

Review #20 : *The Major and the Minor* (1942)

Ray Milland and Ginger Rogers

TRAILER

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq6kgy-chlk>



Nobody thinks much of it when little girls use mama's clothes to play dress-up. But when a full-grown young lady dons a kid's clothes to play a little girl, it makes a delightful idea for a very cunning film. At least, it has in the case of Paramount's *The Major and the Minor*. Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett are two fast boys with a script. Sly boys they are, as well. You'd never dream the Hays office would permit a scene of rather intimate proximity between Miss Rogers and Ray Milland in a Pullman car. Yet youth is the age of innocence, as Wilder and Brackett know. And so they have managed to put by a deliciously *risqué* contretemps — and a continuously teasing complication — by simply passing the lady off as a little girl.

'Don't worry', says Mr. Milland, 'It's just like travelling with your grandfather or uncle'.

But it isn't — not by a long shot. And that is the **devilish charm** of this film +++

REVIEW

The Major and the Minor is a cute twist on the mistaken-identity gag which starts with a homesick young lady, short of the necessary cash, trying to ride half-fare back to Iowa by dressing herself to look like a kid. En route she falls in with a major who teaches at a boys' military school — the major in whose Pullman compartment she breathlessly seeks refuge — and the remaining ambiguous involvements, both on train and at the school, turn on the natural assumption that she is a little girl.

But it takes more than a twist to make a picture and that's where Wilder comes in — by writing a script which effervesces with **wit, humour, neat situations and bright lines**. For instance, little girls have 'button trouble' — the authors have not forgotten that. And little girls who are really grown-up ladies are likely to be uncommonly 'filled out'. Also there comes a time when certain facts must be imparted to young girls. The opportunity the authors have provided Mr. Milland to convey this knowledge, via moths, is one of the most priceless and bountiful moments in the film...

And Miss Rogers and Mr. Milland have played it with spirit and taste. Never once does either permit the suggestion of a leer to creep in. Dogged out in pig-tails and hair-ribbons, with her face shiny and her legs crossing swords, Miss Rogers gives a beautiful imitation of a Quiz Kid imitating Baby Snooks. And in those moments when romance brightly kindles, she is a soft and altogether winning miss. Put this down as one of the best characterizations of her career.

Credit Mr. Milland, too, with making a warm and nimble fellow of the major — and all the rest of the cast for doing very well with lively roles. Robert Benchley is another genial numskull, Rita Johnson as the Major's fiancée is something of a cat with dangerous claws, Diana Lynn is a frightening younger maiden as her young sister and a host of lads are very amusing school cadets.

'You know, Susu', says Mr. Milland, 'You're a very precocious child'.

Miss Rogers has the right rejoinder : *'You bet I am !'*

You bet she is +++