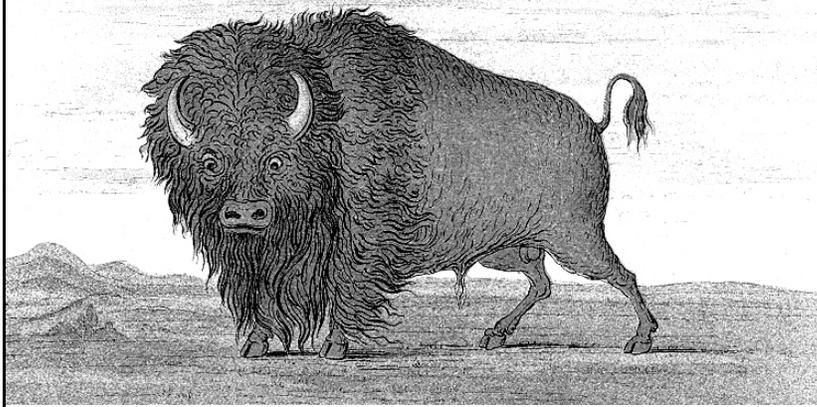


# The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films  
with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

**HOWARD HAWKS** (30 May 1896, Goshen, Indiana—26 December 1977, Palm Springs, California, aftermath of a fall) directed 47 films (and was producer on most of them) and wrote 24 screenplays. The last film he directed was *Rio Lobo* 1970; his first was *Road to Glory* 1926. Some of the others were: *Man's Favorite Sport?* (1964), *Hatari!* (1962), *Rio Bravo* (1959), *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), *A Song Is Born* (1948), *Red River* (1948), *The Big Sleep* (1946), *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *Sergeant York* (1941), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *Come and Get It* (1936), *Barbary Coast* (1935), *Twentieth Century* (1934), *Scarface* (1932), and *The Dawn Patrol* (1930). He won an honorary Oscar in 1975.

**BEN HECHT** (28 February 1894, New York City—18 April 1964, NYC, thrombosis) wrote or co-wrote 128 screenplays, half of them uncredited. Some of them are *Cleopatra* (1963), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962), *A Farewell to Arms* (1957), *Miracle in the Rain* (1956), *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* (1955), *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), *Guys and Dolls* (1955), *Rope* (1948), *The Miracle of the Bells* (1948), *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947), *Kiss of Death* (1947), *Duel in the Sun* (1946), *Notorious* (1946), *Gilda* (1946), *Spellbound* (1945), *Lifeboat* (1944), *The Outlaw* (1943), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Wuthering Heights* (1939), *Stagecoach* (1939), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *Barbary Coast* (1935), *Viva Villa!* (1934), *Scarface* (1932), and *The New Klondike* (1926). He won two best writing/original story Oscars (*The Scoundrel*, 1935 and *Underworld* 1927), and was nominated five other times (*Notorious*, *Angels Over Broadway* 1940, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Viva Villa!*).

**JOSEPH WALKER** (22 August 1892, Denver, Colorado—1 August 1985, Las Vegas, Nevada) shot 143 films, among them *Affair in Trinidad* (1952), *Born Yesterday* (1950), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *The Jolson Story* (1946), *A Night to Remember* (1943), *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* (1941), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), *You Can't Take It with You* (1938), *Lost Horizon* (1937), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Platinum Blonde* (1931), *The Broadway Hooper* (1929), *Virgin Lips* (1928), *The Isle of Forgotten Women* (1927), *Tarzan and the Golden Lion* (1927), *The Wise Virgin* (1924), *Richard the Lion-Hearted* (1923), and *Back to God's Country* (1919).

