Directed by Howard Hawks
Written by Dudley Nichols (screenplay) and Hagar Wilde
(screenplay, from the story by)
Produced by Howard Hawks
Music by Roy Webb
Cinematography by Russell Metty
Film Editing by George Hively
Art Direction by Van Nest Polglase
Costume Design by Jimmie Dundee
Music by Roy Webb
Leopard trained by Olga Celeste

Katharine Hepburn ... Susan
Cary Grant ... David
Charles Ruggles ... Major Applegate
Walter Catlett ... Slocum
Barry Fitzgerald ... Mr. Gogarty
May Robson ... Aunt Elizabeth
Fritz Feld ... Dr. Lehman
Leona Roberts ... Mrs. Gogarty
George Irving ... Mr. Peabody
Tala Birell ... Mrs. Lehman
Virginia Walker ... Alice Swallow
John Kelly ... Elmer
Ward Bond ... Motorcycle Cop at Jail
Jack Carson ... Circus Roustabout
Nissa the Leopard ... Baby

Howard Hawks (director, producer) (b. Howard Winchester
Hawks, May 30, 1896 in Goshen, Indiana—d. December 26,
1977 (age 81) in Palm Springs, California) won a 1975 Honorary
Academy Award as “a master American filmmaker whose
creative efforts hold a distinguished place in world cinema.” He
directed 47 films, including 1970 Rio Lobo, 1966 El Dorado,
1965 Red Line 7000, 1964 Man's Favorite Sport?, 1962 Hatari!,
1959 Rio Bravo, 1955 Land of the Pharaohs, 1953 Gentlemen

Prefer Blondex, 1952 The Big Sky, 1949 I Was a Male War
Bride, 1948 A Song Is Born, 1948 Red River, 1946 The Big
Sleep, 1944 To Have and Have Not, 1943 The Outlaw, 1941
Sergeant York, 1940 His Girl Friday, 1939 Only Angels Have
Wings, 1938 Bringing Up Baby, 1936 Come and Get It, 1936 The
Road to Glory, 1935 Barbary Coast, 1934 Twentieth Century,
1933 The Prizefighter and the Lady, 1933 Today We Live, 1932
Scarface, 1930 The Dawn Patrol, 1929 Trent's Last Case, 1928
A Girl in Every Port, 1926 Fig Leaves, and 1926 The Road to
Glory. He has 26 writing credits, although most are uncredited.
Some of them are 1983 Scarface (1932 screenplay), 1971 The
French Connection, 1965 Red Line 7000, 1952 Monkey Business,
1951 The Thing from Another World, 1943 The Outlaw, 1938
The Dawn Patrol, 1938 Test Pilot, 1934 Viva Villa!, 1933 Today
We Live, 1932 Scarface, 1927 Underworld, and 1924 Tiger Love.
He also produced 23 films, which are 1970 Rio Lobo, 1966 El
Hatari!, 1959 Rio Bravo, 1955 Land of the Pharaohs, 1952 The
Big Sky, 1951 The Thing from Another World, 1948 Red River,
1946 The Big Sleep, 1944 To Have and Have Not, 1943 Corvette


Barry Fitzgerald ... Mr. Gogarty (b. William Joseph Shields, March 10, 1888 in Dublin, Ireland—d. January 14, 1961 (age 72) in Dublin, Ireland) won the 1945 Academy Award for Best Actor in Dublin, Ireland) won the 1945 Academy Award for Best Actor


in the next three years, all of them silent except *The Air Circus* (1928) and *Trent’s Last Case* (1929), part-talkies in the years of Hollywood’s transition between silence and sound.

Of the Fox silents, only *Fig Leaves* (1926) and *A Girl in Every Port* (1928) survive. The former is a comedy of gender, tracing domestic warfare from Adam and Eve to their modern descendants. *A Girl in Every Port* is “a love story between two men,” in Hawks’ words—two brawling sailor buddies who fall for the woman. The motif of two friends who share the same love would recur in many Hawks sound films, particularly in the 1930s (Tiger Shark, *Today We Live*, Barbary Coast, *The Road to Glory*). The motif of two wandering pals, enjoying the sexual benefits of travel, returns with a gender reversal in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, with Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell playing the two traveling buddies. More than anything else, *A Girl in Every Port* declared male friendship one of Hawks’ primary concerns. With the end of his Fox contract in 1929, Hawks would never again sign a long-term contract with a single studio.

