

Home Advice, Gossip, and Professional Resignation: The Female Journalists in the Films of Billy Wilder

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Abstract

The cinematic image of journalism has traditionally relegated the role of women to the background. The same occurs in Billy Wilder films, whose powerful portrayal of the profession in *Ace in the Hole* (1951) and *The Front Page* (1974) was cemented in his previous career as a reporter for tabloids in Vienna and Berlin in the twenties. Among the numerous journalists that appear in the twenty-six films he wrote and directed, only one in ten are women, and they are also relegated to the stereotypical patterns of representation of the early twentieth century. But unlike many other directors who worked as journalists before entering the world of motion pictures and who subsequently contributed to the construction of the film stereotype of the profession, Wilder could boast about something that was hardly within reach of his peers, since he had impersonated a female journalist who offered advice in the Berlin tabloid *Tempo*. This paper analyzes the female journalist characters in the twenty-six films written and directed by Billy Wilder, among the 240 workers in the mass media who appear in those films. The results show that Wilder relied on a highly stereotyped portrait of the profession, with only three female characters with enough of their own identity to stand out as individuals, and that Wilder's portrait ties in with a primitive view of the profession in which women are only one out of ten media workers and only suited to write gossip columns and offer home advice.

Key words

journalism, woman, Billy Wilder, cinema

Introduction

In early 1934, after his hasty flight from Nazi Germany, when Billy Wilder arrived in the United States on board the *Aquitania* with twenty-seven dollars in his pocket and a hundred words of English in his vocabu-

lary (Hutter, 2006, p. 6), he left behind a successful career as a screenwriter in German cinema. The brash Viennese filmmaker, whose mother, influenced by a long stay in New York, called him “Billie” (Lally, 1996, p. 13), had to change how he wrote his name upon arrival in Hollywood and adopt a more masculine version – Billy.

But this ambiguous nickname, far from being a problem, up till then had given him a signature with an American resonance that Wilder greatly appreciated during his career as a journalist and screenwriter in Vienna and Berlin.

The relationship between cinema and journalism spans Billy Wilder’s entire career, which lasted for over five decades. Samuel “Billie” Wilder was born in Sucha, in the province of Galicia in 1906 – then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now in modern-day Poland. After his family moved to Vienna, he became interested in journalism through watching news reports at the cinema (Karasek, 1992, p. 37). Since December 1924, when, at the age of 18, the restless *Billie* wrote a letter to the recently created magazine *Die Bühne (The Stage)* where he asked for advice on becoming an “American” journalist (Hutter & Kamolz, 1998, p. 32), his eventful career as a reporter began in the sensationalist press, first in Vienna (1924-1926) and later in Berlin (1926-1930).

In the vibrant capital of the Weimar Republic, the young Wilder began to alternate his work between journalism and script writing until he got a break in the burgeoning German film industry. After several jobs as a ghostwriter for Curt J. Braun and Franz Schulz among others, Wilder received his first credit as a screenwriter for a crazy action comedy about journalism, *Hell of a Reporter (Der Teufelsreporter)*, Ernst Laemmle, 1929), made as a vehicle for showcasing the ageing Eddie Polo. From then until his swansong *Buddy Buddy* (1981), Wilder wrote and directed twenty-six films, two of which dealt specifically with the journalistic profession: *Ace in the Hole* (1951) and *The Front Page* (1974).

In the study of the image of female journalists in the cinema, Billy Wilder’s case is especially significant not only for his unique relationship with the media and the space he dedicated to female journalists in his film work, but also because he is one of the most prestigious and honored filmmakers of the golden age of classical Hollywood cinema. The recognition he received for his films earned him six Oscars, plus the Irving G. Thalberg Award in 1987, and fifteen other nominations. Among other

awards, also he won five Golden Globes, five Writers Guild Awards (WGA) and one Directors Guild Award (DGA). The critical prestige of Wilder and his privileged relationship with the audience, embodied in numerous hits during a career spanning nearly fifty years, make him one of the most influential creators of the image of the journalistic profession in the history of cinema.

Literature Review

The image of the female journalist in the cinema has been an area of growing interest in recent years. The pioneering study by Jane Baum (1983), “The Female Journalist in American Film, 1930-1949” studied the image of woman journalist during the 1930s and 1940s, and Howard Good (1998) reviewed in “Girl Reporter: Gender, Journalism and the Movies” the nine films in which the fictional female reporter Torchy Blane – the first great female film stereotype – appears (1937-1939) and another dozen films starring women journalists between 1979 and 1996.