**CARY GRANT** (Archibald Alexander Leach. 18 January 1904, Horfield, Bristol, England—29 November 1986, Davenport, Iowa, stroke) was, novelist Ian Fleming once said, the model for James Bond. Grant would later turn down the Bond role when the novels went to film. Grant acted in 105 films, the last of which was *Walk Don't Run* (1966). Some of the others were *Father Goose* (1964), *Charade* (1963), *Operation Petticoat* (1959), *North by Northwest* (1959), *Houseboat* (1958), *Indiscreet* (1958), *The Pride and the Passion* (1957), *An Affair to Remember* (1957), *To Catch a Thief* (1955), *I Was a Male War Bride* (1949), *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948), *The Bishop's Wife* (1947), *Notorious* (1946), *Night and Day* (1946), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), *Destination Tokyo*



**HIS GIRL FRIDAY** (1940). 92 min  
Produced and directed by Howard Hawks  
Based on the play, "The Front Page," by Ben Hecht  
and Charles MacArthur  
Screenplay by Charles Lederer  
Cinematography by Joseph Walker

Cary Grant ...Walter Burns  
Rosalind Russell ...Hildegard 'Hildy' Johnson  
Ralph Bellamy ...Bruce Baldwin  
Gene Lockhart ...Sheriff Peter B. 'Pinky' Hartwell  
Regis Toomey ... Sanders, reporter  
Abner Biberman .... Louis  
John Qualen .... Earl Williams  
Marion Martin ... Evangeline

Selected for National Film Registry, 1993

(1943), *Suspicion* (1941), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), *Gunga Din* (1939), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *Topper* (1937), and *This Is the Night* (1932). He was nominated for two best actor Oscars (*None But the Lonely Heart* 1944 and *Penny Serenade* 1941) but his only win was an honorary award in 1970.

**ROSALIND RUSSELL** (4 June 1907, Waterbury, Connecticut—28 November 1976, Beverly Hills, breast cancer) acted in 53 films, perhaps most famously in *Gypsy* 1962, *Auntie Mame* 1958 (which she did on Broadway for two years), and *Picnic* 1955. Some of the others were *Five Finger Exercise* (1962), *A Majority of One* (1962), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947), *My Sister Eileen* (1942), *The Women* (1939), *It Had to Happen* (1936), and *Evelyn Prentice* (1934). She was nominated for four best actress Oscars (*Auntie Mame*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Sister Kenny* 1947 and *My Sister Eileen*) and won none of them, so in 1973 the Academy gave her the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award.

**RALPH BELLAMY** (17 June 1904, Chicago, Illinois—29 November 1991, Santa Monica, California) appeared in 131 theatrical and made-for-tv films, the last of them *Pretty Woman* in 1990. Some of the others were *Coming to America* (1988), *Amazon Women on the Moon* (1987), *Trading Places* (1983), *Oh, God!* (1977), “The Missiles of October” (1974), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *Sunrise at Campobello* (1960), *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* (1955), *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942), *The Wolf Man* (1941), *Girls' School* (1938), *Ace of Aces* (1933), *Airmail* (1932), *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1932) and *The Secret Six* (1931). He did a huge amount of acting in tv dramas. In 1987 he received an honorary Oscar.

**GENE LOCKHART** (18 July 1891, London, Ontario, Canada—31 March 1957, Santa Monica, California, coronary thrombosis) was one of the great character actors. He appeared in 116 films, among them *Jeanne Eagels* (1957), *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956), *Carousel* (1956), *Androcles and the Lion* (1952), *Bonzo Goes to College* (1952), *Madame Bovary* (1949), *The Sickle or the Cross* (1949), *Down to the Sea in Ships* (1949), *Joan of Arc* (1948), *The Foxes of Harrow* (1947), *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947), *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), *The House on 92nd Street* (1945), *Going My Way* (1944), *The Desert Song* (1943), *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941), *Billy the Kid* (1941), *Meet John Doe* (1941), *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940), *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell* (1939), *A Christmas Carol* (1938), *Blondie* (1938), *The Devil Is a Sissy* (1936), *Crime and Punishment* (1935), and *By Your Leave* (1934).

**from World Film Directors v.I Ed John Wakeman HW Wilson  
Co NY 1987 (entry by Gerald Mast)**

Director, producer and scenarist. Son a wealthy paper manufacturer and grandson of a wealthy lumberman. Moved west w/family in 1906. Settled in Pasadena. The movies themselves traveled west about the same time.