It was the coming of synchronized sound that allowed Hawks to become so independent a film stylist. *The Dawn Patrol* (1930) was a remarkable early sound film in many respects. Its pacifism mirrored the reaction against the First World War in a period that produced such antitwar films as *What Price Glory?*, *The Big Parade*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The flying sequences in *The Dawn Patrol* were as photographically brilliant as they were aeronautically accurate. Flying and filming had never before been so beautifully mated, and Hawks flavorful dialogue sounded as if it were uttered by human beings, not orating actors. The affected, stilted diction that marred so many early talkies was entirely absent. Dialogue in Hawks’ films would always suggest the feel and flavor of spontaneous conversation rather than scripted lines—he in fact not only permitted his players to improvise but deliberately hired players who would and could.

*Scarface* (1930-1932) brought this spontaneous quality from the wartime skies to the urban streets. *Scarface* remains simultaneously one of the most brutal and most funny of gangster films—“as vehement, vitriolic, and passionate a work as has been made about Prohibition,” in the opinion of Manny Farber. When Tony Camonte lets go with his new machine gun into a rack of pool cues, or the O’Hara gang shoots a restaurant to smithereens, they are murderous children having “fun,” one of the most important words in Hawks’ critical lexicon. Hawks’ antihero Tony, a fanciful portrait of Al Capone sketched by Paul Muni, is not only a spiteful kid; he also nurses an unarticulated and repressed sexual attraction to his own sister and guns down their best friend (George Raft) who invades this Freudian turf. Hawks’ recurrent piece of physical business for Raft—the obsessive flipping of a coin—has survived ever after as the quintessential gangster’s tic. It introduced the familiar Hawks method of deflecting psychological revelation from explicit dialogue to the subtle handling of physical objects. As John Belton notes, “Hawks’ characterization is rooted in the physical.

*Scarface* also introduced Hawks to two important professional associates: Howard Hughes, who produced the film and would weave through Hawks’ entire career as either ally or enemy; and Ben Hecht, the hard-drinking, wise-cracking writer who, like Hawks, wanted to make films that were “fun.” Hecht
and Hawks were kindred cynics who would work together for twenty years. Hughes, however, had his own war to win. A lifetime foe of film industry censorship boards, Hughes resisted attempts to soften Scarface. He finally relented, not by toning down its brutal humor but by inserting a drab lecture on the social responsibility of voters. He also concluded the film with the fallen mobster’s whining cowardice, to take the glamor out of his defiance. But Hughes was so enraged at being pressured into these emendations that he withdrew the film from circulation for four decades. Only his death returned it to American audiences.

Hawks traveled to other studios and genres in the 1930s. Columbia gave him a prison movie, The Criminal Code (1931). The Crowd Roars (1932) at Warner Brothers was his first picture about auto racing, another Hawks hobby; he designed the automobile that won the 1936 Indianapolis 500. Tiger Shark (1932), for Warners’ subsidiary, First National, took Hawks to sea with Edward G. Robinson and the fishing fleet. Hawks depicted the professional business of tuna fishing in this film with the same documentary accuracy and regard for detail that he devoted to flying in The Dawn Patrol or driving in The Crowd Roars. His earliest talkies established a key pattern: in the words of Andrew Sarris, “The Hawksian hero is upheld by an instinctive professionalism.”

Hawks returned to wartime professionals in Today We Live (1933) and The Road to Glory (1936). The former was adapted from “Turn About,” a story by William Faulkner, and began Hawks’ personal and professional association with the writer. Like Hawks, Faulkner loved flying and, like Hawks, had lost a brother in an air crash. Both men also liked drinking and storytelling. Hawks and Faulkner would drink, fly, and tell stories together over the next twenty years. Today We Live, made at MGM, began another Hawks pattern—walking off the set when studio bosses interfered with his filming. Today We Live was the only film Hawks completed under a three-picture agreement with MGM. After tolerating Louis B. Mayer’s interference on this first film, mostly in the handling of star Joan Crawford, Hawks refused to finish two others (The Prizefighter and the Lady, and Viva Villa!). He would never return to MGM.

