

MAN

Oh.

WOMAN

No, he just follows me around and fights with me.

MAN

Well, the love impulse in men very frequently reveals itself in terms of conflict.

WOMAN

The love impulse.

MAN

Without my knowing anything about it, my rough guess would be that he has a fixation on you, a fixation...

WOMAN

No no no, wait a minute, I can't remember all that. A fixation?

MAN

That's right.

WOMAN

The love impulse in man frequently reveals itself in terms of...

MAN

Conflict.

WOMAN

Conflict.

MAN

That's right.

WOMAN

Ohh, I'm eternally grateful to you. You're

absolutely wonderful. Thank you...

TOM SCHATZ INTERVIEW

SCHATZ

Something about those mid-30's comedies...

FILM CLIPS:

MY MAN GODFREY

NOTHING SACRED

SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS

MEN & WOMEN PUSHING EACH

OTHER AROUND.

SCHATZ (VO)

...the romance is based in a very lively kind of antagonism that's a function of class... that's a function of a rural-urban split. So it's about the differences between the genders.

FILM CLIP: BOY &
GIRL ARGUING

BOY

No.

GIRL

Yes.

BOY

No.

GIRL

Yes.

(AD INFINITUM)

SCHATZ INTERVIEW

SCHATZ

Why do we keep coming back to the same kind

of movies over and over again, except to see those conflicts worked out in different ways? We want to see them animated in certain ways via stars, characters, story, and we want to see... at least we want to see different types of resolutions proposed.

FILM CLIP: PHILADELPHIA STORY

SCHATZ (VO)

What makes a genre a genre is that it, it, you know, quite literally is working on cultural contradictions that simply can't be resolved.

THE MAN FOLLOWS HER,
PUSHES HER TO THE
GROUND BY THE FACE.

SEIDELMAN (VO)

The characters are such good matches for each other, and the writing was so intelligent, and characters are usually so articulate...

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

...that it's fun to watch them go at each other.

FILM CLIP: SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS

MAN

Been in Hollywood long?

WOMAN

Long enough.

MAN

Trying to crash the movies or something?

WOMAN

Something like that.

MAN

Guess that's pretty hard to do, huh?

WOMAN

I guess so. I never got close enough to find out.

MAN

Hm. Sorry.

WOMAN

Say, who's being sorry for who? Am I buying you the eggs, or are you buying me the eggs?

MAN

Just like to repay you for them.

WOMAN

All right, give me a letter of introduction to Lubich.

MAN

I might be able to do that, too. Who's Lubich?

WOMAN

Drink your coffee.

SCHATZ INTERVIEW

SCHATZ

It is very much a star-driven genre...

STILL PHOTOS:
MALE LEADS

SCHATZ (VO)

...and there were a number of actors who were absolutely crucial to the development of this genre.

Jimmy Stewart, Spencer Tracy... early Cooper...

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

Even though the men were always a little bit, played a little bit as, as fools...

FILM CLIP: BRINGING UP BABY

CARY GRANT

COVERED IN FEATHERS.

SEIDELMAN (VO)

...they were still intelligent men, and they were still certainly very, you know, appealing and sexy.

BOGDONAVICH INTERVIEW

BOGDONAVICH

I think Cary Grant was the quintessential romantic-comedy star, for a number of reasons.

FILM CLIPS: ARCHIVE, GRANT

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

He was terribly good-looking; plus he had this extraordinary facility with comedy. Physical comedy, I mean, he'd been a stilt-walker, he did pratfalls and he could do somersaults and so on, he was athletic and acrobatic.

**FILM CLIPS: THE
AWFUL TRUTH**

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

The movie that made him a star was Leo McCary's The Awful Truth, and Cary Grant resisted the role, resisted playing it... He was so worried about it, he went to the head of the studio and asked to take over the other part; he wanted to play the Ralph Bellamy part. Harry Cohen threw him out of the office.

BOGDONAVICH INTERVIEW

BOGDONAVICH

And everybody else was a "poor man's Cary Grant" after that.

**STILL PHOTOS:
FEMALE LEADS**

SCHATZ (VO)

There were stars like Jean Arthur and Barbara Stanwyck, and even Hepburn, who saw the genre as a place where they could loosen up, where they could bring from within themselves a kind of energy that they couldn't bring to other roles. There were a few stars like Lombard who literally built their star persona in the genre.

E.E. BERNDS INTERVIEW

BERNDS

Lombard was pretty raunchy and profane, but... we endured it, because she did it with a kind of a free spirit that disarmed you.

FILM CLIPS: CAROL
LOMBARD

BERNDS (VO)

She had a magnificent figure, and on the set of 20th Century she wore a white outfit that fitted her perfectly. We had an assistant director who thought he could embarrass her. He came to her and said, "The pubic hair makes a bump, and you'll have to shave it off." She shrieked with laughter, ran into her dressing room, got a razor, and told Buddy: "It's your idea, you shave it off." And believe it or not, Buddy ran... he didn't come back the rest of that afternoon.