East & west for education. Phillips Exeter, Pasadena High School, degree in Engineering from Cornell.

In 1917 prop boy for Famous Players-Lasky. Later that year joined USArmy Air Corps as a flying instructor.

In the early 1920s, Hawks shared a Hollywood house with several young men on the threshold of movie distinction—Allan Dwan and Irving Thalberg among them. Thalberg recommended Hawks to Jesse Lasky, who in 1924 was looking for a bright young man to run the story department of Famous Players. For two years Hawks supervised the development and writing of every script for the company that was to become Paramount, the most powerful studio in 1920s Hollywood. William Fox invited Hawks to join his company in 1926, offering him a chance to direct the scripts he had developed. *The Road to Glory* was the first of eight films Hawks directed at Fox in the next three years, all of them silent except *The Air Circus* (1928) and *Trent's Last Case* (1929), part-talkies in the years of Hollywood's transition between silence and sound.

Of the Fox silents, only *Fig Leaves* (1926) and *A Girl in Every Port* (1928) survive. The former is a comedy of gender, tracing domestic warfare from Adam and Eve to their modern descendants. *A Girl in Every Port* is “a love story between two men,” in Hawks' words—two brawling sailor buddies who fall for the woman. The motif of two friends who share the same love would recur in many Hawks sound films, particularly in the 1930s (*Tiger Shark*, *Today We Live*, *Barbary Coast*, *The Road to Glory*). The motif of two wandering pals, enjoying the sexual benefits of

travel, returns with a gender reversal in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, with Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell playing the two traveling buddies. More than anything else, *A Girl in Every Port* declared male friendship one of Hawks' primary concerns. With the end of his Fox contract in 1929, Hawks would never again sign a long-term contract with a single studio.

It was the coming of synchronized sound that allowed Hawks to become so independent a film stylist. *The Dawn Patrol* (1930) was a remarkable early sound film in many respects. Its pacifism mirrored the reaction against the First World War in a period that produced such antiwar films as *What Price Glory?*, *The Big Parade*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The flying sequences in *The Dawn Patrol* were as photographically brilliant as they were aeronautically accurate. Flying and filming had never before been so beautifully mated, and Hawks' flavorful dialogue sounded as if it were uttered by human beings, not orating actors. The affected, stilted diction that marred so many early talkies was entirely absent. Dialogue in Hawks' films would always suggest the feel and flavor of spontaneous conversation rather than scripted lines—he in fact not only permitted his players to improvise but deliberately hired players who would and could.

*Scarface* (1930-1932) brought this spontaneous quality from the wartime skies to the urban streets. *Scarface* remains simultaneously one of the most brutal and most funny of gangster films—“as vehement, vitriolic, and passionate a work as has been made about Prohibition,” in the opinion of Manny Farber. When Tony Camonte lets go with his new machine gun into a rack of pool cues, or the O'Hara gang shoots a restaurant to smithereens, they are murderous children having “fun,” one of the most important words in Hawks' critical lexicon. Hawks' antihero Tony, a fanciful portrait of Al Capone sketched by Paul Muni, is not only a spiteful kid; he also nurses an unarticulated and

repressed sexual attraction to his own sister and guns down their best friend (George Raft) who invades this Freudian turf. Hawks' recurrent piece of physical business for Raft—the obsessive flipping of a coin—has survived ever after as the quintessential gangster's tic. It introduced the familiar Hawks method of deflecting psychological revelation from explicit dialogue to the subtle handling of physical objects. As John Belton notes, "Hawks' characterization is rooted in the physical."

*Scarface* also introduced Hawks to two important professional associates: Howard Hughes, who produced the film and would weave through Hawks' entire career as either ally or enemy; and Ben Hecht, the hard-drinking, wise-cracking writer who, like Hawks, wanted to make films that were "fun." Hecht and Hawks were kindred cynics who would work together for twenty years/Hughes, however, had his own war to win. A lifetime foe of film industry censorship boards, Hughes resisted attempts to soften *Scarface*. He finally relented, not by toning down its brutal humor but by inserting a drab lecture on the social responsibility of voters. He also concluded the film with the fallen mobster's whining cowardice, to take the glamor out of his defiance. But Hughes was so enraged at being pressured into these emendations that he withdrew the film from circulation for four decades. Only his death returned it to American audiences.