Perhaps Hawks’ most interesting genre films in the 1930s were screwball comedies. Hawks was a master of a genre that has come to represent one of the period’s most revealing reflections of American aspirations. As the philosopher Stanley Cavell argued, the screwball comedy enacts the “myth of modern marriage,” the basis of our culture’s idea of happiness. While Hawks always added comic touches to serious stories—from Scarface in 1930 to El Dorado in 1967—the pure comedy provided much broader comic possibilities. Love and friendship had always been closely intertwined in his films, and since Hawks friends fight as much as they talk, fight because they are friends, each convinced of his own rightness, it was a very short step from male friends to male-female lovers. The Hawks screwball comedy is distinctive in that the hero and heroine are as much friends as lovers and as much fighting opponents as spiritual kin; it is a comedy of ego in which two strong personalities fight because they love.

Hawks’ first work in this genre Twentieth Century (1934), was adapted from a stage play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Along with Frank Capra’s It Happened One Night, made in the same year and at the same studio (Columbia), Twentieth Century was one of the films that defined the screwball genre. The two warring egos of Twentieth Century are the monomaniacal impresario Oscar Jaffe (played by the monomaniacal ham, John Barrymore) and his actress Galatea, Lily Garland (played by Hawks’ own cousin, Carole Lombard, in her first major comic role). The film demonstrated several Hawks traits, including breakneck dialogue that refused to soften or sentimentalize the combat, and the revelation of internal psychological states through concrete external objects—the visible, photographic means of making clear inner feelings that his characters never verbally express….The film also set the two essential Hawks patterns with movie stars: making a familiar star into a comedic parody of his own persona (as Hawks would later do with Cary Grant, Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, and Marilyn Monroe); and inventing the persona of a total unknown (future Hawks Galateas included Frances Farmer, Rita Hayworth, Jane Russell, Lauren Bacall, Montgomery Clift, Joan Collins, and Angie Dickinson).

Bringing Up Baby (1938) at RKO, “the screwiest of screwball comedies” for Andrew Sarris, was also the first of Hawks’ four screwball comedies with Cary Grant. In these films the smooth Grant not only becomes the alter ego of the icily smooth Howard Hawks behind the camera; he also becomes the butt of jokes that the world longs to inflict on the icily smooth. “Whereas the dramas show the mastery of man over nature…,” according to Peter Wollen, “the comedies show his humiliation, his regression.” Hawks endlessly submits Grant to degrading attacks on his handsome masculinity, usually by removing his pants and putting him in a dress. In Bringing Up Baby Grant is a nearsighted zoologist who spends a midsummer night’s eve with Katherine Hepburn, apparently chasing leopards and lost dinosaur bones. What he finds instead is his love and his eyesight—indeed his recognition that love is the secret of vision. In His Girl Friday (1940), adapted from The Front Page, another Hecht-MacArthur stage hit, Hawks changes the gender of the original newspaper reporter from male to female (Rosalind Russell), initiating a contest with her editor (Grant) that is both love and war. In the end, she too recovers her eyesight to discover love in their combative friendship….
Hawks spent the early 1940s with two personalities less slick, cool, and distant than Grant. Gary Cooper made two films for Hawks, both in 1941. Sergeant York, produced at Warners by Jesse Lasky, Hawks’ first boss, features Cooper as the homespun pacifist who became a World War I hero. Hawks’ most honored film in his lifetime, Sergeant York brought him his only Academy Award nomination for best director. Another wartime alternative to Cary Grant was Humphrey Bogart. The Bogart quality Hawks exploited—quite the opposite of Cooper’s open warmth—was a tendency to hide the heart behind a tough mask of emotional indifference and vocal taciturnity. Hawks had always liked characters who did and felt more than they said and Bogart became an especially effective partner for Hawks’ newest find, Lauren Bacall.