FILM CLIP: MY MAN GODFREY

MAN

Good morning. I brought you breakfast.

CAROLE LOMBARD

Are you the new butler?

MAN

Don't you remember last night?

LOMBARD

Well, well what happened to Godfrey?

MAN

I'm Godfrey.

LOMBARD

Oh, you look so different. What happened to

those nice whiskers? Turn around, let me look at you. You're the cutest thing I've ever seen.

MAN

Thank you.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

One of the reasons that they do last, and aren't dated, is because they don't come out and say "This is what we're about, we're about where women are at this time in, in society, or where..." you know, they don't, they don't address sexual issues head-on, or gender issues as we might say today, but they're all about them... it's all there.

JAMES L. BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

In the case of His Girl, His Girl Friday, you know, it was a career woman, and, and what was exotic, it was an exotic creature then, is sort of a... a general malaise [sic] now.

TITLE & CREDITS:
THE FRONT PAGE
HIS GIRL FRIDAY

FILM CLIPS: **THE FRONT PAGE**
INTERCUT WITH
HIS GIRL FRIDAY

HASKELL (VO)

His Girl Friday was originally the play The Front

Page by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, a story of a male newspaper editor and his male star reporter.

ROSALIND RUSSELL

I've got some news for you. Yes, yes, I got the interview all right, but I've got some more important news.

MAN

Now listen, you crazy baboon, get a pencil and paper and take this down and get it straight!

RUSSELL

And if I ever lay my two eyes on you again...

MAN

...no matter where I am or what I'm doing...

RUSSELL

...I'm gonna walk right up to you and hammer...

MAN

...that monkey's skull of yours...

BOTH

...so it rings like a Chinese gong!

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

The story is that Howard Hawks was reading it, and had his, his female secretary read the part of Hildy, and said, "Wow, this is a love story." And of course, it is a love story. Of course you have

the scene of her departure from her fiance, poor
Ralph Bellamy...

RUSSELL

Be back in ten minutes.

RALPH BELLAMY

Even ten minutes...

RUSSELL

What did you say?

BELLAMY

Huh?

RUSSELL

Go on.

BELLAMY

Oh, I just said, even ten minutes is a long time to
be away from you.

STILL PHOTO:
ADELE ROGERS ST. JONES

HASKELL (VO)

Her outfit is based on Adele Rogers St. Jones,
who was a newspaperwoman who dressed in
this kind of mannish style.

FILM CLIP: HIS GIRL FRIDAY

MAN

Hi, Hildy, welcome back.

HASKELL (VO)

And she comes in with such authority, breezes

into the newsroom, says hello to everybody...
she goes into Grant's office, and immediately
it's...

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

...like a boxing match or something, like a love
match and a boxing match.

FILM CLIP: HIS GIRL FRIDAY

RUSSELL

Now listen, Walter. You are no longer my
husband, and no longer my boss, and you're not
going to be my boss.

GRANT

What's that supposed to mean?

RUSSELL

Just what I say.

GRANT

You mean you're not coming back to work on the
paper...

RUSSELL

You are right, Mr. Burns, for the first time today.

GRANT

Ahhh... got a better offer, huh?

RUSSELL

You bet I've got a better offer.

GRANT

All right, go on, take it, work for somebody else.
That's the gratitude I get!

RUSSELL

Oh, I wish you'd stop hamming...

GRANT

What were you when you came here five years ago? A little college girl from a school of journalism, a doll-faced hick!

RUSSELL

Well, you wouldn't take me if I hadn't been doll-faced.

GRANT

Well, why should I? It's _____ to have a face around here a man can look at without shuddering.

RUSSELL

Listen, Walter...

GRANT

Listen, I made a great reporter of you, you hear me, but you won't be half as good on any other paper and you know it! We're a team...

THEY YELL SIMULTANEOUSLY
FASTER AND FASTER.

Finally,

GRANT/RUSSELL

Sold to the American!

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

The rhythm of their speech showed two people who were able to inhabit a world together that nobody else could take part in. So it's, you know, it's really romantic; I mean, they spoke the same language, but nobody else quite spoke that language. They had to end up together.

FILM CLIP: HIS GIRL FRIDAY

RUSSELL

The paper's going to have to get along without me. So are you. Just didn't work out, Walter.

GRANT

Well... it would have worked out, if you'd been satisfied with just being editor and reporter. But not you... you had to marry me, spoil everything!

RUSSELL

I wasn't... I suppose I proposed to you!

GRANT

Well, you practically did, making goo-goo eyes at me for two years until I broke down... "Oh, Walter!"... and I still claim I was tight the night I proposed to you. If you'd have been a gentleman, you'd have forgotten all about it, but not you!

RUSSELL

Why, you...