Hawks traveled to other studios and genres in the 1930s. [prison movie, auto racing, sea]

Hawks returned to wartime professionals in *Today We Live* (1933) and *The Road to Glory* (1936). The former was adapted from "Turn About," a story by William Faulkner, and began Hawks' personal and professional association with the writer. Like Hawks, Faulkner loved flying and, like Hawks, had lost a brother in an air crash. Both men also liked drinking and storytelling. Hawks and Faulkner would drink, fly, and tell stories together over the next twenty years. *Today We Live*, made at MGM, began another Hawks pattern—walking off the set when studio bosses interfered with his filming.

Perhaps Hawks' most interesting genre films in the 1930s were screwball comedies. Hawks was a master of a genre that has come to represent one of the period's most revealing reflections of American aspirations. As the philosopher Stanley Cavell argued, the screwball comedy enacts the "myth of modern marriage," the basis of our culture's idea of happiness. While Hawks always added comic touches to serious stories—from *Scarface* in 1930 to *El Dorado* in 1967—the pure comedy provided much broader comic possibilities.

[*Bringing Up Baby* first of his 4 Grant comedies]

Respected inside the industry as one of Hollywood's sturdiest directors of top stars in taut stories, Hawks acquired little fame outside it until the rise of the *auteur* theory in France, England, and America between 1953 and 1962. To some extent, it was the *auteur* theory that made Hawks a household name and Hawks that made *auteur* theory a household idea. In their campaign against both European "art films" and solemn adaptations of literary classics, articulators of the *auteur* view—François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Peter Wollen, V.S. Perkins, Ian Cameron, Andrew Sarris, John Belton, William Paul—looked for studio directors of genre films whose work displayed both a consistent cinematic style and consistent narrative motifs.

Hawks was the model of such a director. He spent fifteen years in interviews denying any serious artistic aspiration,

claiming that all he wanted to do was tell a story. But a Hawks story had an unmistakable look, feel, and focus. His style, though never obtrusive, had always been built on certain basic elements: a careful attention to the basic qualities of light (the lamps that always hang in a Hawks frame); the counter-point of on-frame action and off-frame sound; the improvisationally casual sound of Hawks' conversation; the reluctance of characters to articulate their inner feelings, and the transference of emotional material from dialogue to physical objects; symmetrically balanced frames that produce a dialectic between opposite halves of the frame. So too, Hawks' films, no matter what the genre, handled consistent plot motifs: a small band of professionals committed to doing their jobs as well as they could; pairs of friends who were also lovers and opponents; reversal of conventional gender expectations about manly men and womanly women. Dressed as routine Hollywood genre pictures, Hawks' films were psychological studies of people in action, simultaneously trying to be true to themselves and faithful to the group. In his classic conflict of love and honor, Hawks was the American movie descendant of Corneille.

He died at the age of eighty-one in Palm Springs, California, from complications arising from a broken hip when he tripped over one of his dogs. Even as he grew older he continued to ride his motorcycle and raise his martini.

#### **from *Who The Devil Made It?*. Peter Bogdanovich. Ballantine NY 1997**

The most laid-back director I've ever seen working—or just living—and. At the same time, the most clearly in total command.

Howard Hawks was probably Cary Grant's favorite director: they did five pictures together, more than Cary did with anyone else, and he had his own pick since the midthirties. Don Siegel, who, while running the montage department at Warners in the late thirties and early forties had watched all the top directors at work, told me Hawks was the one who *looked* most like a director; tall and lean, with silver-gray hair, he certainly did. Don said that when you walked onto a Hawks set, you knew immediately who was in charge.

As with jazz, it was the French who first took Hawks seriously, though his films have always been popular successes everywhere and his independent power in Hollywood was virtually unchallenged over four decades, from 1930 until he stopped making films six years before his death in 1977.