Joe Saltzman (2003), for his part, prefaces the bibliography section dedicated to women journalists in the *The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture Project* with the comprehensive paper “Sob Sisters: The Image of the female Journalist in Popular Culture.” Since 2000, the IJPC Project at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California has researched and analyzed the image of journalism and media professionals as portrayed in films, television, literature, advertisements, comics, cartoons, music, art, and videogames. Bezunartea *et al.* (2008) also conducted a historical review of this figure in “So What? She’s a Newspaperman and She’s Pretty: Women Journalists in the Cinema.”

Finally, the most recent and complete specific study, focusing on the films of the nineties, is found in the doctoral thesis of Olga Osorio (2009), which explores the image of the professional female journalist in fiction films between 1990 and 1999 and is noted for its detailed quantitative analysis of the features that define professional women in film.

In this context, this study aims to analyze the image that Billy Wilder films present of female journalists. With this objective, it analyzes the characters Billy Wilder used in the 26 films he both wrote and directed. The study puts a special focus on the three most important female characters: the real life gossip columnist Hedda Hopper (*Sunset Boulevard*, 1950), the so-

ciety editor of the fictional *Sun-Bulletin* Miss Deverich (*Ace in the Hole*, 1951), and Celia Clooney (*Buddy Buddy*, 1981), who embodies professional resignation. To complete the study, an analysis of Augusta “Gusto” Nash, the powerful protagonist of *Arise, My Love* (Mitchell Leisen, 1940), is included. Although Billy Wilder didn’t direct this film, his script – which he authored along with Charles Brackett and Jacques Théry – builds one of the strongest female characters in his filmography.

Feminine Advice at *Tempo*

A few months before the release of *Hell of a Reporter*, “Billie” Wilder started his last journalistic collaboration with the publisher Ullstein in a newly formed newspaper, the evening newspaper *Tempo*, which hit the streets on Sep. 11th, 1928 under the direction of Gustav Kauder. In its pages, in a game of deceptions, misunderstandings, and false appearances similar to what he exploited throughout his film career (Pujol-Leiva, 2013), Billie presented himself to his readers as a female journalist.

Tempo sought out the younger postwar generation with a fresh and dynamic design and large pictures and titles. It was printed on sepia paper, and three editions were published daily between four and seven in the afternoon, which accounts for the hectic work pace (Wentzel, 1977, p. 34). Wilder was criticized in conservative circles for being the “epitome of the Americanization of the press,” while National Socialists scored him contemptuously for “jüdische hast” (Jewish haste). Commercially, he was a failure and published his last number on August 5th, 1933 (Hung, 2010).

To develop Ullstein’s new publishing concept, *Tempo* was formed with a young team and *Billie* was, without a doubt, the best person to write about jazz, film, sports and American topics, given that his name had an American resonance. His early interest in journalism was matched only by his fascination with the United States: “In a way, before Billy Wilder went to America, America went to Billy Wilder” (Siebenhaar, 1996, p. 151).

During his relationship with Olive Victoria, an English ballerina with the *Tiller Girls*, Wilder had already discovered that his nickname was actually feminine. Going on this, on September 19th, 1928 the resolute reporter began publishing, almost daily, advice about style, beauty, health, homes, and nutrition, pretending to be the female author of the section “Das Gute Aussehen – Die Gute Haltung” (Good Appearance – Good Manners).

Sharing his “woman to woman” advice, “Billie” managed to create another feminine alter ego, a Parisian named Raymonde Latour, whom he presented as a “friend” or presumed girlfriend – insinuating a lesbian relationship – who sent advice about *savoir-vivre* from the French capital. Starting in October 1929 and until early 1930, Billie continued to publish his column every two or three weeks about topics such as how to behave at the table, nail polish color, stockings, and beauty treatments (Hutter & Kamolz, 1998, p. 117).

Journalism Is a Man’s Game

At the same time Wilder was working on his adventures as a female journalist, cinema was responsible for laying the foundations of the portrait he would make of the profession for decades. In the late nineteenth century, female reporters had been regularly depicted as impoverished widows or single mothers who had to find their way in a man’s world (Ghiglione, 1991, p. 454). However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, their success could emulate that of their male colleagues, although a female journalist’s main goal still resided in marrying the man she loved, which gave rise to one of the strongest stereotypes in history of films about journalism, the *sob-sister* (Good, 1998; Saltzman, 2003).

Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, however, the classic Hollywood comedy established a powerful image of gender equality in the public and private sphere (Echart, 2005, p. 272). In the case of the female journalist, the main stars of the time played reporters who not only had as much talent as men, but who could compete with them as equals in all fields, and they built what is probably the most flattering portrait ever made (Bezunartea, Cantalapiedra, Coca, Genaut, Peña & Pérez, 2008, p. 241). In later years, film has preferred to portray women as successful professionals who have a personal emptiness, although the film image has also reaffirmed their independence (Osorio, 2009, p. 427).

Wilder himself also contributed decisively to the construct of the image of journalists on the big screen, not only in the two films he dedicated exclusively to the profession – *Ace in the Hole* (1951) and *The Front Page* (1974) – but also in the ample presence of journalists as characters throughout all of his films.

The analysis of the film screenplays of Billy Wilder gives a total balance

of 240 professionals, 162 of which (67.5%) carry out specifically journalistic work. According to the definition of character typologies described by Atchity and Wong (2003, pp. 30-40), five may be considered leading characters, five secondary, twenty minor, nine functional, and 201 extras. Among the latter, sixteen have a single line of dialogue and nine of them appear in the credits (8% and 4.5% of the total, respectively) (Peña-Fernández, 2014, p. 2).

Table 1.

Leading, Secondary, and Minor Characters (Female Journalists in Bold)

Film	Year	Character	Actor/Actress	Char. type	Media	Position
<i>Sunset Boulevard</i>	1950	Hedda Hopper	Hedda Hopper	Minor	Los Angeles Times	Gossip columnist
		Chuck Tatum	Kirk Douglas	Lead	<i>Sun-Bulletin</i>	Reporter
		Jacob Q. Boot	Porter Hall	Secondary	<i>Sun-Bulletin</i>	Editor-in-chief / Owner
		Herbie Cook	Robert Arthur	Secondary	<i>Sun-Bulletin</i>	Reporter/Photographer
		Bob Bumpas	Bob Bumpas	Minor	<i>Radio KOAT</i>	Narrator
<i>Ace in the Hole</i>	1951	Indian copy-boy	Iron Eyes Cody	Minor	<i>Sun-Bulletin</i>	Editorial assistant
		Jessop	Ken Christy	Minor	-	Reporter
		McCardle	Lewis Martin	Minor	-	Reporter
		Miss Deverich	Edith Evanson	Minor	Sun-Bulletin	Writer
		Morgan	Bert Moorhouse	Minor	-	Reporter
		Nagel	Richard Gaines	Minor	<i>New York Daily R.</i>	Editor-in-chief
<i>The Spirit of St. Louis</i>	1957	E. Lansing Ray	Maurice Manson	Minor	<i>Globe-Democrat</i>	Owner
<i>One, Two, Three</i>	1961	Untermeier	Til Kiwe	Minor	<i>Tageblatt</i>	Reporter
<i>The Fortune Cookie</i>	1966	Harry Hinkle	Jack Lemmon	Lead	<i>CBS</i>	Cameraman
		Hildy Johnson	Jack Lemmon	Lead	<i>Examiner</i>	Reporter
		Walter Burns	Walter Matthau	Lead	<i>Examiner</i>	Editor-in-chief
		Bensinger	David Wayne	Minor	<i>Tribune</i>	Reporter
		Duffy	John Furlong	Minor	<i>Examiner</i>	Editor's assistant
		Endicott	Lou Frizzell	Minor	<i>Post</i>	Reporter
<i>The Front Page</i>	1974	Kruger	Allen Garfield	Minor	<i>Journal of Commerce</i>	Reporter
		McHugh	Dick O'Neill	Minor	<i>City News Bureau</i>	Reporter
		Murphy	Charles Durning	Minor	<i>Evening Journal</i>	Reporter
		Rudy Keppler	John Korkes	Minor	<i>Examiner</i>	Reporter
		Schwartz	Herb Edelman	Minor	<i>Daily News</i>	Reporter
		Wilson	Noam Pitlik	Minor	<i>American</i>	Reporter
		<i>Buddy Buddy</i>	1981	Victor Clooney	Jack Lemmon	Lead
Celia Clooney	Paula Prentiss			Minor	CBS	Ex-reporter

Source: Peña-Fernández, 2015, p. 37

Among these characters, only 24 are women, a meager 10% that rises slightly to 12.3% in the specific case of journalists, largely due to their limited presence in technical positions. Moreover, none of them receive a leading role, an aspect in which it is worth noting the return of Hildy Johnson to masculinity after the transformation she underwent with Howard Hawks in *His Girl Friday* (1940).

