



A LEAGUE OF HER OWN: THE CINEMA OF DOROTHY ARZNER

# Honor among Lovers

## Honor among Lovers

Director: Dorothy Arzner  
Production Company: Paramount Pictures  
Assistant Director: Arthur Jacobson \*  
Script Girl: Pat Donahue \*  
Screenplay/Original Story: Austin Parker  
Additional Dialogue: Gertrude Purcell  
Photographed by: George Folsey  
Editor: Helene Turner \*  
Art Directors: Charles M. Kirk, J. Frank Whitman \*  
Costumes: Caroline Putnam \*  
Musical Arrangements: Johnny Green \*  
Sound Recordist: C.A. Tuthill \*  
Cast:  
Claudette Colbert (*Julia Traynor*)  
Fredric March (*Jerry Stafford*)  
Monroe Owsley (*Phillip Craig*)  
Charlie Ruggles (*Monty Dunn*)  
Ginger Rogers (*Doris Blake*)  
Avonne Taylor (*Maybelle Worthington*) \*  
Janet McLeay (*Margaret*) \*  
John Kearney (*Inspector*) \*  
Ralph Morgan (*Riggs*) \*  
Jules Epailly (*Louis*) \*  
Leonard Carey (*butler*) \*  
Robert Barrat (*detective*) \*  
Charles Halton (*Wilks*) \*  
Charles Trowbridge (*Lawyer Cunningham*) \*  
Elisha Cook Jr (*office boy*) \*  
Granville Bates (*Clark*) \*  
Si Wills (*club waiter*) \*  
Grace Kern, Roberta Beatty, Betty Morrissey (*party guests*) \*  
Basil Harvey  
USA 1931  
75 mins  
35mm

\* Uncredited

35mm preservation print courtesy of the UCLA Film & Television Archive.

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**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away the film's ending.

Here, Dorothy Arzner's instinct for story, casting and visuals are employed at the service of some of the era's finest actors. Her third collaboration with Fredric March proved her star-making skills worked for men too. Businessman Jerry is in love with his secretary Julia and what begins as an office romance evolves into a love triangle with dangerous consequences. Arzner cynically plays on sex and social class distinctions to satisfying effect.

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It takes Dorothy Arzner less than two minutes to upend expectations about where men and women belong in *Honor Among Lovers*. In a boardroom looking out on the New York City skyline, nine businessmen are deliberating on a deal. One associate is missing; the chair of the table calls in the absentee's secretary. Arzner's notions of secretarial duty, of course, went beyond typing and keeping tabs on a diary: when she arrived at Paramount Pictures as a typist herself in 1919, she already had aspirations to direct. And so Julia Traynor, played with characteristic poise and wit by Claudette Colbert, is not just any secretary in this feminist-minded film. By the end of the meeting, she has engineered approval for an audit on behalf of her employer – a man who would, for his part, rather plan cruises and pick out jewellery than do too much work.

Although this comedy has been billed as a 'sizzling pre-Code love triangle', *Honor Among Lovers* is a more or less conventional narrative about an ambitious woman presented with two options for marriage: her employer, Jerry Stafford (Fredric March), and a broker, Phillip Craig (Monroe Owsley). Bed-hopping is minimal and the rapport – while it has a few flirtatious winks – not half as ribald as 'sizzling' might suggest. What the pre-Code moment allowed the lesbian filmmaker was not so much naughtiness as a chance to cast doubt on the value of matrimony. Set the year after the Wall Street Crash, *Honor Among Lovers* mirrors bad investments on the market with bad investments in affairs of the heart. Our heroine might be empowered to make decisions on her own and of her own – but in this romantic comedy tapped into calamitous numbers on stock tickers, her speculation about who to wed is not always sound.

Laura Staab, *Sight and Sound*, March 2024

## **A LEAGUE OF HER OWN: THE CINEMA OF DOROTHY ARZNER**

### **Honor Among Lovers**

Sun 11 Feb 18:20; Mon 19 Feb 21:10

### **Nana**

Mon 12 Feb 18:15; Thu 22 Feb 18:20

### **Anybody's Woman**

Mon 12 Feb 20:30

### **Woman with a Movie Camera: The Wild Party**

Tue 13 Feb 18:30 (+ intro by season curator  
Caroline Cassin)

### **Paramount on Parade**

Wed 14 Feb 18:10

### **Craig's Wife**

Fri 16 Feb 20:30; Sun 25 Feb 15:40

### **Working Girls**

Sat 17 Feb 20:50

### **Christopher Strong**

Mon 19 Feb 18:50 (+ intro by season curator  
Caroline Cassin)

### **Merrily We Go to Hell**

Tue 20 Feb 18:40

### **The Bride Wore Red**

Fri 23 Feb 18:20; Mon 26 Feb 20:45

### **First Comes Courage**

Sun 25 Feb 12:30; Thu 29 Feb 18:20

### **Dance, Girl, Dance**

Sun 25 Feb 18:20; Tue 27 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by  
academic Lucy Bolton)

### **Philosophical Screens: Dance, Girl, Dance**

Tue 27 Feb 20:10 Blue Room



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## **Arzner on 'Honor among Lovers'**

*Honor among Lovers was one of the first Ginger Rogers films. Did you discover her? Was her famous 'stage mother' found on the set during shooting?*

Ginger Rogers was a star in *Girl Crazy* in the theatre. I saw her and liked her and requested her for a small part in *Honor among Lovers*. Paramount gave me about everything I wanted after *Sarah and Son* and *Anybody's Woman*, so I imagine they offered her much money. She could also continue playing in *Girl Crazy* at the same time. I never saw her mother.

*Honor among Lovers ends with Julia, the married woman, going on an ocean voyage with a man not her husband. Was this unorthodox ending your choice? Was there pressure to have Julia finish the movie in the arms of her husband?*

I collaborated in the writing of *Honor among Lovers*, which I made for Paramount in New York. As audiences were ready for more sophistication, it was considered the smartest high comedy at the time.

No, there was no pressure regarding the script, I had very little interference with my pictures. Sometimes there were differences in casting, sets or costumes, but usually I had my way. You see, I was not dependent on the movies for my living, so I was always ready to give the picture over to some other director if I couldn't make it the way I saw it. Right or wrong, I believe this was why I sustained so long – 20 years.

Dorothy Arzner interviewed by Gerald Peary and Karyn Kay in Claire Johnston (ed.), *The Work of Dorothy Arzner Towards a Feminist Cinema* (BFI Publishing, 1975)