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

What Rosalind Russell is, is looking for here, what she's torn between is not just two men, but between two versions of herself, two versions of womanhood, which are seen as in conflict... and still are. I mean, we have on the one hand the myth you can have it all; on the other we do feel still, feel this tension between devotion to career, which is still seen in some ways as somehow selfish for women to be obsessed with their career.

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

I mean about three years ago, His Girl Friday, if the script had come in, I think, would have been cutting-edge.

FILM CLIP: HIS GIRL FRIDAY

RUSSELL

And that, my friends, is my farewell to the newspaper game. I'm gonna be a woman, not a news-getting machine. I'm gonna have babies and take care of them and give them time to grow, watch their teeth grow, and, and... Oh

dear, if I see one of them look at a newspaper again, I'm gonna brain em. Where's my hat?

MAN

Hello? Hello? Oh, Mr. Burns? Yes, she's still here.

HASKELL (VO)

She thinks she wants to move to suburbia and join the garden club and do all those womanly things.

RUSSELL

Where is my... oh, there it is.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

And Cary Grant is out to, to show her that she, that's not what she wants, that she really wants to be a newspaperman.

FILM CLIP - HIS GIRL FRIDAY cont.

RUSSELL ON
PHONE THEN RUNNING
TO CATCH A STORY.

RUSSELL

Walter? Hildy. Well, he's just escaped from the county jail... yeah?

HASKELL (VO)

By the end, she's realized through having covered this story, through having gotten involved in it, that this is really where she belongs... she needs

that adrenaline, that excitement... that this is her passion, that this is what turns her on.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

This is sex for her.

FILM CLIP: **HIS GIRL FRIDAY**

BELLAMY

One question... You don't want to come with me...

RUSSELL

I need that.

BELLAMY

You don't, do you?

GRANT

No!

HASKELL (VO)

There was always this fear that women would get a taste of freedom and never come back...

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

...and you sense that, I think... that's one of the core themes in screwball comedy.

ZEMECKIS INTERVIEW

ZEMECKIS

This kind of starts to sound like it's a political thing, and I don't, I don't think it is; I think it's just a dramatic thing, it's a, it's a character that

goes from point A to point B... and I think it reflects, that, that, that character arc reflects the climate of the time.

FILM CLIP: **HIS GIRL FRIDAY**

GRANT

No, don't worry about the story, Hildy's gonna write it. No, she's not quitting, she never intended to. We're gonna get married!

RUSSELL

Oh... I can't wait to go on our honeymoon...

GRANT

Suuure. Hey, Duffy. You're gonna be managing editor. No, no, not permanently, just for the few weeks we're away on the honeymoon. I don't know where we're going. Where are we going?

RUSSELL

Niagara Falls.

GRANT

Niagara Falls, Duffy.

RUSSELL

Two whole weeks, Walter?

DUFFY

Sure, you've earned it. What? What? Strike? What strike? Where? Albany? Well, I know it's on the way, Duffy, but I can't ask Hildy to...

RUSSELL

All right, we'll move the honeymoon to Albany.

GRANT

Okay, Duffy. [Laughs] Well isn't that a coincidence. We're going to Albany. I wonder if Bruce can put us up. Say, why don't you carry that in your hand.

FILM CLIPS - MARRIAGE.

HASKELL (VO)

The screwball comedies are conservative; they end in marriage, generally, or capitulation to marriage; but then, so do movies generally. Audiences are basically conservative, and this is what they want. But you don't imagine that suddenly these women are going to fall into submissive roles... it's just not gonna happen.

FILM CLIP, TITLES: **PALM BEACH STORY**
"AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY
EVER AFTER" ... "OR DID THEY?"

FILM CLIP: **SEND ME NO FLOWERS**

ROCK HUDSON

These are the little things that keep our ship afloat.

DORIS DAY

Oh!

HUDSON

For example. What does amortization of a mortgage mean?

DAY

[Laughs] I don't care...

NARRATOR

The next great era of romantic comedy was the 1950's, when the genre went in two very different directions.

DAY

Now, what's the sense in both of us knowing the same thing?

HUDSON

Judy, please.

DAY

Will you let me get dinner, George?

HUDSON

That's exactly what I wanted to talk to you about. This ham, for example. How much is a pound of Virginia Ham these days?

DAY

I don't know, I didn't buy a pound.

HUDSON

How much did you buy?

NARRATOR

Doris Day and Rock Hudson emerged as the top two box-office draws, and they reflected the era's concern with marriage, stability and the home.

DAY

Would you please tell me why you're getting so worked up over Virginia ham?

HUDSON

It's not just Virginia ham...

NARRATOR

But truer to the critical tradition of romantic comedy were the films of Billy Wilder and Frank Tashlin which sought to reveal what Doris and Rock concealed.

DAY

George?

HUDSON

Hm?

DAY

You didn't lose your job?

HUDSON

Ohhh, no, I didn't lose my job! I'll have that job the rest of my life.

