

3-27-2020

## The Many Editions of The Front Page: How Gender Shapes the Story

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### Recommended Citation

Moore, Nicole (2020) "The Many Editions of The Front Page: How Gender Shapes the Story," *Conspectus Borealis*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: [https://commons.nmu.edu/conspectus\\_borealis/vol5/iss1/14](https://commons.nmu.edu/conspectus_borealis/vol5/iss1/14)

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HON495X

November 29, 2019

The Many Editions of *The Front Page*: How Gender Shapes the Story

Have you ever been upset that a movie adaptation was not faithful to the book? That the remake was not as good as the original? This gut instinct to reject a performance's interpretation of the text haunted me at the 2019 Stratford Festival. After falling in love with the written play, *The Front Page* (1928), I could not wait to see it staged. The quick wit, overlapping dialogue, and ever-present power dynamics would surely be impressive when performed live. By intermission, however, I felt disappointed but hopeful. By the end, I was defeated and ready to rant. The pace remained slow and unyielding, which is unnerving for a comedy. The choice to play Walter Burns as a woman genuinely thrilled me – until it fell dead short of what it promised. The main theme of the written text, revolving around a cast of reporters known as “the Boys,” made interesting commentary on evolving gender roles in 1928 – especially for women. But this 2019 performance took a different focus, almost entirely eliminating “the Boys” club in favor of a more racially and politically charged narrative. While those elements were certainly present in the script as written, the near elimination of gender inequality was unnecessary, and frankly disappointing.

But just like we learn to love the movie as something separate from the book, I needed to take a step back from the performance as only a presentation of the text. After all, there have been many adaptations of *The Front Page* since its 1928 Broadway debut. It has been restaged time and time again, and it was adapted for the screen just two years after opening, resulting in four movies and four T.V. shows produced from 1931 to 1988. The play's dialogue alone was strong enough to produce it as a radio series in 1948. Each adaptation had to take the words of *The Front Page* and turn them into something new, exploring a focus relevant to its audience. Several of these adaptations, stage and screen, go so far as to change the gender of certain characters, just as done in the 2019 Stratford Festival production. My first introduction to this strategy included Walter's transformation into Penelope on the Stratford stage. Several questions have followed me since I left that performance. How do these gender changes alter the written word? Do such choices enhance the discussion of modern issues, or merely shift focus away from an "outdated" problem involving gender and power? Can a performance that makes these changes still be considered faithful to the original text? These questions and more will be the focus of my paper, as I explore how the gender choices of recent adaptations help to shape the play's political realities.

Originally written by Ben Hecht and Charles McArthur, *The Front Page* delves into the comedic but at times uncomfortable world of 1920s Chicago journalism. Set in a single location, the Newsroom becomes a sort of sanctuary for "the Boys," the cynical and hardboiled reporters of Chicago. With elements of sexism, racism, corruption, and communism, the text of *The Front Page* denies nothing about the dirty underbelly where journalism and politics overlap.

The opening stage directions for *The Front Page* introduce us to "the Boys," engaged in a game of poker. The only two outliers are Kruger, "a chronic loafer" (6), who plays banjo, and

McCue, who makes phone calls to dig up leads. These character actions give the reader an immediate sense of the men's priorities, with McCue's work ethic in stark contrast to the others, indicating this is not a common quality we'll see from the reporters. We also get an immediate sense of their attitude towards women, as they react to McCue's phone call to the female victim of a peeping tom:

“KRUGER. Ask her if she's worth peeping at?

WILSON. Has she got a friend?

...

ENDICOTT. Tell her I can run up for an hour.

SCHWARTZ. Pass

MCCUE. Just a minute, *Madame*. Is it true, Mrs. Margolies, that you took the part of Pocahontas in the Elks' Pageant seven years ago? – Hello. (To the others) She hung up!

MURPHY: The hell *with her!*” (8)

Here we see that even McCue, the hard worker of the bunch, has no problem harassing a woman for a story, and lacks enough self-awareness to be offended when she hangs up. The other reporters are more than ready to make crass passes at a woman who already feels violated by unwanted sexual attention. Of course, one could argue that “the Boys” easily make vulgar jokes to each other, knowing the woman cannot see or hear them. It's just hyper-masculine press room talk, right?

Enter Mrs. Schlosser, looking for her husband, a fellow reporter:

“SCHWARTZ. What became of that rule about women coming into this press room?