Among American directors, Orson Welles referred to Hawks as "certainly the most *talented*." French critic Henri Agel wrote: "Hawks is one of the rare patricians of the screen and his ethic is of human nobility."

But French director Jacques Rivette nailed it: "If Hawks incarnates the classic American cinema, if he has brought nobility to every genre, then it is because, in each case, he has found that particular genre's essential quality and grandeur, and blended his personal themes with those the American tradition had already enriched and made profound." The great variety of Hawks' pictures—there really isn't any *kind* of movie he didn't make—speaks for a restless desire to challenge oneself, perhaps almost as a kind of renewal. His characters do that—it is a part of their professionalism as well as of their bravery. Hawks put it simply: "For me the best drama is the one that deals with a man in

danger.”

The legendary Edward G. Robinson (whom I never met) wrote me: “When I first came to Hollywood in the early thirties, a product of the Broadway stage, I was unfamiliar with the techniques of motion picture production. I appeared in a few films but I didn’t really get the spirit of this new medium. Then I met a young, pleasant and imaginative director named Howard Hawks and made my first two pictures for him [*Tiger Shark* and *The Barbary Coast*]. Hawks understood the difference between motion pictures and stage plays. He instinctively knew that a movie had to tell its story pictorially.

He was never one to linger on anything. He said to me once...”Always cut on movement, and the audience won’t notice the cut.”

*How did you decide to change the male reporter in The Front Page to a woman in His Girl Friday [1940]?*

I was going to prove to somebody one night that *The Front Page* had some of the finest modern dialog that had been written, and I asked a girl to read Hildy’s part and I read the editor. After a while I stopped and said, “Hell, it’s even better between a girl and a man than between two men,” so I called Ben Hecht: “What do you think of changing it so that Hildy is a girl?” He said, “I think it’s a great idea,” and he came out and we did it with Charlie Lederer.

*You overlapped the dialog even more than you had in Twentieth Century or Bringing up Baby.*

In *His Girl Friday* the dialog was particularly adaptable to that technique. I had noticed that when people talk, they talk *over* one another, especially people who talk fast or who are arguing or describing something. So we wrote the dialog in a way that made the beginnings and ends unnecessary; they were there for overlapping. When any new actor came in, it took him a few days to get oriented, but everybody put up with that, and then it worked beautifully. It has a natural quality and yet, oddly enough, it becomes rather dramatic.

*The original movie of The Front Page [1931; Lewis Milestone] was pretty fast, wasn’t it?*

*Oh, I don’t know.* At the time it was considered a milestone in newspaper pictures. It got great reviews and it was said to be terribly fast. When I was making mine, three or four newspapermen who’d come out talked about the speed of the first one. I fixed up a little screening with two projection machines and we ran part of the old one and part of mine, and they said, “Holy smoke! The old one’s *slow*. So I guess we’d accomplished what we’d wanted, which was to make it fast.

*Apart from the speed, so you see a similarity between His Girl Friday and Twentieth Century—in the ruthlessness of Grant and Barrymore, for example?*

I think they have a similarity because they were written by the same people. But actually *Twentieth Century* was a real farce and *His Girl Friday* was not—it was based on very

believable things and there wasn’t one farcical moment. In *Twentieth Century* there were dozens: Barrymore’s makeup when he got on the train as a Kentucky colonel and the crazy little guy who ran around the train putting up religious stickers.

On the other hand, it’s the same old thing—it’s very easy to do a comedy about a tragedy. That poor little fellow who’d been put in prison was being railroaded. I would say *His Girl Friday* is a far better piece of writing than the other, although I really loved *Twentieth Century*. Of course, any time you compile a great deal of somebody’s exploits into one two-hour session, you get a feeling of caricature because nobody could do all the things that reporter and that editor did in so short a time. The editor was based on a Chicago editor Hecht and MacArthur had known, but they took years of his adventures and feats and jammed them into one period so it was a supercharged, compressed version of that man’s character. No person could exist and keep on going at that speed all the time and think of that many crazy things. The reporter was also a true character and they simply made up a story about their relationship.