DAY

Well then, what are you worried about?

MARSHALL INTERVIEW

MARSHALL

50's, everybody said, you know what love is?

Love is getting married, having a nice family...

FILM CLIP: NICE FAMILY

MARSHALL (VO)

...sitting around at home and paying cards and eating and having a nice meal together... that's love. Everybody said, fine.

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

You had in America in the 50's a pretty grotesque schism between the sudden discovery of overt sexuality, together with the ingrained..

FILM CLIP: THE
GIRL CAN'T HELP IT

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

..Puritanism of the country.

FILM CLIP: THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT
MEN OGGLING WOMAN RESULTING IN SPECIAL
EFFECTS: GLASSES CRACKED, ETC.

MUSIC: "THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT"

BOGDONAVICH INTERVIEW

BOGDONAVICH

If the movies are a kind of pop mythology... then it's true that mythology, all mythology, basically...

FILM CLIP: SEVEN YEAR ITCH

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

...it's a kind of heavenly mirror of what's going on in society.

MAN

Chapter three. The repressed urge in the middle-aged male, its roots and its consequences.

FILM CLIP: THE PINK PANTHER

SIKOV INTERVIEW

SIKOV

In the 1950's, psychoanalysis really washed over American popular culture. There was a kind of obsession with psychoanalysis, and with the meaning of psychoanalysis. What psychoanalysis taught us was that under the surface of everyday life, particularly domestic life, lay a whole set of, of unruly, chaotic, anarchic, dark feelings and tension, dark dirty little secrets.

SCHATZ INTERVIEW

SCHATZ

And now at the same time, Billy Wilder is still making movies... and I think this is pretty important in terms of the staying power of the genre.

**FILM CLIPS: SOME
LIKE IT HOT**

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

I think certainly the pictures in the 50's and 60's are satirical examinations of the various archetypes.

JACK LEMMON

Look how she moves! That's just like Jell-O on springs. Must have some sort of built-in motor or something, eh? I... I tell you, it's a whole different sex!

SIKOV INTERVIEW

SIKOV

Billy Wilder's Some Like it Hot may be the most important romantic comedy of the 1950's. It was the most commercially successful, but it was also the sharpest in the way that it dealt with the way men and women treat each other.

**FILM CLIP: SOME LIKE
IT HOT**

MARILYN MONROE

Have you tried American girls?

CURTIS

Why?

SHE KISSES HIM HARD.

MONROE

Was that interesting?

CURTIS

Thanks just the same.

MONROE

You should see a doctor, a good doctor.

CURTIS

Oh, I have. I spent six months in Vienna with Professor Freud, flat on my back. Then there were the Mayo brothers, injections, hypnosis, ah, mineral baths...

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

Tony Curtis is doing Cary Grant... Marilyn is doing an extreme version of Marilyn...

BOGDONAVICH INTERVIEW

BOGDONAVICH

...and Jack Lemmon's doing a woman. I mean... it, it's off into a kind of farce.

FILM CLIP: **SOME LIKE IT HOT**

SIKOV (VO)

Oftentimes, drag comedy begins and ends with the image of a man in a woman's dress. This representation moves into something a whole lot deeper.

MAN

Osgood Fielding the third.

LEMMON

Cinderella the second. Bye-bye.

SIKOV (VO)

They end up getting harassed...

MAN

You don't get off that easy! Heh, heh...

SIKOV (VO)

They get pinched...

MAN

All right, driver: once around the park, slowly,
and keep your eyes on the road.

SIKOV (VO)

And it teaches them something.

LEMMON

I know that, sugar. No guy's worth it.

SIKOV (VO)

And it makes them more human.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

Billy Wilder was pushing the limits of the Code...

FILM CLIP: **SOME LIKE IT HOT**

HASKELL (VO)

...but his sympathy is really with the decadent
characters.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

He was able to get away with that because his,
his movies were so much fun.

FILM CLIP: **SOME LIKE IT HOT**

LEMMON

I smoke! I smoke all the time!

SEIDELMAN (VO)

They worked on two different levels: you could laugh at all the misadventures of the characters...

LEMMON

For ten years now I've been living with a saxophone player!

SEIDELMAN (VO)

But then when you really thought about what the ending was saying, it really was very bold.

LEMMON

I can never have children!

MAN

We can adopt some.

LEMMON

Well, you don't understand, Osgood!

HE THROWS OFF HIS
WIG. OSGOOD SMILES.

I'm a man.

MAN

Well... nobody's perfect.

TITLE: "THE END"

SIKOV INTERVIEW.

SIKOV

"Nobody's perfect" is the greatest gay joke in the

American cinema. It's funny because it's true.
What we see in this film is that nobody is purely
male, nobody is purely female; these ideals don't
work. Nobody's perfect, nobody's like that.