If the decade and a half from 1938 to 1952 marked Hawks’ Cary Grant period, split by the war years, the final two decades of Hawks’ creative career marked his John Wayne period. Red River (1948) was both Hawks first Wayne film and his first Western apart from The Outlaw, a Billy the Kid film that Hawks began in 1941 but quit on account of conflict with its producer, Howard Hughes. Hughes’ resulting resentment had considerable impact on Red River, for he demanded that Hawks delete footage resembling scenes in The Outlaw or face a lawsuit. Red River was Hawks’ most epic film, the story of a cattle drive from Texas to Kansas, in which the wanderers travel thousands of miles, facing both the external challenge of the physical universe and the internal struggle against their own psychological defects. Wayne plays the older rancher, Thomas Dunson, a man whose will, determination, and courage have built a cattle empire; Montgomery Clift, in his first film role, plays the younger partner, Matthew Garth, Dunson’s adopted son, friend, and “lover.” When Dunson’s unswerving commitment to his own values threatens the success of the drive, Matthew usurps Dunson’s command in a Western Mutiny on the Bount. Dunson swears to track Matthew down and kill him. He tracks him down, but as father faces son and friend faces friend, Dunson learns that a vow spoken in haste and anger is not worth defending. In Red River Hawks shaped the essential John Wayne persona—the inflexible man of honor, courage, and will whom no adversary can break but love can bend.

After Red River, Hawks and Wayne took three more trips to the Old West—in Rio Bravo (1959), El Dorado (1967), and Rio Lobo (1970). They also traveled to the wilds of Africa in Hatari! (1962), where Hawks’ extended sequences of tracking wild animals provide another masterly film document of courageous and knowledgeable professionals performing an exotically difficult job. As both Wayne and Hawks grew older, their films together showed their age while defying it, settling into a comfortable social landscape with comfortable friends to perform tasks beyond the capacity of younger, less experienced men.

The final fifteen years of Hawks’ life brought him wider public recognition than he had ever known in his busiest years of studio activity. Respected inside the industry as one of Hollywood’s stoutest directors of top stars in taut stories, Hawks acquired little fame outside it until the rise of the auteur theory in France, England, and America between 1953 and 1962. To some extent, it was the auteur theory that made Hawks a household name and Hawks that made auteur theory a household idea. In their campaign against both European “art films” and solemn adaptations of literary classics, articulators of the auteur view—François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Peter Wollen, V.S. Perkins, Ian Cameron, Andrew Sarris, John Belton, William Paul—looked for studio directors of genre films whose work displayed both a consistent cinematic style and consistent narrative motifs.

Hawks was the model of such a director. He spent fifteen years in interviews denying any serious artistic aspiration, claiming that all he wanted to do was tell a story. But a Hawks story had an unmistakable look, feel, and focus. His style, though never obtrusive, had always been built on certain basic elements: a careful attention to the basic qualities of light (the lamps that always hang in a Hawks frame); the counter-point of on-frame action and off-frame sound; the improvisationally casual sound of Hawks’ conversation; the reluctance of characters to articulate their inner feelings, and the transference of emotional material from dialogue to physical objects; symmetrically balanced frames that produce a dialectic between opposite halves of the frame. So too, Hawks’ films, no matter what the genre, handled consistent plot motifs: a small band of professionals committed to doing their jobs as well as the could; pairs of friends who were also lovers and opponents; reversal of conventional gender expectations about manly men and womanly women. Dressed as routine Hollywood genre pictures, Hawks’ films were psychological studies of people in action, simultaneously trying to be true to themselves and faithful to the group. In his classic conflict of love and honor, Hawks was the American movie descendant of Corneille.

He died at the age of eighty-one in Palm Springs, California, from complications arising from a broken hip when he tripped over one of his dogs. Even as he grew older he continued to ride his motorcycle and raise his martini. He was married three times, and had four children—two of whom work in the film industry. His primary legacies are his films and his persona as the modest professional in a bombastic business, a man who could make the structures and the strictures of that
business work for him, so he could tell the stories he wanted to
tell in the way he wanted to tell tem.

