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## Dartmouth Film Society

## HIS GIRL FRIDAY (1940)

Walter Burns
Hildy Johnson
Bruce Baldwin
Sherriff Hartwell
Murphy
Bensinger
Endicott
Mayor
McCue

Cary Grant
Rosalind Russell
Ralph Bellamy
Gene Lockhart
Porter Hall
Ernest Truex
Cliff Edwards
Clarence Kolb
Roscoe Karns

Wilson
Sanders
Louie
Duffy
Earl Williams
Mollie Malloy
Mrs. Baldwin
Silas F. Pinkus

Frank Jenks
Regis Toomey
Abner Biberman
Frank Orth
John Qualen
Helen Mack
Alma Kruger
Billy Gilbert

Screenplay by Charles Lederer, adapted from the play (and film) The Front Page, by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Photographed by Joseph Walker. Edited by Gene Havlick. Music by Morris W. Stoloff. Released by Columbia Pictures, January 18, 1940.

Produced and directed by HOWARD HAWKS

Howard Hawks, despite the cool critical reception of his most recent film, RED LINE 7000, is one of the reigning auteurs of the recently rediscovered old American "underground." HIS GIRL FRIDAY is generally glossed over and lumped into the category of one of the director's "screwball" comedies, but, compared with most of today's kneeslappers, it evokes nostalgia for a style of comedy sadly absent.

When it opened at the Radio City Music Hall in 1940, the public was largely familiar with its plot, based on the famous, and very serious, Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur play, The Front Page, which has also been made into a 1931 film by Lewis Milestone starring Lee Tracy as the reporter and Adolphe Menjou as his boss. Hawks' film retains a certain degree of the source's staginess, employing essentially only three sets and a stable, eye-level camera into which the actors do most of their talking. But verbosity, with Hawks, never connoted boredom, and despite the un-Godardian camera, HIS GIRL FRIDAY is one of the most hysterical, chaotic and fast-paced comedies of its era, revelling in its overlapping, racy and quickly exchanged dialogue, easily the equal of anything in a Capra or Marx Brothers comedy.

Hawks, with the aid of screen writer Charles Lederer, later responsible for the same director's I WAS A MALE WAR BRIDE (1949) and GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES (1935), switched Hildy Johnson's sex to female and thus set against the wild journalistic comedy and the macabre prison setting a third complication. Hitchcock's best moments of comedie noire (digging up and re-burying Harry, for example) seem mild when compared with Hawks' jokes about "pains in the neck," remininscences about the good old days when Walter and Hildy stole an old lady's stomach from the coroner, or the famous vaudeville sequence which incorporates a rather unpleasant attempted suicide and the presence of the murderer in the most original hide-out of movie history. And the director's sense of pacing his macabre is perfect in allowing us just enough time to comprehend the suicides, corruption and general seriousness before taking us off on another wild spree.

The casting of the unlikely romantic triangle is perfect: Ralph Bellamy underplaying to the best of his abilities as the Albany insurance agent; Rosalind Russell tackling the police department and her two lovers as Hildy (not to mention her assult on the fashion world, which was undergoing a rather peculiar phase, if her costumes are to be believed); and Cary Grant in the cute but confident role that the Newmans and McQueens of today have yet to master.

Cary Grant, born Archie Leach, needs no introduction, for he is possibly the screen's most loved, most wealthy, and also most underrated and least honored star alive (always a nominee, never an Oscar.) Immediately before HIS GIRL FRIDAY, Grant had worked under Hawks in BRINGING UP BABY (1938) and ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS (1939). Like Gary Cooper (used by the director three times including the famous SERGEANT YORK (1941), Humphrey Bogart (a Hawks actor in TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT (1944) and THE BIG SLEEP (1946) and John Wayne (whose three appearances under Hawks include

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RED RIVER (1948), RIO BRAVO (1959) and HATARI! (1962), Cary Grant, in his five Hawks' films, embodies in his sure, self-confident manner the professional man of action that Howard Hawks makes all his movies about--and is himself.

HIS GIRL FRIDAY is not a very widely known film. It will probably come as a delight-ful surprise to all who have been saddened by the demise of the great comedies of the Preston Sturges variety, and to those who revel in the rise of Richard Lester, ONE, TWO, THREE and, of course, WHAT'S NEW, PUSSYCAT.

Peter Werner

Although director Howard Hawks has made all kinds of films, his comedies are particularly noteworthy and some example include: TWENTIETH CENTURY (1934); BRING-ING UP BABY (1938); HIS GIRL FRIDAY (1940); BALL OF FIRE (1941); A SONG IS BORN (1948); I WAS A MALE WAR BRIDE (1949); one episode, "The Ransom of Red Chief" from O. HENRY'S FULL HOUSE (1952); MONKEY BUSINESS (1952); GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES (1953); and possibly, HATARI! (1962).

Our next film is OCTOBER (TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD), Eisenstein's 1927-1928 masterpiece about the Russian revolution. It will be screened Tuesday, May 24th, at 4 and 8:30 pm.