FILM CLIP: **THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH**

WOMAN EMBRACING PASSIVE
MAN ON BEACH.

WOMAN

What is this strange animal thing you have... it
bothers me. It's bothered me since the first time
I saw you. And it'll bother me always. From
here to eternity.

SHE KISSES HIM.

MAN

You must fight it, Elaine. You must be strong.
You must remember I belong to another.

WOMAN

Richard!

MAN

This can never be. As you know but too well, I
have a wonderful, devoted, trusting wife at
home, and a tow-headed freckle-faced little space
cadet...

WOMAN

Richard!

HE CRAWLS INTO
THE OCEAN.

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

It had a lot to do with the basic lie at the heart of the society, which split women between purity and the carnal urge...

BOGDONAVICH INTERVIEW

BOGDONAVICH

In the 30's, the women were both; they could be, you know, whore and nun in one. That tended to split apart in the 50's and into the 60's, where it, it really had to be kind of one or the other.

FILM CLIP: SEVEN YEAR ITCH

WOMAN

It's too wicked.

MAN

The pattern of your behavior is completely obvious. You pushed the plant down because you wanted to kill me.

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

There seems to be a lot of misanthropy that comes into play in the 50's.

MAN

Could it possibly be because you... love me?

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

It's not very romantic. There's not as much affection for people.

WOMAN

Surely you wouldn't mind, you're such a nice man.

SIKOV (VO)

Wilder plays with psychoanalysis.

SIKOV INTERVIEW

SIKOV

He understands that love is not only a lofty feeling, it's also motivated by base sexual desire.

FILM CLIP: SEVEN YEAR ITCH

TOM EWELL

There's nothing to be ashamed of. Under this thin veneer of civilization, we're all savages... man... woman... hopelessly enmeshed. We're all on a great toboggan, we can't stop it, we can't steer it, it's too late to run! The Beguine has begun! ...What are we going to do?

FILM CLIPS: FEMALE
MOVIE STARS.
AUDIO: "PRETTY BABY"

BOGDONAVICH (VO)

The 50's were the last period in which there were really strong female stars. The women lost power tremendously in the 50's, and in the 60's tended to disappear.

MARSHALL INTERVIEW

MARSHALL

And then came the 60's, and love was...

FILM CLIP: BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE

MARSHALL (VO)

"Let's love everybody! We'll have, we'll all love, we'll have love-ins!" And romance was hippies meeting hippies and all those kind of stories.

FILM CLIP: THE GRADUATE

DUSTIN HOFFMAN

Oh, God! Let me out.

ANNE BANCROFT

Don't be nervous.

SCHATZ (VO)

By far the most popular film in the late 1960's was The Graduate.

BANCROFT

I want you to know that I'm available to you, and if you won't sleep with me this time...

HOFFMAN

Oh my Christ.

SCHATZ (VO)

Our notion of monogamy, of sexual identities, particularly women's roles but men's roles as well, are being redefined.

HOFFMAN

Let me out.

BANCROFT

Benjamin...

SCHATZ (VO)

And it's a very curious film in terms of whether we read that thing as a comedy or a melodrama...

HOFFMAN

Oh Jesus, that's him.

MARSHALL INTERVIEW

MARSHALL

Compared to the 30's, there's much more explicit sexual innuendoes -- they're not even innuendoes, they're... endoes.

FILM CLIPS: NUDITY.
BULL DURHAM
GOODBYE COLUMBUS
BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE
10

MUSIC: "WIPEOUT"

SIKOV INTERVIEW

SIKOV

The effect of explicit sexuality has been somewhat negative for romantic comedy. I am not a fan of censorship; however, when constraints are placed on art, artists can find a way of working within the constraints, and various layers of meaning erupt out of it. When you bring the subtext of sexuality into the open, when you make that text, where do you go?

SCHATZ INTERVIEW

SCHATZ

Perhaps it was because the weight of the issues in the feminist movement and the sexual revolution, we just... we don't seem to find as much humor in,, in, in, in all of that.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

Well, Hollywood responded to the women's movement by ignoring it.

FILM CLIPS:
MOVIES STARRING MEN.

HASKELL (VO)

In the late 60's and early 70's, which is really when the movement was at its peak, women virtually disappeared from the cinema.

FILM CLIP: THE ODD COUPLE

LEMMON

Where the hell am I gonna get gravy at eight o'clock?

MATTHAU

I don't know, I thought it comes when you cook the meat.

NARRATOR

In the late 1960's and 70's, women's roles in pictures diminished markedly, while their position in society appeared to improve.

LEMMON

You didn't even know where this kitchen was till I came here and showed it to you!

MATTHAU

Listen, you want to talk to me, buddy, put down that spoon.

LEMMON

Spoon! Hahaha, you dumb ignoramus, that is a ladle! You did not know that's a ladle...

NARRATOR

The new woman had become too hot to handle, and it would be a number of years before romantic comedies returned to the screen.