*You treated the prisoner and his girlfriend quite seriously.*

I told you I made a mistake having all the characters crazy in *Bringing Up Baby*, so that poor guy and the girl don’t reach for a laugh of any kind. And we got more fun for our leading characters, Grant and [Rosalind] Russell by keeping the other people straight. Outside of one reporter and the funny man who came in with the pardon and the overdone mayor, they were all pretty legitimate.

*Was it your idea to have Grant and Russell a couple who had once been married?*

No, that was Charlie Lederer’s idea.

**from Howard Hawks *The Grey Fox of Hollywood*. Todd McCarthy. Grove Press NY 1997**

In July 1938, Howard Hughes made the biggest headlines of his life when he completed his epochal round-the-world flight in the record time of just over ninety-one hours. Later that year, word began circulating that he was planning a return to the movies after his withdrawal in disgust, six years earlier, in the wake of *Scarface*. First, however, he sold the screen rights to *The Front Page* to producer Edward Small. With *Only Angels Have Wings* just barely into production, Hawks went to see Cohn to try to sell him on producing another version of *The Front Page* as Cary Grant’s next starring vehicle for Columbia. Initially Cohn imagined Grant in the reporter role, with the editor Walter Burns being played by the celebrated Walter Winchell, who had already appeared in a couple of pictures for Zanuck at Fox. When Hawks informed the studio boss that he wanted Grant to play Burns and a woman to appear as the reporter, Cohn, Hawks related, was initially aghast but quickly came around to his idea during the course of a single meeting. In early January 1939, Cohn bought the remake rights from Eddie Small.

With Hecht and MacArthur unavailable—Hecht was busy doing uncredited rewrites for Victor Fleming on *Gone with the Wind* and preparing his next film as a director, *Angels over Broadway*—the first screenwriter Hawks approached to ring the transformation was Gene Fowler. The man responsible for setting the playwrights back on track when they were having second-act

problems during the writing of *The Front Page*, Fowler was a natural candidate for the job, but he resented, as Hecht did not, the changes Hawks wanted to make. Rebuffed, the director instead turned to another old Hecht crony, Charles Lederer, the prankish, wealthy nephew of Hearst's mistress, Marion Davies, who had begun his career polishing dialogue on *Scarface* and helping Bartlett Cormack with the adaptation of Lewis Milestone's 1931 film of *The Front Page*.... It was Lederer who took Hawks's basic notion the crucial extra step to make ace reporter Hildy Johnson the ex-wife of Walter Burns, who schemes to lure her back into his professional and personal life before she marries a straight-laced mama's boy the next day. Hawks credited Lederer's idea with making "all the scenes much better and the characters more definite. Now we knew what we were talking about—two people who had been married and in love and divorced. After that, it wasn't really a great effort to do the story. We were a little snagged up before that because the relationship was nebulous."

Hawks, feeling that the dialogue needed more punch, then decided to call in Morrie Ryskind, who had pitched in so helpfully on *Ceiling Zero*. Ryskind was a particularly apt choice, not only for his comic mind but because of his intimate familiarity with the material; his celebrated and frequent collaborator George S. Kaufman had directed the original Broadway production of *The Front Page*. Ryskind worked through the summer right up to the start of shooting at the end of September, by which time more than half of what Hawks considered the "finest modern dialogue that had been written" had been rewritten.

Changing Hildebrand into Hildegard enriched the dynamic of the story in obvious ways, enabling it to become "a very curious and complex romantic comedy in which love is expressed through work and work is expressed as love..."

The Hayes Office had no overriding problems with the screenplay it received before production but vehemently objected to repeated references to newspapermen as "the scum of creation" and "the scum of Western civilization," as well as to such untoward behavior as Hildy's bribe of the jailer, Louie's kidnapping of Mrs. Baldwin, and the idea of smuggling Earl Williams out of the court building. But censorship requirements impinged not at all upon anything significant in *His Girl Friday*.

As precise and adamant about adhering to the script as Hawks could be on a "serious" film such as *Only Angels Have Wings*, he was loose and casual about such matters on his comedies, rightly believing that actors could bring inspiration and life to the material on the set that writers couldn't possibly think of in an office.