MURPHY. Yeah – I don't let my *own* wife come in here.” (14)

While the men try to cover for their friend, who is likely out drinking away his paycheck, their attempts to exclude Mrs. Schlosser reveal their attitude is more about her gender than defending Mr. Schlosser. After all, Murphy admits he doesn't “let” his wife in the press room, and Schwartz exposes his preference for no women to be allowed in – whether tracking down their husband or not. So clearly, the protection of their fellow reporter is not the only, or even main, motivation for excluding Mrs. Schlosser.

This early scene with a seemingly minor character carries greater implications for the play to come. During Mrs. Schlosser's dejected comments about her husband, we learn some important information about our as-of-yet unseen main character:

“MRS. SCHLOSSER. Don't trouble yourself! I notice Hildy Johnson ain't here either. I suppose the two of them are out sopping it up together.

SCHWARTZ. Now, you mustn't talk that way, Mrs. Schlosser. Hildy's reformed – he's gettin' married.

MRS. SCHLOSSER. Married? Well, all I can say is, God help his wife!” (15)

Mrs. Schlosser's conclusion – “God help his wife!” – tells the reader the treatment she has received is not uncommon from this group of men. Perhaps this foreshadows how the protagonist's relationship will unfold as the play progresses. But most importantly, it emphasizes the fact that the treatment she received is how “the Boys” handle their wives and girlfriends – women who are ostensibly important to them. If this is the behavior they reserve for their better halves, what do they subject other women to?

Meet Mollie Malloy, a.k.a, the “Clark Street tart” (40). A woman of low status fallen on hard times, she has recently shown kindness to Earl Williams, a man about to be hung for killing a cop. The reporters are familiar with Mollie, as the imminent hanging of Earl Williams consumes the current news. Their familiarity, of course, does not translate to friendliness. “The Boys” immediately unleash their cruelty on Mollie, taking advantage of her sympathy for Earl. They make callous references to his impending fate, in addition to vulgar comments about her profession and way of life. Perhaps they only treat her this way due to her helping a man they all view as a cop-killer. Perhaps they are only so mean because they look down on prostitutes. Mollie suspects these reasons as well, shouting, “And that’s why you’re persecuting me!! Because he treated me decent, and not like an animal, and I said so!” (42). If that is the case, they would never treat “respectable” women so cruelly. Unfortunately, the rest of the play proves this wrong.

That brings us to our main character, Hildy Johnson. While he has not been involved in any of the previous scenes, the other reporters’ behavior is important, as it reflects who Hildy will be as part of this boy’s club. He will claim otherwise, giving grand speeches about finally leaving the newspaper business, and calling the profession “A lot of lousy, daffy, buttinskis, swelling around with holes in their pants, borrowing nickels from office boys!” (36). Despite his colorful protests, he clearly views himself as a journalist. On the verge of getting married and moving to New York for a better job in advertising, Hildy “stands paralyzed, his suitcase in his hand” (56). The infamous Earl Williams has just broken out of jail, and the other reporters are scrambling to cover it. Hildy had just finished telling off his boss, Walter Burns, moments before. He promised Walter, “I’m through with newspapers” (53). He promised his fiancé,

Peggy, “I’m on my way – Not more than fifteen minutes” (53). But both promises fall flat as he picks up the phone to respond to the prison break, telling Burns: “I’m on the job!” (57).

Hildy’s identity as a journalist is inextricable from his relationship with women. After all, for him, the two things are currently at odds: his fiancée wants him to move to New York and switch careers, but he chooses to stay to cover the Earl Williams escape. Even before this monumental decision, we know journalism constantly pulls Hildy away from Peggy. Our first impression of their relationship is through a phone call:

“HILDY: Why, darling, what’s the matter? ... But listen, sweetheart – there isn’t anything to cry about. ... But listen, darling, I had business to attend to. I’ll tell you all about it the minute I see you – Aw, darling, I just dropped in here for one second – because I *had* to. I couldn’t go away without saying goodbye to the fellows” (51).

This one-sided conversation reveals a lot about Hildy. First, it proves his place within “the Boys,” as he admits feeling obligated to them. Secondly, it proves that he places his “business” over his fiancée – even if that “business” is goofing off with the lads. He repeatedly tells Peggy that he is “on his way” or will leave in just a few minutes, but he never does. Peggy eventually comes to find him, and exclaims:

“PEGGY: Every time I’ve ever wanted you for something – on my birthday and New Year’s Eve, when I waited till five in the morning –

HILDY: But a big story broke!