LEMMON

The kitchen's yours, all yours, you go make a meatloaf for four people that come a half-hour late, go on! I can't believe I'm arguing with him over gravy.

MATTHAU

They're here.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

The tension between the sexes, the confusion about sexual roles, is so great, it's, it's like it's no laughing matter. There are no comedies because nobody's laughing.

FILM CLIP: **BROADCAST NEWS**
HOLLY HUNTER HAS
CRYING/LAUGHING FIT.

NARRATOR

When romantic comedies did finally grapple with some of the issues raised by feminism, they often presented the new woman with the same old choices.

TITLE: "WRITTEN, DIRECTED
& PRODUCED BY JAMES L. BROOKS"

BROOKS (VO)

I knew that I didn't want to do a picture that could be in any way a feminist picture.

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

"See her as she really is"... that would have been the trailer, I guess.

FILM CLIP - HUNTER
IN TAXI.

HOLLY HUNTER

Hey, um, we're going to Cap's Bar on 17th and Vermont. Connecticut's clear on Sunday, so...

BROOKS (VO)

There was great effort given to presenting what I hope was a new kind of heroine.

HUNTER

...we should bypass Thomas Circle that way. If you don't go over forty, we should catch mostly green lights.

HASKELL (VO)

Broadcast News makes an interesting parallel with His Girl Friday...

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

...because it's obviously about, well, a television newsroom as opposed to a news newsroom, and a woman who's torn between two men. Holly Hunter, though, for one thing is, is the boss in a sense, she's the producer...

FILM CLIP: BROADCAST NEWS

HASKELL (VO)

...whereas William Hurt is the pretty-boy anchor.

WILLIAM HURT

If I can pick your brain...

HUNTER

I, I can't help you, sorry, I'm not here to teach remedial reporting.

HURT

And it has nothing to do with the fact that I left your room instead of staying there?

HUNTER

[Pause] Oh. Please!

HASKELL (VO)

The characters now are much more neurotic, and all three of them are anxiety-ridden, I mean,

they're not smooth and confident...

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

...and Holly Hunter is a, is a, is a mess... I mean, she cries every five minutes.

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

The first time she cries, you have no idea why she's crying; the second time, you might have some vague idea; and the third time, you realize that this is, this is part of her. And I always thought that spoke volumes.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

The core sexy scene in Broadcast News is where she's leading him through the, the Libyan crisis...

FILM CLIP: HUNTER
SPEAKING TO HURT OVER
EARPHONE DURING BROADCAST.

HASKELL (VO)

...and there's so much at stake, because it is live...

HUNTER

The name of the U.S. commander is Nathan Benchley.

HURT

Nathan Benchley is at the Pentagon. So...

HUNTER (VO)

That's great. That's great.

HURT

Commander, it must have been a bit tougher today, shooting down the MiG-21. The one you got was an SU-22?

HUNTER (VO)

What's it like at the moment of confrontation?

HURT

What's it like to be in a real dogfight?

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

This is where you get into work as sex, right with this shot here.

FILM CLIP: HUNTER'S
FINGER CARESSES AN
AUDIO CONTROL BUTTON.

HUNTER

That's good.

BROOKS (VO)

We worked forever on the sound...

HUNTER

That's good.

BROOKS (VO)

...just the finger on that button. Just the way these two people made their connection...

HURT APPEARING ON
ALBERT BROOKS
CHARACTER'S TV.

BROOKS (VO)

... far apart and electronically.

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

Tom's agenda is to get to her, cause he's felt the connection between the two of them, and he hasn't questioned it, he's going with it. She's felt the same thing and she's fleeing from it.

FILM CLIP: HURT
GRABS HUNTER'S
CHAIR IN OFFICE.

HURT

You're an amazing woman. What a feeling having you inside my head.

HUNTER

Yeah. It was... an unusual place to be.

HURT

It was indescribable. You knew just when to feed me the next line... the second before I needed it... there was like a rhythm we got into, it was like... great sex or...

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

That was my favorite moment in dailies, when her head went back, the chair came forward... look at her, she almost falls out of the chair...

FILM CLIP: **BROADCAST NEWS**

BROOKS (VO)

...as if she'd just had some pretty good sex.
It was always at its core a romantic triangle.

HUNTER

I'm going over to Aaron's, but maybe I'll hook up
with all of you later. How long do you think
you'll be?

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

A true romantic triangle does not decide in
advance who gets the girl.

HASKELL INTERVIEW

HASKELL

I mean, there's something in us that wants her to
pair up with one of these two men, and, and
feels disappointed that she doesn't.

FILM CLIP: **BROADCAST NEWS**

HASKELL (VO)

I think you do feel it's the price that a woman
pays for being smart.

HUNTER

Dupont Circle, please. Don't take the Beltway,
because at this time of day there's gonna be a...
Go any way you want.

HASKELL (VO)

Again, it's that heterosexual romantic ethos.

