



Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory

Annette Kuhn

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In the 1930s, Britain had the highest annual per capita cinema attendance in the world, far surpassing ballroom dancing as the nation's favorite pastime. It was, as historian A.J.P. Taylor said, the "essential social habit of the age." And yet, although we know something about the demographics of British cinemagoers, we know almost nothing of their experience of film, how film affected them, how it fit into their daily lives, what role cinema played in the larger culture of the time, and in what ways cinemagoing shaped the generation that came of age in the 1930s.

In **Dreaming of Fred and Ginger**, Annette Kuhn draws upon contemporary publications, extensive interviews with cinemagoers themselves, and readings of selected film, to produce a provocative and perspective-altering ethno-historical study. Taking cinemagoers' accounts of their own experiences as both "the engine and product of investigation," Kuhn enters imaginatively into the world of 1930s cinema culture and analyzes its place in popular memory. Among the topics she examines are the physical space of the cinemas; the role film played in growing up; the experience of being a member of a cinema audience; film-inspired fantasies of American life; the importance of cinema to adolescence in offering role models, ideals of romance, as well as practical opportunities for courtship; and the sheer pleasure of watching such film stars as Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Nelson Eddy, Ronald Colman, and many others.

Engagingly written and painstakingly researched, with contributions to film history, cultural studies, and social history, **Dreaming of Fred and Ginger** offers an illuminating account of a key moment in British cultural memory.

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