Who the Devil Made It Conversations with Legendary Film
Directors, Peter Bogdanovich, Ballantine Books NY 1997

...I liked almost anybody that made you realize who in the devil
was making the picture. ...Because the director's the storyteller
and should have his own method of telling it.  Howard Hawks

Among American directors, Orson Welles referred to
Hawks as “certainly the most talented.” French critic Henri Agel
wrote: “Hawks is one of the rare patricians of the screen and his
ethic is of human nobility.” Offbeat critic Manny Farber said:
“Howard Hawks is the key figure in the male action film because
he shows a maximum speed, inner life, and view, with the least
amount of flat feet. His best films have the swallowed-up
intricacy of a good softshoe dance.” But French director Jacques
Rivette nailed it: “If Hawks incarnates the classic American
cinema, if he has brought nobility to every genre, then it is
because, in each case, he has found that particular genre’s
essential quality and grandeur, and blended his personal themes
with those the American tradition had already enriched and made
profound.” The great variety of Hawks’ pictures—there really
isn’t any kind of movie he didn’t make—speaks for a restless
desire to challenge oneself, perhaps almost as a kind of renewal.
His characters do that—it is a part of their professionalism as
well as of their bravery. Hawks put it simply: “For me the best
drama is the one that deals with a man in danger.”

[Bogdanovich of Hawks] He said to me once—and I
remembered it quite often on every picture I’ve made: “Always
cut on movement, and the audience won’t notice the cut.”

Comedy and drama were often interchangeable with
Hawks: he said that when he read a story, he first tried to see if a
comedy could be made of it and if not, he made a drama.

So many things Howard said to me echo in my head,
and did on every film I made. In 1965, on the set of El Dorado,
he told me: “An audience doesn’t know the geography of a place
unless you show it to them. If you don’t show them, it can be
anything you want it to be.” In other words: a movie is the world
you make it. And Hawks made his worlds his way, was an
amazingly modern picture maker—his work stays in tune with
changing times far more than most. He also had a sharp eye for
human archetypes, a nearly flawless sense of human nature’s
contradictions in mythic form. He also had an almost infallible
nose for movie mistakes: terrific advice I didn’t always heed and
regretted when I didn’t….

How did Bringing Up Baby [1938] come about?
I was working at RKO and I read a marvelous story
written by Hager Wilde. She knew nothing about writing for
pictures, so Dudley Nichols came in to work with her on the
script.

What was the basis of the story?
Just a story about a girl who got a leopard. We trimmed
it up and added stuff—like putting together the brontosaurus that
fell down at the end. Dudley Nichols was a very fine writer.

Isn’t the picture basically about a guy whose life is pretty
antiseptic until this wacky girl comes in and destroys everything?
The whole thing is a complete exaggeration. It wasn’t
played on a straight line ever. You saw this thing developing in
Cary. You knew right away from her viewpoint that she was after
him.

At one point the psychiatrist says, “The love impulse often
reveals itself in terms of conflict,” which is pretty funny since
that happens in almost all your pictures.
I know it.

Were you expressing any comment on scientists and
academicians?
No, if you’re doing a picture like that, the fun of it is to
do a characterization that is very close to caricature. Now the
moment you caricature something, you’re accused of disliking it.
But you’re really just picking up things that make a good
 caricature—the attitude of newspapermen, the attitude of
scientists—and it’s bound to make people think you’re poking
fun at them. That’s why a scientist or inventor or man who’s in
a situation that’s special is fun to do.

By the end of the film, would you say that Grant has abandoned
his scientific life?
Well, let’s say he’s mixed it. He had an awefully good
time and if anyone had to choose between the two girls, they’d
certainly choose Hepburn. We start off, as I said, with a complete
caricature of the man and then reduce it to give him a feeling of
normality because he certainly wouldn’t have any fun going
through life the other way, would he? You’ve got a rather happy
ending. You have to almost overdos it a little in the beginning and
then he becomes more normal as the picture goes along, just by
his association with the girl. Grant said, “I’m kind of dropping
my characterization.” I said, “No, she’s having some influence
on you. You’re getting a little normal.”

Then in your view Hepburn is the normal one.