PEGGY: It’s always a big story – the biggest story in the world, and the next day everybody’s forgotten it, even you!” (65).

This argument and many more reveal that Hildy often puts Peggy on the backburner. But that is not the only way the paper business influences his relationship with women. The reporters are often accused of lying or fabricating stories, and sometimes they prove these claims true. Hildy, the true journalist he is, prefers to bribe the facts out of people rather than lie – until his fiancée asks questions anyway. Upon spending most of her father’s financial gift to get an exclusive scoop, Hildy’s first instinct is to lie to Peggy:

“PEGGY: What was that – over the telephone?

HILDY: (Taking her suitcase) Nothing. I was just telling Walter Burns I was all through that’s all. Hello, darling. (He crosses up. Puts suitcase down.)

PEGGY: Hildy, you haven’t done something foolish with that money?

HILDY: (Crossing down Center to PEGGY). No! No!

PEGGY: You still *have* got the rest of it?

HILDY: Of course. Gee, darling, you don’t think for a minute –

PEGGY: I think I’d better take care of it from now on!

HILDY: Now listen, darling. I can look after a couple of hundred dollars all right –

PEGGY: Hildy, if you’ve still got that money, I want you to give it to me!

HILDY: Now, sweetheart, it’s going to be perfectly all right –

PEGGY: Then you haven’t got it” (64).

Not only does Hildy frequently lie to his fiancée – which is bad enough in itself – he constantly tries to shift the blame to her. He repeatedly says things like “you don’t think” and “listen” to

make her sound paranoid and hysterical for accusing him of lying, and he uses “darling” and “sweetheart” as much as he can to pull on her feelings for him. This tactic of gaslighting is a form of manipulation, and is often used in abusive relationships. During the end of Act II, Peggy finally realizes Hildy’s true nature, but he continues to claim, “Just because you won’t listen you’re saying I don’t love you when you know I’d cut off my hands for you! I’d do anything in the world for you!” (105). Of course, he’s lying, as he won’t even stop reporting for her – the one thing she wants him to do. Worse than the lie, however, he continues to turn her valid concerns back on her, claiming she only thinks this way because she “won’t listen” to him. Hildy embodies the attitude that men know best, and their women just need to stick by them, even when the man constantly lies and places his priorities elsewhere. This toxic behavior towards a loved one proves that even valued women in this play are treated cruelly.

After reading that text, and seeing just how intensely gender issues drove the characters and plot, I was surprised to hear that the Stratford performance would be switching some characters’ genders. I did not entirely discount the idea – after all, some interesting commentary could be made, or power dynamics shifted, or issues modernized. This adaptation, by Michael Healey, had lots of potential to expand upon the original text. And then the play began.

Right away, the play felt different than the script. One of the reporters, McCue, was now played as McLaren, a woman. As discussed earlier, the opening scenes of *The Front Page* establish this group of reporters as a boy’s club. Does making one of the reporters a woman dissolve the boy’s club? Perhaps not entirely. Recall that the opening scene had only one reporter with any obvious work ethic – McCue. If one reporter out of “the Boys” could be a woman, and still maintain a sense of exclusion, this would be the best choice. McCue, or McLaren as she is now called, was not part of the sacred poker game. While in the text this exclusion seemed to be

personal choice on McCue's part, perhaps McLaren has less of a choice on stage. Perhaps she is not welcome to join the poker game because she is a woman. However, this opportunity was not seized upon. There was no change in dialogue or actions that indicated "the Boys" wanted to keep McLaren out. In fact, much of the reporters' interactions with each other remain the same, fully immersing McLaren as one of the group. While this decision could be viewed as progress for women in the workplace, I viewed it as claiming there never was a challenge for women to overcome in the first place. After all, the time period of the play remains the same in this adaptation. We are still firmly planted in 1920's Chicago, and the suggestion that a female coworker was just another coworker, with no barriers to opportunity or success, is insulting. The reason the boy's club was an effective motif in the original play is because it gave something for the women to rail against, and it proved that their anger was justified. This version of McCue denies that justification to the female characters truly struggling with their role in this society.

