

THIS WEEK IN MORE RUTH GORDON

THE ACTRESS

Before the late Jessica Tandy became the old lady du jour, there was Ruth Gordon. You know her from her first and only Academy Award-winning performance in 1968's *Rosemary's Baby* (when, at the age of 72, she remarked to the Academy, "I can't tell you how promising a thing like this is"), those craggy, 1980s Clint Eastwood films with the ape, and her fabulous turn in *My Bodyguard* (1980)—which should not be confused with that nauseating Whitney Houston/Kevin Costner doody. If you're really into the obscure, you saw her coup in *Where's Poppa?* (1970), and you already know what I think of you if you haven't seen *Harold and Maude* (1971). But did you know this brilliant actress/comedienne was also a brilliant screenwriter/playwright?

When Ruth Gordon was given the heave-ho by Hollywood back in the '40s because she was considered a talentless and mousy leading lady, she took to her pen. Pouring forth some of the highest caliber comedy recorded on celluloid—along with her partner/husband Garson Kanin—Gordon gave birth to the modern battle of the sexes with the Katherine Hepburn/Spencer Tracy/George Cukor Oscar-nominated wit-fests *Adam's Rib* (1949) and *Pat and Mike* (1952). Add the Oscar-nominated script for *A Double Life* (1947) starring Shelley Winters and Judy Holliday's triumph, *The Marrying Kind* (1952), and you have a woman who turned critics on their ear. And she hadn't even started her acting career—for the second time, that is.

In 1953, Gordon offered longtime director/friend Cukor the story of her life: *The Actress*. Already a hit stage play, *The Actress*, starring Spencer Tracy, Jean Simmons and Anthony Perkins is the story of a stagestruck daughter of a sea captain who travels to New York City to realize her dreams. It's a great little gem, as well as showcasing some of Cukor's best work. The most remarkable part of the film, however, comes with the realization that Gordon wrote it at age 57—a premature time for most to write an autobiography, and for Gordon, the dawn of infancy. The mantra that kept her going? "Never give up, and never, under any circumstances, no matter what—*never* face the facts."

The Actress tells you all you need to know about Ruth Gordon on Turner Classic Movies; www.turnerclassicmovies.com. Tues., 1:15 a.m.



GORDON
CIRCA 1920

—Stacy Davies