The absence of female journalists in Wilder films, far from being casual, is devastating. In the ramshackle press room of his adaptation of *The Front Page*, for example, a significant detail reveals the relationship of women: there is only a men's restroom. Women are not welcome in a room that looks more like a male social club, where tenants eat, drink, smoke, play cards and, when the situation requires, also work. Hecht and MacArthur, who wrote the original version of *The Front Page* for the stage in 1928 after having worked as Chicago journalists themselves, indicated that their initial impulse was to show the contempt they harbored for those who had been their professional colleagues, but the play ended up being a loving tribute to their old profession, as well as a tribute to the city of Chicago (Hecht & MacArthur, 1928).

Things don't seem much different in the newsroom of the *Examiner* either. Upon Hildy's arrival at the newspaper, before he says goodbye to Walter Burns before leaving for a new life in Philadelphia, the reporter crosses the room humming, where his boisterous companions swirl around their worktables. The camera shows more than fifty men in the common space with barely a handful of women.

The presence of female journalists in Billy Wilder films reduces the already minimal presence of women in newsrooms of the media of the time. According to census figures in 1901, the number of women working as journalists in the United States was 1,249, around 9% of the total, and by 1931 that figure had risen further to 3,213, around 17% (Franks, 2013, p. 2). On this point, the play by Hecht and MacArthur (1928) – set in the first two decades of the twentieth century – seems not far removed from the professional situation of women in the newsrooms of American newspapers at the time, whose roles rarely exceeded fashion, home, beauty tips and literary criticism.

A survey conducted in 1901 by *Ladies' Home Journal* among media professionals, in which they were asked about the presence of women in newsrooms and if they would like their daughters to work at a newspaper,

serves as an example of the situation. The result was devastating: thirty-nine of the forty-two women and thirty men surveyed said no. Most of them cited the harsh reputation of the profession. Among them, the answers varied between paternal and reactionary; one respondent showed concern about the detrimental effect that the profession could have on women's health; for another, journalism instilled a "terrible sense of freedom" in women that would unconsciously lead them to all kinds of "verbal and behavioral licenses"; and a third emphasized that the profession required them to work with men, "which was not a good idea" (Teel, 2006, p. 25).

The presence of women in Billy Wilder films is no more encouraging. Walter Newman, one of the collaborators in *Ace in the Hole*, recalled that one of the Viennese director's favorite aphorisms regarding female characters was "unless she's a whore, she's a bore" (Zolotow, 1996, p. 177). The wide gallery of sex workers and women with sordid pasts in his films corroborates the statement and has also fueled accusations of misogyny against Wilder and hinted at the fact that, deep down, he did not quite understand women (Seidl, 1991, p. 87).

Home Advice and Gossip

Quantitatively, of the 30 journalist characters in the films written and directed by Billy Wilder who can be classified as leading, secondary, or minor, only three are women. However, despite their limited relevance in the respective plots, they offer an unflattering portrait all told, more appropriate for an outdated view at the time the films were made, which relegates them to offering useful tips for the home and writing gossip columns, or even leads them to leave their profession because of their love life.

In *Ace in the Hole* (1951), Billy Wilder recreates in 1950 New Mexico the excitement that Floyd Collins provoked in 1925 Kentucky after Collins became trapped in a cave and died. In this gloomy melodrama, reporter Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas) applies the well-learned techniques of tabloid journalism to fabricate a "human interest story" that allows him to restore his professional success with no compassion whatsoever for the suffering of the trapped man (Peña-Fernández, 2015, p. 40).

In the vitriolic portrait of the profession made in this film, Wilder reserved a space in the newsroom of the *Sun-Bulletin* for a minor character,

Miss Deverich (Edith Evanson), whose characterization is akin to that of an endearing southern housewife who writes household hints on how to clean chili stains from blue pants. The stage directions of the original script described her as “a dumpy middle-aged society editor, dressed with provincial elegance, wearing a floppy straw hat adorned with artificial roses” (Wilder, Samuels & Newman, 1950, p. 2).

