



Cary Grant.

Grant, Cary (1904-1986)

by Julia Pastore

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Cary Grant embodied the elegance, charm, and sophistication of Hollywood in its golden years. His good looks, charisma, and ambiguous sexuality enchanted women and men alike. As the star-struck comedian Steve Lawrence once said, "When Cary Grant walked into a room, not only did the women primp, the men straightened their ties."

Born Archibald Alexander Leach on January 18, 1904, near Bristol, England, Grant began his career in vaudeville. In 1932 he signed with Paramount and moved to Hollywood, where he developed the debonair persona that made him famous.

After appearing in half a dozen films, his big break came when the sultry Mae West handpicked him to star with her in *She Done Him Wrong* (1933). Based on West's Broadway hit *Diamond Lil*, the film made Grant a bankable star.

Appearing in seventy-two films from 1932 to 1966, Cary Grant combined urbanity with a down-to-earth charm. Starring with the most ravishing female stars of the time, such as Katharine and Audrey Hepburn, Sophia Loren, Deborah Kerr, and Ingrid Bergman, Grant exuded romance, refinement, and, perhaps most surprisingly, humor. As C.K. Dexter Haven in George Cukor's *The Philadelphia Story* (1941), with Katharine Hepburn, he added the crucial sophistication necessary to screwball comedy.

Most directors Grant worked with, including the celebrated Howard Hawks, Frank Capra, and Peter Bogdanovich, were content simply to use Grant as the elegant leading man audiences adored. But Alfred Hitchcock was attracted to the actor's darker side. Grant gave some of his best performances in *Suspicion* (1941), *Notorious* (1946), *To Catch a Thief* (1955), and *North by Northwest* (1959), playing brooding, enigmatic, and troubled characters.

Rumors of Grant's homosexuality swirled early in his career and followed him throughout his life. Grant and his close friends consistently denied rumors of his homosexuality or bisexuality. Although he had many failed relationships with women (he married five times) and numerous gay friends, including William Haines and Australian artist Jack Kelly (later a set designer professionally known as Orry-Kelly), with whom he lived briefly in Greenwich Village, there is no conclusive evidence that Grant was bisexual.

The rumors of Grant's bisexuality were sparked principally by his close friendship with Randolph Scott, his live-in companion and co-star in *My Favorite Wife* (1940). The two shared a Santa Monica beach home from 1935 to 1942.

Paramount started an intense publicity campaign, including photos of them in domestic scenes, promoting Grant and Scott as the epitome of Hollywood's new young man. More camp than intimate, these staged photos offer no real insight into the private nature of their relationship. They stopped living together when Grant married his second wife, Barbara Hutton, but the two remained close friends throughout their lives.

Although most of his career was spent playing a static archetype, Grant was unafraid to take risks, professionally or privately. He is credited with using the word "gay" for the first time in a homosexual context on screen. In *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), Grant plays a shy paleontologist against Katharine Hepburn's spoiled New York heiress. During one scene, Grant appears in a frilly pink dressing gown and to incredulous observers delivers his famous line "because I just went gay all of a sudden."

Grant sported women's clothing again in the less well-known film *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949). He also became the first Hollywood star to admit to using LSD as part of psychotherapy in the late 1950s.

Knowing his audience did not want to see him age, Grant retired from films in the 1960s, secure as one of Hollywood's brightest stars. He died on November 29, 1986.

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About the Author

Julia Pastore is a New York-based freelance writer who works in book publishing.