We're so programmed, we're so conditioned to want that.

HUNTER

But New York Avenue's faster.

BROOKS (VO)

Two years later, I saw a bit of the picture...

BROOKS INTERVIEW

BROOKS

...and it hit me that what the picture was about was three people who had missed their last chance at real intimacy in their lives. And I felt... and then I felt more satisfied with the ending than I ever had.

SCHATZ INTERVIEW

SCHATZ

Whether we're in a kind of postfeminist stage or backlash stage...

FILM CLIP: PRETTY WOMAN
JULIA ROBERTS IN BATH.

SCHATZ (VO)

...or whether patriarchy is reasserting itself, is an interesting question...

RICHARD GERE

I will pay you to be at my beck and call.

SCHATZ (VO)

Julia Roberts is the first woman to break into the

top ten box-office stars in quite a number of years.

JULIA ROBERTS

You're talking twenty-four hours a day... it's gonna cost you.

GERE

Oh... yes, of course. All right, here we go. Give me a ballpark figure, how much?

ROBERTS

Four thousand.

GERE

Six nights at three hundred is eighteen hundred.

ROBERTS

You want days too.

GERE

Two thousand.

ROBERTS

Three thousand.

GERE

Done.

ROBERTS

Holy shit! [Laughs]

MARSHALL (VO)

She wasn't this downtrodden little damsel...

MARSHALL INTERVIEW

MARSHALL

...who the knight came and rescued, because women are not like that today, women don't like stories like that. That's what I do, I wait for Prince Charming, he's gonna save me, that's my whole life here? They don't go for that anymore.

FILM CLIP: LOOK WHO'S
TALKING - ANIMATION OF
SPERM ATTACKING EGG.
AUDIO: BEACH BOYS, "I GET AROUND"

SPERM (VO)

Come on right down here kids here we go! Yee ha!

NARRATOR

In the late 1980's and 90's, women writers and directors found more opportunities to tell their side of the story.

Using the truth of their own experience...
stretching the boundaries of the form...

A SPERM SUCCEEDS.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...women have revitalized the genre, as they take a humorous look at cherished romantic myths.

EGG DIVIDING.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In a tradition where nothing is sacred, one director even began a film where most romantic comedies end: motherhood.

TITLE: "WRITTEN AND
DIRECTED BY
AMY HECKERLING"

CLIP: A WOMAN VOMITS.

HECKERLING INTERVIEW

HECKERLING

I had sort of avoided the whole, you know,
women thing... for a long time, I was, you know,
I wanted to work in movies, and I didn't want to,
uh, limit myself, I wanted to be doing what the
boys were doing. And, um... I, I sort of was
trying to figure out how you stay in the game and
all of that, and... it was only after, you know,
having my baby that I like said, well, you know,
what do I want to do?

EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

It's very hard to write a romantic comedy
without... at least it is for me... without it being
personal in some way.

FILM CLIP: WHEN
HARRY MET SALLY

EPHRON (VO)

You've got to have had some experiences that
you can pull from.

MEG RYAN

He rips off my clothes.

EPHRON (VO)

And you have to have had some friends who are willing to have told you some of their experiences, so that you can steal them from them.

BILLY CRYSTAL

A faceless guy rips off your clothes. And that's the sex fantasy you've been having since you were twelve. Exactly the same.

RYAN

Well, sometimes I vary it a little.

CRYSTAL

Which part?

RYAN

What I'm wearing.

HECKERLING INTERVIEW

HECKERLING

I didn't make a conscious effort to throw any new thing into the mix to keep romantic comedies alive. I... you know, look at my life, or life of other women around me, and say, you know, this stinks, here I am, I'm, you know, getting up in the middle of the night, I'm feeding a baby, I'm by myself and doing this and doing that, what... what would make me feel good? Well, you know, John Travolta coming in and dancing around my house would be a nice thing.

FILM CLIP: LOOK WHO'S TALKING
TRAVOLTA DANCING IN KITCHEN,
SINGING "TOWN W/OUT PITY"

HECKERLING (VO)

I'm sure that my fantasies aren't that different
from anybody else's.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

One of the things I've always been interested in
is creating female characters that I could relate
to...

FILM CLIP: DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN

SEIDELMAN (VO)

...and that female friends of mine could relate to.

MAN ON TV

That funny young lost look... I loved.

SEIDELMAN (VO)

I think taking a genre and twisting it, and by
twisting it being able to say something about the
state of modern romance, is something that's
very appealing.

ROSANNA ARQUETTE

I know. Gary... do you remember your dreams?

MAN

I never thought about it. They really went for the
commercial tonight, don't you think?

ARQUETTE

Everyone thought you were great.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

I think romantic comedies today are more realistic; they have to give you characters that, that a modern audience finds credible, and deal with certain issues that are part of contemporary life.

EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

When I started out writing When Harry Met Sally, I only... I thought only that it would be nice to write this little movie that Rob had proposed.

FILM CLIP: WHEN
HARRY MET SALLY -
RYAN & CRYSTAL EYE
EACH OTHER AT PARTY.

EPHRON (VO)

Two people are friends, they realize that if they have sex they'll ruin everything, and then they have sex and they ruin everything. That was my goal.

I don't think that we made a movie that redefined anything.

What we were really trying to do in When Harry Met Sally was to tell...

EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

...women some things about men they didn't know, and men some things about women that they didn't know, and that was a very conscious part of our working process. And when I worked with Rob Reiner and Andy Scheinman on it, they filled my notebook with horrible things that I... I'm not saying I didn't know them about men, but they were sort of my wildest nightmares.

FILM CLIP: WHEN HARRY MEY SALLY

CRYSTAL

You meet someone, you have the safe lunch, you decide you like each other enough to move on to dinner. You go dancing, you do the white man's overbite... go back to her place, you have sex; and the minute you're finished, you know what goes through your mind? "How long do I have to lie here and hold her before I can get up and go home? Is thirty seconds enough?"

RYAN

That's what you're thinking? Is that true?

CRYSTAL

Sure. All men think that.

EPHRON (VO)

And then they said to me one day...

EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

..."Now tell us something we don't know about women." So I told them.

FILM CLIP: WHEN HARRY MET SALLY

CRYSTAL

What are you saying? That they fake orgasms?

RYAN

Most women at one time or another have faked it.

CRYSTAL

Well, they haven't faked it with me.

RYAN

How do you know?

EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

I do think we made a movie that touched on a question of whether men and women can be friends; and more important, was a movie about the difference between men and women.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

The thing that interested me the most about Desperately Seeking Susan is that it is a love story between the two women, and that although there's a secondary love story between a man and each of the, of the women, I don't

think that's the most interesting part of the movie.

FILM CLIP: DESPERATELY
SEEKING SUSAN

SEIDELMAN (VO)

Rosanna Arquette very much represents the traditional good girl, housewife... she's Mrs. Glass.

ARQUETTE USES A
SIGHTSEEING TELESCOPE TO
SPY ON MADONNA AS SHE
KISSES A MAN.

SEIDELMAN (VO)

The Madonna character represents her opposite: somebody who does things totally on her own terms, is sexually active, has a very devil-may-care attitude.

It's about one woman who's desperately seeking the other woman, but really what she's desperately seeking is herself.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

And the relationship between those two women, and the tension between those two women, I think are the core of the whole story.

FILM CLIP: ARQUETTE
FOLLOWS MADONNA,
OBTAINS HER HAT.

SEIDELMAN (VO)

What happens is that Rosanna Arquette, in imitating Susan, in trying to be an imperfect version of Susan, actually by the end of the movie becomes a better version of herself. We tried to use obvious devices, like amnesia, like mistaken identity, borrowed from the old screwball comedies, in order to get at some bigger truths about identity.

SEIDELMAN INTERVIEW

SEIDELMAN

Hollywood is a pretty conservative institution, and I think that, that there are films that explore alternatives to these sort of traditional romantic situations, but I don't really think they come out of Hollywood... because I think Hollywood is trying to still appeal to this safety net. You know... I think there's a lot of issues that could be dealt with, that, that have to do with gender, and have to do with, with, with sexuality, that I think we're still afraid to touch upon.

MARSHALL INTERVIEW

MARSHALL

We're mixed up. We don't know exactly exactly what to fall in love with in the 90's. So you're seeing in the 90's all sorts of strange love... older

men, younger women, you're seeing two men fall in love, you're seeing two girls fall in love... it's all over the place in the 90's. We still haven't figure it out. But... soon, maybe by 2000, we'll have the 90's under control.

EPHRON INTERVIEW

EPHRON

We all go through cycles of believing in love and not believing in love, and believing in love and not believing in love. But always I think we want to believe in love, no matter how cynical we are, we want to believe that in the end the lovers will triumph and walk off into the sunset together, even though we know that... that when they walk into the sunset, they'll probably have a fight over what route to take.

NATURE FILM: BIRDS COUPLING

NATURE FILM NARRATOR (VO)

The rewards for all these displays, persuasions and entreaties, however, can certainly be great.

FILM CLIP: LOOK WHO'S TALKING
ALLEY & TRAVOLTA IN BED

NATURE FILM NARRATOR (VO, CONT'D)

Yet even coupling may not be the ultimate achievement it might seem to be. An animal may have to do even more than this, if it's to transcend its mortality.

FILM CLIP: WHEN HARRY MET SALLY
IN BED, AFTER SEX - RYAN
HAPPY, CRYSTAL STUNNED.

QUICK CLIPS: FAMOUS COUPLES.

MUSIC: "WHY DO FOOLS
FALL IN LOVE"

END OF ROMANTIC COMEDY