At the same time, Hawks the engineer was still very much present. Everyone always said that the original film of *The Front Page* featured some of the fastest dialogue ever delivered on-screen. Hawks devised a way to set a new speed record on *His Girl Friday* by having the actors overlap each other's dialogue. This technique had been tried before, of course, by him and others, but Hawks and his writers worked out a careful plan by which "we wrote the dialogue in a way that made the beginnings and ends of the sentences unnecessary; they were there for overlapping." He also cranked up the pace to where, by one count, the actors were speaking at up to 240 words per minute, compared to the average speaking rate of 100-150 (drawling Hawks would have come in at something significantly slower than that)....

The zany, unpredictable behavior on the set was great for the

actors, but it "was hell for the cameraman," Joseph Walker recalled. "*His Girl Friday* was tough because you never knew where the actors were going to go." Comedies normally call for brighter, plainer lighting than dramas, and the look and mood was certainly a world apart from that on their last film together. Nonetheless, Walker had to pay special attention to his female star. "Rosalind Russell was very hard to photograph," he recalled, "because she had sagging jowls along her chin." His solution was to have the makeup man, Fred Phillips, "paint a sharp, very dark line along the edge of her jaw, blending it toward her neck. Then, hitting her with a high key light, that dark line became a strong shadow below her cheek, giving it a firm, youthful appearance."

At one point, Roz Russell became concerned that the unvarying torrent of dialogue would prove too much for the audience to take, but Hawks, with great insight, reassured her: "You're forgetting the scene you're gonna play with the criminal. It's gonna be so quiet, so silent. You'll just whisper to him, you'll whisper, 'Did you kill that guy?' and your whispering will change the rhythm. But when you're with Grant, we don't change it. You just rivet in on him all the time."

Given the green light, Russell quickly came up to Grant's speed and matched him, quip for ad-lib. She had a ball: "We went wild, overlapped our dialogue, waited for no man. And Hawks got a big kick out of it," she said. By now, completely converted to Hawks's methods, she decided "Hawks was a terrific director; he encouraged us and let us go. Once he told Cary, 'Next time give her a bigger shove onto the couch,' and Cary said, 'Well, I don't want to kill the woman,' and Hawks thought about that for a second. Then he said, 'Try killin' 'er.'"

On another occasion, Russell did something so unexpected that Grant broke character and, with a grimace directed at Hawks and the camera, said, "Is she going to do that?" Hawks left it in the picture, just as he did other jokes in which Grant refers to Archie Leach (his real name) and describes Ralph Bellamy's Bruce Baldwin character as looking like "that fellow in the pictures—you know, what's his name—Ralph Bellamy." Bellamy happened to be in watching dailies when Harry Cohn heard this for the first time. The studio chief erupted in a fury at the impertinence, but he eventually let Hawks leave it in, retaining what has always been one of the pictures biggest laughs.

Despite her pleasure in the part, Russell began to feel that the combined efforts of Hecht, Lederer, Ryskind and Hawks had pushed the piece somewhat in favor of the Walter Burns character, leaving him with most of the best lines. Taking matters into her own hands, she mentioned this to her brother-in-law Chet La Roche, the head of the advertising firm Young and Rubicam, who recommended one of his top copywriters to her. Out of her own pocket and unbeknownst to Hawks or the studio, the actress paid the writer, whom she would never identify, two hundred dollars a week to sharpen her lines, as well as, eventually, a few of Grant's. Because of the anything-goes, ad-libbing atmosphere on the set, Russell didn't have to clear her changes with Hawks, since she could just drop them spontaneously into her dialogue. All the same, Cary Grant began to suspect something was up; it got to the point where each morning he would greet his costar by inquiring, "What have you got today?"

Very uncharacteristically for the time, but consistent with his first speed comedy, *Twentieth Century*, Hawks used no music in the film except to build to the final fadeout.

Any concerns he and the filmmakers might have had about the

dialogue being too fast for viewers to grasp evaporated at that highly successful first showing. Screened for the press on January 3 as the first picture of 1940, *His Girl Friday* received across-the-board outstanding reviews, with virtually all critics approving the sex switch and therefore the legitimacy of remaking the beloved *Front Page*.