I think the picture had a great fault and I learned a lot
from that. There were no normal people in it. Everybody you met
was a screwball and since that time I have learned my lesson and
I don’t intend ever again to make everybody crazy. If the
gardener had been normal, if the sheriff had been just a perplexed
man from the country—but as it was they were all way off
center. It was a mistake I realized after I’d made it and I haven’t
made it since. I think it would have done better at the box office
of if there had been a few sane folks in it—everybody was nuts. Harold Lloyd told me, though, that he thought it was the best constructed comedy he had ever seen.

It was much darker in the lighting than most comedies.

You’ll find that the backgrounds are darker, but the light on the faces is just about the same. That’s just a method of lighting.

There’s a very dark, though very funny, quality to the night scenes when Grant and Hepburn are looking for the lost bone.

Well, it was a complete tragedy to Cary, wasn’t it? You see, there’s a certain dignity about a scientist. So if he gets down on all fours and scrambles about, he becomes ridiculous. And that’s the thing Chaplin was always so good at. The more dignified people are, the easier it is to laugh at them. The scene with Katie Hepburn losing the back of her dress is funny because she was all dressed up and superior to the whole situation.

That’s one of the best sequences in the film.

It had the greatest line, and nobody ever heard it. He stepped on her dress—ripped the whole back of it, and she had these cute little underpants on—and he ran after, and took her hat and held it over her behind. She said, “What on earth are you doing?” “Oh,” he said, “I feel a perfect ass.” The audience was always laughing so much that the censors never heard it. Then they put it on TV and that’s the first time anybody ever heard it.

At one point Grant says, “This is probably the silliest thing that’s ever happened to me,” but his character was treated very seriously, and not played for comedy.

Oh, he was perfectly serious. He would fall down someplace with her and end up with a fishnet over his face, She’d start to laugh and he’d just say “Please,...” And he’d never do anything about the net. “It seems that every time I’m with you something happens to me,” he’d say, which is just the way a guy would think, you know? And he didn’t have to have funny lines—the situations made him funny.

You told me once that at the start Hepburn didn’t really know how to play the scenes and you got Walter Catlett to help you.

Catlett, being an old comedian, was able to give her the idea of how to do this kind of stuff, and she caught on in just a flash and apologized. She said, “I’ve never played this kind of comedy before and the whole idea seemed to try to be funny. I’ve just found out that you don’t try to be funny, but the more serious, the more honest you are, the funnier it becomes.”

If you don’t think that was a hard one to make! Oh, that goddam leopard—and then the dog, running around with the bone. Katie and Cary had a scene in which he said, “What happened to the bone?” And she said, “It’s in the box,” or something like that. Well they started to laugh—it was ten o’clock in the morning—and at four o’clock in the afternoon we were still trying to make this scene and I didn’t think we were ever going to get it. I tried changing the line. It didn’t do any good—they’d still laugh at the thing. They were just putting dirty connotations on it and then they’d go off into peals of laughter.

I remember another time we were making a scene and Katie was talking so much she didn’t hear me. We called “Quiet!” She didn’t hear that. Called “Quiet!” again, and she didn’t hear it, so I just stopped everybody, and all of a sudden, in the middle of talking she stopped and said, “What’s the matter?” I said, “I just wondered how long you were going to keep up this imitation of a parrot.” She said, “I’d like to talk to you,” and she led me around to the back. She said, “You mustn’t say things like that to me. Somebody’ll drop a lamp on you. These are my friends around here.” I looked up at the man on the lamp. When I was a prop man, this fellow had been an electrician—I’d known him for God knows how many years. I said, “Pete, if you had your choice of dropping a lamp on Miss Hepburn or me, who would you drop it on?” He said, “Get out of the way, will you, Mr. Hawks?” And Katie looked up at him and looked at me and said, “I guess I was wrong.” And I said, “Katie, he doesn’t make it wrong, but you are. And I can tell you one thing, I’m going to come up and kick you right in the behind if it happens again.” She said, “You won’t have to kick me.” And from that time on, she was just marvelous.

She’s so full of something, you know, that she can’t put up with the waits that happen around a picture set. But Hepburn made the character charming. She was forceful, but she never became obnoxious. It could be so damned obnoxious, forcing herself on someone like that, but she just did it.

Someone said that the picture shows the descent of man down to the primitive animal: there’s been an awful lot read into that picture.

