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HIS GIRL FRIDAY

(U.S./1939)

95 minutes

\$30.00

Directed by Howard Hawks - Screenplay by Charles Lederer from the play "The Front Page" by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur - Cinematography by Joseph L. Walker - Edited by Gene Havlick - Music Conducted by Morris W. Stoloff - Produced by Hawks for Columbia Pictures. Players: Cary Grant, Rosalind Russell, Ralph Bellamy, Gene Lockhart, Helen Mack, Porter Hall, Roscoe Karns, John Qualen, Clarence Kolb, Billy Gilbert, Ernest Truex, Cliff Edwards, Frank Jenks, Alma Kruger, Regis Toomey, Frank Orth, Pat West, Edwin Maxwell.

"He treats me like a woman!"

"How did I treat you? Like a water buffalo?"

These lines cannot be found in the original play, nor in our fine Lewis B. Milestone filmization of that play under its original title. Howard Hawks has directed here not so much a bitter/funny indictment of the newspaper game (though there's plenty of that left from the Hecht/MacArthur original), as a snappy-dialogued vehicle for Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell (she, taking the original male part of Hildy Johnson, played in the early-thirties film by Pat O'Brien). By changing the part from a male lead to a female lead, such lines as "If you won't do it for love—how about money?" are possible, which would have been quite out of place (if not out of character) if Adolph Menjou had used them on O'Brien in the Milestone version.

In the older version, Menjou took a brilliantly photographed walk through the printing plant of the paper as the camera accompanied him in a walking shot; in this version, Miss Russell takes a breezily photographed walk through the editorial offices as the camera pans with her. This rewrite necessitated changing another role. In the original, O'Brien is about to marry a cloyingly innocent young girl, when he is interrupted by the necessity to do a final reporting job for his editor. Miss Russell was not, in 1939, about to be permitted to marry a cloyingly innocent young girl, so instead, she is about to marry a cloyingly innocent young boy (Ralph Bellamy). In this version, Cary Grant is her ex-husband, as well as the hard-driving editor. In the original, Menjou was *not* O'Brien's ex-husband, merely his hard-driving editor.

But once we enter the reporters' room overlooking the rehearsal scene for the next morning's execution of Earl



Williams (here, John Qualen), the original Hecht-MacArthur dialogue returns almost *in toto*—only delivered faster with a bit more *panache*.

When Williams escapes, Hawks copies the Milestone film almost exactly, shot for shot: close-ups of one reporter after another on their individual phones, alternate cuts of dialogue, duplicate framing. A film student will want to see both films in order to explore the possibilities of utilizing similar material, sometimes differently, sometimes identically. On this level, the picture has a fascination that transcends its rapid-fire comedy.

Not that it's bad on *that* level. Grant and Russell are a great pair to watch, as they play their dialogue off one another and often score bull's eyes: "Divorce doesn't *mean* anything anymore. Just a few words muttered over you by a judge!"

Some of the additional characters (Abner Biberman as Grant's resident thug and Marian Martin as his too-blond girl friend) added to this film do not drag it down a bit, for they have some very funny lines, too. Witness Biberman's outraged rejoinder when told what he can do with his "albino" girl friend, "She *ain't* no albino! She was born right here in this country!"

By knowing when it was a good idea to add dialogue, and an even better one to maintain the original lines, Hawks scores points for maintaining *this* line, which has gone unchanged from the play to the first film to this version: a re-

porter, listening on the phone, turns to another reporter and mutters, "A woman's on the line. She thinks Earl Williams is hiding under her piazza!"

And the other reporter's rejoinder, "Tell her to stand up!" (Note: the original film "The Front Page" is in the KPF library)

Earl Wilsonne-GDW

W. T. Parker / 1979