As the play went on, however, there were some changes that made McLaren's gender relevant. The treatment of reporter's wives, as shown in the text, consists of harsh words and exclusion. The reporters give them the run around and show no sympathy for their situation. McLaren, however, showed some sympathy for Mrs. Schneller – this adaptation's version of Mrs. Schlosser. Here, Mrs. Schneller doesn't enter as the only woman. She enters with her daughter, Zelda, and is greeted by McLaren, bringing the number of women on stage to three. The power dynamic of three women to five men is vastly different than one woman to six men. So the question must be asked again: is there still a boy's club? While the treatment of Mrs. Schneller mirrors the treatment of Mrs. Schlosser, McLaren plays her lines with much more sympathy than the other reporters. It helps that McCue's lines with Mrs. Schlosser sound quite respectful on paper, if you can forget that he's still trying to get her to leave to the wrong

location as fast as possible. However, the only indication now that Mrs. Schneller should leave because she's a woman are the two lines about women and wives not entering the press room, to which McLaren delivered a withering glare. So perhaps the boy's club attitude remains prevalent among the reporters, and McLaren's presence shows progress but not triumph. Either way, I felt the most powerful motif of the original text – the boy's club – had been at best watered down, if not entirely drowned.

While the boy's club had been weakened, the girl's club had certainly been strengthened. Not only were there more female characters, the original female characters came out swinging. Peggy, played by Amelia Sargisson, displayed an impressive amount of resistance and self-confidence in the face of Hildy's efforts. When Hildy, played by the lovable and charming Ben Carlson, would shower Peggy with "darling" and "sweetheart" to smooth over his lies, Amelia's pouting and skepticism shined through to the truth. Peggy's lines as written have moments of backbone (once she's been pushed to the limit), but Amelia's portrayal had a permanent sense of self, even on lines conceding with Hildy. Her performance transformed the relationship from a one-sided steam roller to two stubborn individuals butting heads. This transformation in power dynamic between Peggy and Hildy enhanced the idea of women pushing for a place in this world – rather than just lying back and taking what place they were offered. I must admit that although this relationship diverges somewhat from the original text, I do wholeheartedly love it. Unlike the elimination of the boy's club – which implies there is no obstacle for the women to overcome, the strengthening of female characters allows them to fight harder, shedding light on their struggles and triumphs.

Speaking of strong female characters, enter the powerhouse character to rival Hildy: Penelope "Cookie" Burns. In the text, this character is actually Walter Burns, Hildy's abusive

and controlling boss who doesn't take "I quit" for an answer. Our first introduction to this character in the play is only Walter's voice over the telephone, calling repeatedly for Hildy while cursing up a storm. Without ever seeing the character appear on stage, the voice of Walter Burns leaves an impact the reader can't forget. I was so excited to see how this voice would be executed on the stage in Stratford, only to be disappointed when we never heard a single one of those telephone lines. Instead of getting to hear Penelope call Hildy a "dirty double crossing Swede" (30), or a "two-faced bastard" (30), or my personal favorite, "You God damn tittering Swede moron – you lousy stewbum" (30), we only get the one-sided telephone conversation from the reporters and Hildy. I feel this decision robs the audience of a chance to properly understand the power dynamic between Hildy and his boss. Walter – or in the performance, Penelope – refuses to accept that Hildy wants to quit, and instead of trying to persuade him back, tries to bully him into it. This abusive behavior defines the power dynamic between Hildy and his boss, and removing that element shields the audience from viewing Penelope as a toxic character. I believe this gets at the heart of the decision to exclude those lines – since Walter's character transformed into Penelope, we are meant to view this powerful female character as a woman who has fought for and deserves her success, rather than a vengeful, abusive boss. I believe this choice cheapens the complexity of her character and her relationship with Hildy. Changing the abusive boss to a woman could have created such an interesting shift in the power struggle between Penelope and Hildy, but instead the taming of the abuse makes the power struggle much less dire.

Another interesting choice that stripped Penelope of some of Walter's power, is that she was not actually written as the female Walter. She is written as the *widow* of Walter, only coming to own the newspaper after her husband's death. This choice impacts the story two-fold.