I know. I had thirty people in Paris asking me questions: “Well, what did you think of when you were making it?” “Nothing,” I said, “I just thought it was funny.”

...You realize the greatest stars in the picture business were made during an era when they didn’t have one single thing to say about what they did. At MG, for instance, they were never thrown into something as a convenience; they were only put into a part that fit them. If the picture didn’t turn out right, they made added scenes until it was passable, and they developed the greatest bunch of stars that have ever been in the picture business. But stars have spoiled themselves by choosing parts. Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert didn’t at all want to do It
Happened One Night [1934; Frank Capra] and they got Academy Awards for it. Cary Grant wasn’t going to do Bringing Up Baby. John Wayne hasn’t thought one story I’ve made with him was any good.

If you had to pick your own favorites, which would you say they were?

I think Scarface is the favorite, because we got no help from anybody—we were outlawed....Also, I like Red River. And Rio Bravo was fun. And Bringing Up Baby. I like the comedies—I like it when you go and hear people laugh and you know they like it.

Pursuits of Happiness The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage
“Leopards in Connecticut” Bringing Up Baby

At some point it becomes obvious that the surface of the dialogue and action of Bringing Up Baby, their mode of construction, is a species of more or less blatant and continuous double entendre. The formal signal of its presence in the dialogue is the habitual repetition of lines or words, sometimes upon the puzzlement of the character to whom the line is addressed, as though he or she cannot have heard it correctly, sometimes as a kind of verbal tic, as though a character has not heard, or meant, his own words properly.

Why are the vaunted pleasures of sexuality so ludicrous and threatening? In the middle of their chase through the woods, they come upon Baby and George growling and rolling in one another’s arms on a clear moonlight patch of ground. Thus seeing themselves, the female is relieved (“Oh look. They like one another”—but she had earlier said that she doesn’t know whether, having been told that Baby likes dogs, that means that he is fond of them or eats them); the male is not happy (“In another minute my intercostal clavicle will be gone forever”). I think it would be reasonable, along such lines, to regard the cause of this comedy as the need, and the achievement, of laughter at the physical requirements of wedded love, or, at the romance of marriage; laughter at the realization that after more than two millennia of masterpieces on the subject, we still are not clear why, or to what extent, marriage is thought to justify sexual satisfaction. . . .

The film, in short, poses a question concerning the validation of marriage, the reality of its bonding, as that question is posed in the genre of remarriage comedy. Its answer participates in, or contributes its particular temperament to, the answer of that structure—that the validity of marriage takes a willingness for repetition, the willingness for remarriage.

About halfway through Bringing Up Baby, Grant/David provides himself with an explicit, if provisional, answer to the question how he got and why he stays in his relation with the woman, declaring to her that he will accept no more of her “suggestions” unless she holds a bright object in front of his eyes and twirls it. He is projecting upon her, blaming her for his sense of entrenchment. The conclusion of the film—Howard Hawk’s twirling bright object—provides its hero with no better answer, but rather with a position from which to let the question go: in moving toward the closing embrace, he mumbles something like, “Oh my; oh dear; oh well,” in other words, I am here, the relation is mine, what I make of it is now part of what I make of my life, I embrace it. But the conclusion of Hawk’s object provides me, its spectator and subject, with a little something more, and less: with a declaration that am hypnotized by (his) film, rather than awakened, then I am the fool of an unfunny world, which is, and is not, a laughing and fascinating matter; and that the responsibility, either way, is mine.—I embrace it.

Screwball comedy (Wikipedia)
The screwball comedy is a principally American genre of comedy film that became popular during the Great Depression, originating in the early 1930s and thriving until the early 1940s. Many secondary characteristics of this genre are similar to the film noir, but it distinguishes itself for being characterized by a female that dominates the relationship with the male central character, whose masculinity is challenged. The two engage in a humorous battle of the sexes, which was a new theme for Hollywood and audiences at the time. Other elements are fast-paced repartee, farcical situations, escapist themes, and plot lines involving courtship and marriage. Screwball comedies often depict social classes in conflict, as in It Happened One Night (1934) and My Man Godfrey (1936). Some comic plays are also described as screwball comedies.