*His Girl Friday* has remained in high regard since then, a Hawks classic of its period whose reputation was further strengthened by the reevaluation of the director's career from the 1950s on. Although theater critics and historians have been curiously silent on the subject, the handful of film academics—Gerald Mast and Robin Wood in particular—who have bothered to closely analyze the differences between *The Front Page* and *His Girl Friday* have come down decisively in favor of Hawks's film.

Because of the central role of a smart working woman torn between her professional talent and her domestic inclinations, the film has also served as a convenient focal point for discussions of Hawks's attitudes toward women. On the surface, of course, Hildy comes off as exceedingly modern, a sharp-dressed feminist before her time who can out-think, out-write, and out-talk any of her male colleagues, an unusual woman even in Hawks's world in that she long ago proved herself worthy of inclusion in the otherwise all-male group. Feminist critics, notably Molly Haskell, have praised Rosalind Russell's Hildy as one of the most positive and uncompromised female screen characters of the era. By contrast, one of the director's great champions, Robin Wood, attacked the final choice Hildy was offered between staying with Walter Burns or Bruce Baldwin as "much too narrow to be acceptable." Wood argued that "the only morally acceptable ending would be to have Hildy walk out on *both* men; or to present her capitulation to Walter as tragic." The point Wood misses, it would seem, is that throughout the film Hawks is making the case for Walter and Hildy being two of a kind and,

therefore, belonging together. Sure, Walter takes advantage of her and manipulates her, as he does everyone. But he also brings Hildy fully alive, both personally and professionally. Hildy is at her most vital and creative with Walter, as he is with her; who else could Wood imagine being suitable for her? It almost seems as though Wood would rather she were alone than with a man who, for all his monstrosity, brings out the best in her.

As it happened, the film had a happy consequence for Rosalind Russell on a personal level. During the shoot, she became quite close to Cary Grant, adoring his humor and charm on and off the set. They went dancing together occasionally and Grant, who was seeing the actress Phyllis Brooks at the time, kept telling his costar about a good friend of his, the Danish-born agency executive Frederick Brisson. Finally he introduced them, and in 1941, Grant was the best man at the wedding of Brisson and Russell.

#### from *From Reverence to Rape*. Molly Haskell. "Female Stars of the 1940s"

By including women in traditionally male settings (the newspaper office in *His Girl Friday*, the trapping party in *The Big Sky*, the big-game hunters in *Hatari!*), Hawks reveals the tension that other directors conceal or avoid by omitting women or relegating them to the home. Many of Ford's thirties' and forties' films have no women in them at all, whereas even in Hawks' most rough-and-tumble, male-oriented films, the men are generally seen in relation to women, and women are the point of reference and exposition.

Hawks is both a product of sexual puritanism and male supremacy, and, in the evolution of his films and the alternation-compensation between tragedy and comedy, a critic of it. In the group experience of filmmaking, he lives out the homoerotic themes of American life, literature, and his own films.

#### COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:

- February 8 Henri-Georges Clouzot *Le Corbeau* 1943
- February 15 John Huston, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* 1948
- February 22 Vincente Minelli *An American in Paris* 1951
- March 1 Ingmar Bergman *Wild Strawberries* 1957
- March 8 Andrzej Wajda *Ashes and Diamonds* 1958
- March 22 David Lean *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962
- March 29 John Frankenheimer *The Manchurian Candidate* 1962
- April 5 Sergio Leone *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* 1966
- April 12 Robert Bresson *Lancelot of the Lake* 1974
- April 19 Larissa Shepitko *The Ascent* 1976
- April 26 Akira Kurosawa *Ran* 1985

THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS ARE PRESENTED BY THE MARKET ARCADE FILM & ARTS CENTER &

 **University at Buffalo** *The State University of New York*

...email Diane Christian: [engdc@buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@buffalo.edu)

...email Bruce Jackson [bjackson@buffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@buffalo.edu)

...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

...for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us.

...for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/search.html>