First, it strips Penelope of a huge accomplishment, diminishing the power of her character. As discussed before, this diminished power takes away from the crucial dynamic between Penelope and Hildy. But the second effect, implying that a woman was only able to become editor of a newspaper because it was her husband's, backs up the struggles of women in the play. In making Penelope feel the sting of gender inequality, this choice actually increases the complexity of her dynamic with Hildy. She becomes the female boss of someone deeply entrenched in a boy's club, even if this version of the boy's club is weakened. She suddenly has understandable, but not justified, reasons for trying to control Hildy. Her attempts at aggression and manipulation, while still abusive, could be seen as overcompensating for the lack of power she feels over a male employee, especially since he once saw her husband, and not her, as his boss. This fear that others view her power only as her husband's returns again. During a later scene in the play, the Mayor – a corrupt antagonist to our reporters – makes a comment about Penelope, disgusted that she still tries to hang around with the town's power players at the opera, despite her husband's passing. He describes her presence as acting "as if she still belonged there." This line, delivered with such disdain and condescension by Juan Chioran, drove home the play's sexism for the first – and possibly only – time. I only wish such remarks had come sooner and more frequently.

Overall, the choices made in Stratford shifted the focus of the play. While the text was fast-paced and full of gender inequality issues, the live performance slowed it down and softened the sexism. While the gender changes made for this performance disappointed me, they were not unprecedented. Several film adaptations have also played around with the gender of characters, starting with the 1940 release of *His Girl Friday*, directed by Howard Hawks.

In this film adaptation, Hildy Johnson, played by Rosalind Russel, gives us a strong female protagonist. Walter Burns, played by Cary Grant, provides the charming, but incredibly

manipulative male antagonist. The abusive relationship between them becomes more complex by one key fact: Hildy divorced Walter just a few months ago. This opening establishes an engaging tension between the two. Not only does Walter Burns refuse to accept Hildy has quit her job, he refuses to accept that Hildy has quit him. In our introduction to Walter's character, we discover that he repeatedly attempted to slow down or stop their divorce. Even after the divorce went through, Hildy still has to tell him to "stop phoning me a dozen times a day, sending me twenty telegrams –" before she gets interrupted by Walter. This becomes one of Walter's classic moves in the film, talking over anyone trying to argue with him, especially Hildy. His use of dominance, manipulation, and charm serve not only to get his way, but also to provoke Hildy's internal struggle against the parts of Walter that she sees in herself.

One of those qualities lies in her knack for journalism. Throughout the film, people herald Hildy as a "swell" reporter. Even in the press room, with its all-male cast speaking many of the original boy's club lines, Hildy seems right at home among the reporters. One reporter even remarks, "She's just like us." Based on her interactions with all the men in the film, it would seem as if the boy's club does not exist in this adaptation. However, that does not mean there is no gender battle at play. The unique thing about this Hildy's battle for equality is that she alone fights in it. None of the reporters exclude her, there are no comments made about a woman doing a man's job, and not a single character remarks on her gender – except for Hildy. Hildy is the only one to bring up being a woman, and when she does she reveals a deep divide within herself. This first appears when she tells Walter she quits the newspaper business for good, and he tries to claim she can't because she's "a newspaper man." Hildy proudly quips back, "That's why I'm quitting. I want to go someplace I can be a woman." This is not the only time Hildy remarks that being in the newspaper business conflicts with being a woman. In her choice

between reporting for Walter and starting a family with her new fiancé, she makes it clear the choice is also between being a man and being a woman.

Another clear example of her internal dichotomy occurs after Hildy discovers Walter had her fiancé, Bruce, arrested to keep them in town. Hildy gets Walter on the phone, and in front of the reporters of the press room, lays into him about quitting for real this time. As she gathers her things, she tells the other reporters:

“And that, my friends, is my farewell to the newspaper game. I’m gonna be a woman not a news-getting machine. And I’m gonna have babies and take care of them and give them cod liver oil and watch their teeth grow and – and – and oh dear if I ever see one of them look at a newspaper again I’m gonna brain ‘em” (*His Girl Friday*).

Her rambling outburst demonstrates that she strongly believes being a reporter is irrevocably at odds with being a woman and a mother. Her fellow reporters are stunned by this outburst. Moments before they were betting her marriage would not last three months because she was too good of a reporter. Even so, I do not believe they made this bet because they believe a woman cannot be both a reporter and wife. Rather, they believe “anybody that can write like that ain’t gonna give it up permanently.” Once again, Hildy seems to be the only one insecure in her place as a woman, as she continues to convince herself to leave reporting, and being a man, behind.