History
Screwball comedy has proven to be one of the most popular and enduring film genres. It first gained prominence in 1934 with It Happened One Night, which is often cited as being the first true screwball. Although many film scholars would agree that its classic period had effectively ended by 1942, elements of the genre have persisted, or have been paid homage, in contemporary film.

During the Great Depression, there was a general demand for films with a strong social class critique and hopeful, escapist-oriented themes. The screwball format arose largely as a result of the major film studios’ desire to avoid censorship by the increasingly enforced Hays Code. In order to incorporate prohibited risqué elements into their plots, filmmakers resorted to handling these elements covertly. Verbal sparring between the sexes served as a stand-in for physical, sexual tension.
The screwball comedy has close links with the theatrical genre of farce, and some comic plays are also described as screwball comedies. Many elements of the screwball genre can be traced back to such stage plays as Shakespeare’s Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It and A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest. Other genres with which screwball comedy is associated include slapstick, situation comedy, romantic comedy and bedroom farce.

Characteristics
Films definitive of the genre usually feature farcical situations, a combination of slapstick with fast-paced repartee and show the struggle between economic classes. They also generally feature a self-confident and often stubborn central female protagonist and a plot involving courtship and marriage or remarriage. These traits can be seen in both It Happened One Night and My Man Godfrey. The film critic Andrew Sarris has defined the screwball comedy as "a sex comedy without the sex."

Like farce, screwball comedies often involve mistaken identities or other circumstances in which a character or characters try to keep some important fact a secret. Sometimes screwball comedies feature male characters cross-dressing, further contributing to the misunderstandings (Bringing Up Baby, I Was a Male War Bride, Some Like It Hot). They also involve a central romantic story, usually in which the couple seem mismatched and even hostile to each other at first, but eventually overcome their differences in an amusing or entertaining way that leads to romance. Often this mismatch comes about because the man is much further down the economic scale than the woman (Bringing Up Baby, Holiday). The final romantic union is often planned by the woman from the outset, while the man doesn’t know at all. In Bringing Up Baby we find a rare statement on that, when the leading woman says, once speaking to someone other than her future husband: "He’s the man I’m going to marry, he doesn’t know it, but I am."

These pictures also offered a kind of cultural escape valve: a safe battleground on which to explore serious issues like class under a comedic (and non-threatening) framework. Class issues are a strong component of screwball comedies: the upper class tend to be shown as idle and pampered, and have difficulty getting around in the real world. The most famous example is It Happened One Night; some critics believe that this portrayal of the upper class was brought about by the Great Depression, and the poor moviegoing public’s desire to see the rich upper class taught a lesson in humanity. By contrast, when lower-class people attempt to pass themselves off as upper-class, they are able to do so with relative ease (The Lady Eve).

Another common element is fast-talking, witty repartee (You Can’t Take It With You, His Girl Friday). This stylistic device did not originate in the screwballs (although it may be argued to have reached its zenith there): it can also be found in many of the old Hollywood cycles including the gangster film, romantic comedies, and others.

Screwball comedies also tend to contain ridiculous, farcical situations, such as in Bringing Up Baby, in which a couple must take care of a pet leopard during much of the film. Slapstick elements are also frequently present (such as the numerous pratfalls Henry Fonda takes in The Lady Eve).

The online PDF files of these handouts have color images

**Coming up in the Spring 2015 Buffalo Film Seminars**

- Feb 10 Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, *I Know Where I’m Going,* 1945
- Feb 17 Carol Reed, *Odd Man Out,* 1947
- Feb 24 Budd Boetticher, *Seven Men from Now,* 1956
- March 3 Roger Vadim, *Barbarella,* 1968
- Mar 10 Bob Fosse, *All That Jazz,* 1979
- Mar 24 George Miller, *Mad Max,* 1979
- Apr 7 Gregory Nava, *El Norte,* 1983
- Apr 28 Sylvain Chomet, *The Triplets of Belleville,* 2003
- May 5 Joel and Ethan Coen, *No Country for Old Men,* 2007

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...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: [http://buffalofilmseminars.com](http://buffalofilmseminars.com)

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