Miss Deverich embodies ingenuity – also journalistic – faced with which the energetic Chuck Tatum is unable to hide his sarcasm. She confesses to the New York reporter, with whom she feels equally fascinated and disturbed, that it is she who embroidered the ‘Tell the Truth’ embroideries that are in the chief’s and newsroom of the *Sun-Bulletin*, and that they show how far away the small Albuquerque newspaper is from the crazed tabloid newsrooms on the East Coast where Tatum comes from and whose techniques he mercilessly applies until they ultimately cause the death of a trapped man.

The portrait of the fictional society editor Miss Deverich is not so far from Wilder’s own journalistic experience at *Tempo*, even though the provincialism and candor of the New Mexico journalist has nothing to do with the cosmopolitanism and the sophistication of Berlin in the twenties, where “Billie” displayed his feminine alter egos (Hutter & Kamolz, 1998, p. 117).

In contrast, the presence of Hedda Hopper was quite different in the previous Wilder film, *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), since the actress and columnist played herself in a brief cameo that barely lasted ten seconds, in which she had time to appear as a determined journalist, whose aggressive ways and commanding tone were reminiscent of Chuck Tatum in *Ace in the Hole*.

Hopper’s presence in the film has a dual purpose. On one hand, she joins the cast of celebrity cameos who play themselves throughout the film, such as Buster Keaton, Cecil B. DeMille, Anna Q. Nilsson and H.B. Warner, because although when she participated in *Sunset Boulevard* she was at the height of her fame as a Hollywood gossip columnist, she also had had a long career as an actress in the golden age of silent films.

But beyond her past as a performer, Hopper’s presence, though brief, becomes highly important as a characterization of the powerful gossip and celebrity journalism of the era. Along with Louella Parsons, Hopper was known as the “Queen of Hollywood,” and her columns and comments

stood out for the bitterness and occasional sadism with which she treated stars (Brennen, 2005; Frost, 2011). Her appearance epitomizes the tendency of the entertainment media to forget their old idols but to fall fiercely upon their prey whenever a faded star gets involved in a sticky situation. She stands for journalism, in short, that is sensationalist, aggressive, and greedy for scandals, those whom Joe Gillis (William Holden) defines in his monologue as “the heartless so-and-sos.”

Wilder and Brackett were well aware of this image and tried to present it even more crudely on the screen. “I had in mind”, said Wilder, “not only Hedda on the phone, but downstairs Louella, in the ladies’ room on another one, saying, ‘Get off that phone, you bitch. Let me talk!’ Then they both get on the, phone saying, ‘Get me the copy desk. No, wait a minute –hang on. Hang up! I was on the phone first! Now, Louella, I’m gonna come down and I’m gonna – Shut up, Hedda. I’ve had it with you.” Wilder’s lines, and his line readings of the two parts, illustrate his penchant for bitchy slapstick (Staggs, 2002, pp. 101-102).

Hopper, meanwhile, stated in her autobiographical books *From Under My Hat* (1952) and *The Whole Truth and Nothing But* (1963) a somewhat more condescending version of herself, in which she says that she was devising a scene in which both fought for the telephone, where she finally gave in sweetly to her rival: “After you, Louella.”¹ According to how the gossip queen tells it, Brackett and Wilder² offered Parsons a lead role in *Sunset Boulevard* and when they contacted Louella Parsons, she asked them to dispense with her rival. When she didn’t get her way, she not only turned down the role but didn’t speak about the film in her column for months (Hopper, 1963, p. 62). Parsons’ biography, meanwhile, stated that she refused to play the role was because she considered that the image that was shown of gossip columnists could tarnish her reputation (Barbas, 2005, p. 313).

Hopper’s collaboration in *Sunset Boulevard* had real star appeal, which, according to Staggs (2002), reveals the terrible power that both Hopper and Parsons had in Hollywood (p. 328). Hopper continued collaborating with

¹ The kindness that comes out in Hopper’s story is rather difficult to believe, especially since it appears after a whole chapter devoted to recounting the supposed meanness of her rival.

² The columnist had already previously participated as a supporting actress in two films written by Brackett and Wilder: *Midnight* (Mitchell Leisen, 1939) and *What a Life* (Theodore Reed, 1939).

different media until her death in 1966. Her brief participation in *Sunset Boulevard* became the most famous role in her film career. Wilder once again included a brief reference to the two “Queens of Hollywood” in the sunset film *Fedora* (1978).