Hildy’s internal struggle does an excellent job of presenting and discussing subtler women’s equality issues. The original text of *The Front Page* used the boy’s club and chauvinistic male characters to demonstrate the obstacles women of the time were fighting. While *His Girl Friday* does not use these external obstacles, Hildy’s struggle with her own self-

identity demonstrates an important aspect of inequality that is often hard to see. The way individuals internalize societal pressures can cause deep feelings of insecurity and inferiority. The more society says something about a group of people, the more they're going to internalize it, even if they don't consciously believe it. In Hildy's case, no one around her tells her a woman can't be a reporter. So, this societal message she's internalized must be from when she was younger, and she's carried it with her until now. This is internalized misogyny. The film's attempts to designate societal sexism as a thing of the past are unavoidable, given that the opening credits try to distance the creators from the "Dark Ages" of the 1920s. This opening disclaimer reads:

"It all happened in the 'Dark Ages' of the newspaper game - - When to a reporter 'Getting that story' justified anything short of murder. Incidentally, you will see in this picture no resemblance to the men and women of the press of today. Ready?" (*His Girl Friday*).

This distancing of the film from the past tries to claim that the "newspaper game," and by extension society as a whole, has vastly improved from the 1920s to 1940. Adding in the total acceptance of Hildy as a reporter, the film seems to be saying, "See how far our society has come? We no longer have these issues of sexism! Only women think we do, but that's just left over from the 'Dark Ages.' That doesn't reflect on today's progressive society!"

While *His Girl Friday* did a wonderful job crafting the abusive relationship between Hildy and Walter, and an even better job demonstrating Hildy's internalized struggle, this after taste of "but everything is perfect now!" does not sit right with me. They showed careful attention to the issues at the heart of *The Front Page*, only to make them less important by implying we do not need to worry about them anymore. The finishing touch to this message was

the film's ending. After all the toxicity between Hildy and Walter, including Walter having her fiancé arrested three separate times, the ending decides to make Hildy complicit in the abuse. She spent the entire film telling Walter no, calling him horrible names, and anticipating his abusive tactics – but as soon as he lets her go peacefully, she flips. She keeps trying to stay to write the story, but Walter plays the part of the gentleman, telling her to join her fiancé in Albany. Except, Bruce isn't in Albany. Just as Hildy walks out the door, she gets a call from jail – Bruce has been arrested a fourth time. Hildy breaks down into tears, but rather than being upset for her fiancé, she cries tears of relief. “I thought you were really sending me away with Bruce ... I thought you didn't love me” she cries. When Walter gets on the phone to help release Bruce from jail, he gleefully announces, “Of course she's not quitting, she never intended to! We're gonna get married.” Rather than be appalled by her abuser's statement, Hildy excitedly begins to make honeymoon plans. Thus, the film ends with the abusive relationship restored, and all the issues of the past having no relevance to the present.

This happy ending, of course, falls far from the truth. The issues of the past do not magically disappear, as shown in the 1988 film adaptation, *Switching Channels*, directed by Ted Kotcheff. This adaptation once again makes Hildy a female reporter, now named Christy Colleran, and the ex-wife of her boss, John Sullivan, this version's Walter Burns. However, this version brings the issues to the present, updating the story from newspaper reporters to television reporters. This decision demonstrates that the issues presented in *The Front Page* are not limited to the “Dark Ages” as *His Girl Friday* claims. Rather, these issues can persist over time, finding places to hide when they are no longer socially acceptable. Interestingly enough, this update to television reporters does not exclude the original print media. In fact, the press room for the newspaper journalists remains a central location in this film, giving the print and television

reporters plenty of chances to take shots at one another. One newspaper reporter says, “The TV guys are always in a hurry, that’s why they make so many mistakes.” This snide comment proves two things. First, it points out that the problems of journalism are indeed alive and well long past the “Dark Ages.” Second, it shows that it’s easy to reflect on the “good ol’ days,” such as the days of newspaper journalism, as being without fault. But as the original text of *The Front Page* knows, the good ol’ days are fraught with racism, sexism, and corruption.

