



Katharine Hepburn Star As Feminist (A movie book)

By Andrew Britton

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Of all the major Hollywood stars, Katharine Hepburn is the least conventional, conforming to none of the stereotypes of stardom. Instead, she always appeared wilful and independent, able to develop her own persona within the confines of the studio system. This monograph by the late Andrew Britton, published for the first time in illustrated hardcover form, proposes a feminist reading of Hepburn's films, arguing that her persona raises problems about class, female sexuality and women's oppression which test the conventions of cinema ultimately committed to the reassertion of bourgeois gender roles. This book on the Hollywood cinema focuses on a film star rather than a director or a genre and as such should appeal to anyone interested in the movies.

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Katharine Hepburn Star As Feminist (A movie book) By Andrew Britton Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #15968930 in Books
- Published on: 1998-01-08
- Original language: English
- Binding: Paperback
- 216 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Hepburn's film persona challenged expectations of class and gender, while her strong self-assurance defied the strictures of Hollywood studios during her career. According to Britton, a British film lecturer before his death in 1994, Hepburn's public image was replicated in part by her film roles. Yet that same brash confidence, coupled with the social conventions of the day, dooms her onscreen characters, who are validated only when they find contentment with men. Britton combs Hepburn's oeuvre for signs of subversive feminism and points out the studios' successes at undermining them. But his thesis doesn't live up to his title. Although a close examination of such films as *Sylvia Scarlet*, *Stage Door* and *Woman of the Year* impart some insight into the gender politics of the day, much of Britton's analysis is labored and his conclusions are strained (and, at times, overwrought, as when he claims that casting Hepburn as the controlling mother in 1959's *Suddenly*, Last Summer was a reaction to her role as a daughter rebelling against patriarchy in 1932's *A Bill of Divorce*). The book, published in England in 1984, displays Britton's encyclopedic knowledge of film. He assumes his readers are similarly familiar with everyone from D.W. Griffith to Hal Ashby. In addition, he expects them to know Jacques Lacan's writings, Marxist politics and sophisticated gender identity theories. Academics may not mind Britton's leaden prose, but researchers will be frustrated by his lack of attribution. B&w photos.

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About the Author

Andrew Britton lectured in film studies at the Universities of Warwick, Essex, and Reading. He also taught at Queens and Trent Universities in Ontario, Canada, and was a guest lecturer at other universities in Britain, Canada, and the United States. He died in 1994. Robin Wood is a founding editor of *CineAction* and author of *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan... and Beyond*, and *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film*. He is professor emeritus at York University and the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for Cinema Studies.

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