Professional Resignation

In two films from the early 50's, *Ace in the Hole* and *Sunset Boulevard*, both Miss Deverich and Hedda Hopper develop the image that is traditionally associated with female journalists: home advice columnist in the first case, and sensational gossip columnist in the second.

Three decades later, in a film which ended up being his last film, *Buddy Buddy* (1981), Wilder rounded out his filmography in journalistic terms with the classic film stereotype of the *sob-sister*, which depicts the journalist that works neck and neck with peers and whose ultimate ambition, as Saltzman points out, has nothing to do with how strong or independent the journalist is; it's about giving up everything for marriage, family life, and children, exactly the opposite path that their male counterparts have followed (Saltzman, 2002, p. 187).

In *Buddy Buddy* (1981), Wilder adapted the French comedy *L'emmerdeur* (Édouard Molinaro, 1973), written by Francis Veber and played by Lino Ventura and Jacques Brel. With Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau as the lead duo, the American remake of the film chronicles the chance meeting between the insecure and friendly Victor, who tries to get his wife back, and Trabucco, a stone-cold hit man who the mafia hired to assassinate a trial witness.

The Wilder adaptation incorporates a slight journalistic background to the story, which is lacking in the original work, and turns the Clooney couple into workers at CBS, the husband in the legal department – “What you might call censorship, you know?” says Victor – and the wife in the research department for *60 Minutes* with Mike Wallace.

What could have been the first reference to a woman journalist in a well-known news program – a woman whose power and influence are highlighted in the film – would soon be reduced to a new example of the female journalist who resigns from professional life for the sake of love. The able Celia Clooney (Paula Prentiss), in her attempt to unmask the Institute for Sexual Fulfillment of the eccentric Dr. Hugo Zuckerbrot – played with

his usual excess by German actor Klaus Kinski – falls hopelessly in love with her scoop and leaves her husband and her job to join the open cult.

Also on this occasion, the fate of the woman journalist, however powerful, capable and independent she may be, is once again in the hands of a man, even if the man is the very embodiment of extravagance and charlatanism.

The Powerful Portrait

Given the above, the contribution of Billy Wilder to the film portrait of a female journalist would be disheartening if not redeemed, at least in part, with another of his contributions, in this case as a screenwriter. The rescue comes from the hand of Augusta “Gusto” Nash, the powerful protagonist of *Arise, My Love*.

In June 1940, along with his collaborator Charles Brackett, Wilder started writing his second screenplay at Paramount for Mitchell Leisen.³ Based on a treatment previously developed by other writing teams, Brackett and Wilder developed the story that had been entrusted to them by producer Arthur Hornblow Jr. about an American aviator and member of a combat brigade in the Spanish Civil War and the journalist who helped him escape from prison.

Written in the months prior to the entry of the United States into the Second World War in December 1941, the screenplay makes a fervent argument for joining the struggle. Poland had already been invaded by Hitler in September 1939, and Krakow, Wilder’s early childhood home, suffered under the yoke of Nazi rule. Mitchell Leisen’s film was one of the first to explicitly advocate the American entry into the war to fight against fascism, along with *Foreign Correspondent* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) and *The Great Dictator* (Charles Chaplin, 1940) (Sikov, 1998, p. 191).

The film’s dynamic argument portrays how the intrepid journalist from *Associated News*, Augusta “Gusto” Nash (Claudette Colbert), looking for an exclusive story, rescues the aviator Tom Martin (Ray Milland) from his execution in a Francoist prison, posing as his grieving wife and asking the

³ Disputes with Mitchell Leisen to maintain the integrity of his texts were the trigger for Wilder to start directing his own stories from behind the cameras, in what Colpart called “an act of self-defense” (Colpart, 1983, p. 23).

mayor for clemency. The grateful soldier tries to woo her, but she puts her career first at all times. After their escape, they decide to work separately to confront the German army as they push through Europe, Martin as an aviator of the free Polish Air Force and Nash as a correspondent in Berlin (Hopp, 2003, p. 26).

The journalistic characterization of “Gusto” Nash repeats the usual pattern of professional obsessed with his work who renounces his love life for his work. The most unforgettable example of this stereotype, no doubt, is Hildy Johnson in *The Front Page*, the play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur that Billy Wilder adapted for film in 1974. In this classic fiction, the conflict in the main plot is none other than the choice Hildy has to make between marrying Peggy and leaving journalism, or staying with Walter Burns as a journalist in Chicago.