In *Switching Channels*, the worst discrimination issues of *The Front Page* hide in the most unlikeable characters. Much like the Hildy in *His Girl Friday*, this adaptation’s Christy is revered by her ex-husband and coworkers as a top-tier reporter. As such, we hear nothing negative about her being a female reporter, except by the villains of the story. Roy Ridnitz, a corrupt politician running for governor, is the most outspokenly sexist character of the story. Such overt sexism quickly makes his character unlikeable, especially with outbursts calling Christy a “bimbo girl television reporter” and a “panty hose reporter.” Using sexism as a villainous trait keeps the issues of gender inequality alive and well, while also claiming it is no longer accepted in mainstream society.

Unfortunately, this claim falters under scrutiny. While only disliked characters are sexist towards Christy, women’s equality issues do not end there. The men respect Christy as an excellent reporter, but they constantly joke about another female reporter. This reporter struggles at her job more than Christy, but she tries her best with a smile on her face. Despite this positivity, and in part due to being a beautiful blonde, she is constantly referred to as a bimbo. Even Christy participates behind the girl’s back, calling her a “Twinkie.” Reducing this female reporter to being just a dumb blonde proves that sexism can still be accepted in this society, even if only in select circumstances. Two other brief moments point to sexism in the workplace being

ignored. In the first moment, a male reporter welcomes his new female colleague by cornering her in the news van and trying to kiss her. We only witness this sexual harassment for a few seconds before he leaps out of the van to chase down Christy. The second moment occurs right after the first, as Christy remarks that she has seen the same male reporter's expose on sexual harassment in the workplace. She implies that his work was far from great.

These moments of sexual harassment are peppered throughout the movie, and indicate that while overt sexism in everyday life is villainous, sexual harassment in the workplace is still incredibly common. Rather than seize this issue for our protagonist to rebel against, *Switching Channels* falls into the same trap as *His Girl Friday*. In the end, Christy returns to her abusive relationship with her boss, Sully. Although, perhaps this decision isn't as defeatist as it seems. Christy's new fiancé throughout the film, a gorgeous billionaire, proves himself to be somewhat of a dolt. Throughout the film he obsesses over his appearance and is more than happy to be steam rolled by Christy's ex-husband. While simple, he seems mostly harmless. As the story wraps up and Blaine, the fiancé, prepares to leave for New York, Christy hesitates. Rather than communicate with his soon-to-be wife, Blaine speaks to Sully on her behalf, while she stands only feet away. Blaine talks about Christy's relationship with the news, claiming, "She hates it, she feels oppressed by it." Before Christy can correct him, he goes on to promise, "I want to treat you like a woman, like you deserve." Not only do these comments show Blaine's innate sexism in speaking for a woman instead of letting her speak for herself, they show that he believes she can't be "treated like a woman" in her workplace. In the span of two sentences he reaffirms the two areas of sexism prevalent throughout the film, the personal and the professional. Meanwhile, Sully, an undeniable asshole, has managed to make it throughout the film without being overtly sexist. Perhaps Christy's choice to remarry Sully symbolizes a rejection of Blaine's sexism. One

could believe that, if it weren't Blaine's choice to leave her, and Sully's decision for them to remarry. In the end, Christy has two terrible choices for husband, and the men end up choosing for her. Any hope that Christy could be a symbol of the fight for equality fades away, and the movie cuts to black.

While there was something disappointing for me in each adaptation, there were also decisions that impressed and amazed me. From the powerhouse performance of Amelia Sargisson's Peggy, to the internal struggle and quick wit of Rosalind Russell's Hildy, and even the television twist of *Switching Channels*, I did find something to like in every version. Each variation told its own story, using the original text as an inspiration point and not a restrictive box, and I applaud them for that.

After all of this, I find it important to remind myself that adaptation in theatre is not a new concept. Western theatre traces its history to ancient Greece, where the power of the spoken word was explored and expanded. Greek culture believed an oral performance to be more dynamic and capable of growth than the written word. Socrates, a Greek philosopher, never wrote anything down, although his student, Plato, recorded some of his dialogues. According to these records, during a discussion about the written word, Socrates said, "those who think they can leave written instructions for an art, as well as those who accept them, thinking that writing can yield results that are clear or certain, must be quite naive and truly ignorant" (Plato 551). This quote gets to the heart of debates that still rage today – including the one I had with myself in Stratford. Socrates believed that once the words were written, they were static. Theatre, as a growing and changing art, would have to adapt such words, to mold them into something relevant to the current audience, the current society – as art should.

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