Interestingly enough, Wilder ignored the transformation that the character had undergone in Howard Hawks’ previous adaptation of the play (*His Girl Friday*, 1940), where Rosalind Russell performed the lead role. By turning Hildy back into a man, with a stroke of his pen, Wilder erased one of the strongest examples of a female journalist, and also changed the central romantic plot – in which Cary Grant was struggling to remarry his ex-wife, not a newsroom partner – turning it back into a male-centered journalistic plot, in which the editor-in-chief of the *Examiner* wants to keep his best reporter and friend at all costs, a relationship stronger than any marriage.

However, Gusto Nash in *Arise, My Love*, brings female Hildy to mind and joins her as one of the most powerful examples of women journalists. According to Maurice Zolotow (1996), the character was inspired by Martha Gellhorn, the famous war correspondent and third wife of Hemingway, who covered the Spanish Civil War as a correspondent for *Time-Life* (Gellhorn, 1988, pp. 13-50).

In Gusto Nash’s desire for an exclusive story, emphasized at the beginning of the film, Tom’s release seems more motivated by a desire to write a human-interest story that could dazzle readers of the 400 newspapers subscribed to *Associated News* than an effort to save the life of one person – echoing Chuck Tatum in *Ace in the Hole* – though both “Gusto” and Tom eventually end up fighting for an ideal larger than themselves (Lally, 1996, p. 114). Of course, the case also brings to mind another journalistic landmark, the rescue of Evangelina Cisneros during the war in Cuba by reporter Karl Decker, one of the most exploited news stories by the *Journal*

of William Randolph Hearst.⁴

Conclusions

Throughout his entire film career, Billy Wilder, who once worked for the press during his early career (1924-1930) as a “female journalist” for the Berlin-based tabloid *Tempo*, delineated a highly stereotyped portrait of the profession, in which, among other characteristics, he portrayed it as an almost exclusively male profession where only 10% of the 240 journalists and media professionals that appear in the twenty-six screenplays he wrote and directed are women. These figures are almost half of the journalists working in American newsrooms of the time when the films are set, according to census data (Franks, 2013, p. 2).

The characteristic features of the three female characters in Wilder’s films with enough of their own identity to stand out as individuals also tie in with a primitive view of the profession in which women only offer advice about the home or work in tabloids, and also incorporates the tired old stereotype of the *sob-sister* who abandons her promising professional career for her love life.

Although the classic Hollywood comedy had established a powerful image of gender equality in the public and private sphere, the distortion of Wilder’s journalistic portrait, however, is not from the unreality or lack of plausibility of the facts shown in their historical context – above all in the case of *The Front Page* and the press in the early twentieth century – but rather the reiteration in the representation for a prolonged period of an era

⁴ In the summer of 1897, William Randolph Hearst found a notice from Cuba in a teletype that sought to agitate US public opinion in favor of a government intervention by McKinley against Spain: Evangelina Cisneros, a young 17 year-old, had been sentenced to twenty years in prison for collaborating with rebel islanders. After beginning a huge campaign for her release, on August 28th, Hearst sent a correspondent to Cuba, Karl Decker, with the mission of freeing the young woman at all costs, something that he achieved through bribes. The *Journal* chronicles exploited the event for weeks with an ornate story that described a fabulous rescue with a ladder from an adjacent building, a knotted handkerchief as a signal, bent cells bars and a dangerous escape with the young woman disguised as a sailor. Hearst’s fabrication was a huge success and thousands of people thronged the streets of New York to welcome Evangelina Cisneros to the “land of freedom”, where she was even received by President McKinley at the White House on October 23rd, 1897 (Procter, 1998). Karl Decker published his story about the release in 1898: Decker, Karl. (1898). *The Story of Evangelina Cisneros Told by Herself*. New York: Continental Publishing Company.

and a specific type of journalism that has been broken away from. Significantly, the Viennese director ignores previous contributions that reinforced the image of women in journalism, especially Frank Capra's prior adaptation of Hecht and Mac Arthur's play *The Front Page* (*His Girl Friday*, 1940), and returns to Hildy to masculinity.

However, his career as a screenwriter has given us a brave and energetic character in "Gusto" Nash in *Arise, My Love*, a characterization that lies squarely in line with the powerful representation of the female journalist offered by classic Hollywood comedy during the 1930s and 1940s, and that in part redeems the final balance of his filmic portraits.

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