

Savannah Gillespie

Screening Report on *His Girl Friday*

In Howard Hawks' film, *His Girl Friday*, the question of how one defines a union works to shape the film both visually and narratively. As a member of the Remarriage Comedy genre, the film centers on the path through which the leading male and female characters must travel towards their inevitable reunion. Although it is appropriately categorized as a member of this genre, one of the genre's major characteristics is missing in this film. Unlike many of the genre's films, where the two individuals must become a duo, in *His Girl Friday*, the question is not how will these two characters become one entity, but how will these characters recognize that they already are one. Made clear to the audience in the opening scene by the editing of the shots and the proximity and arrangement of the characters within the frame, it becomes apparent that Hildy and Walter are very much still a team, both professionally and romantically. Therefore, the audience begins to understand that the goal of the film and success of their reunion completely center's around Hildy's education, and thus, her ability to recognize that their unity remains intact and that this is the life she actually wants. Therefore, in this film, the lack of this one characteristic helps draws greater attention and place more weight not another characteristic of the genre: the heroine's transformation. Even though there is no change in the relationship between Hildy and Walter, the heroine's education in itself is what allows for the rebirth of the marriage.

In the opening scene between Walter and Hildy, the deliberate choices made as to how the sequence would be edited directly correlates with the sentiments of the couple. Therefore, the editing helps to visually express the emotions of the characters and ultimately reveals the presence of their unity and their unearthed desires to stay unified. The sequence begins with the entrance of Hildy and Bruce, and as the two begins to speak, shots of the two characters quickly switch back and forth with over-the-shoulder framing; Hildy and Walter rotate being the focal point of the shot. Afterwards, the first scene between Hildy and Walter begins, opening with an establishing shot that orients the viewer to Walter's office. When finally alone, the shot maintains a frame where both Hildy and Walter can be seen together, acting very comfortably with one another, lighting cigarettes, sharing a match. However, the

mildly put

good

literary comparison

familiarity of the scene is soon broken, as the editing switches to shot-reverse shot again, similarly to the prior conversation between Hildy and Bruce. What must be noted is that the change directly connects to the change in the couple's conversation. As they move from common, nonchalant interactions, to discussing the time when the two were apart, the editing soon switches to a style of framing where the characters remain isolated from one another on the screen. This not only reflects how they feel about how each feels when separated from each other, but also comments on the type of relationship Hildy has with Bruce. However, as the two fall back into their old patterns again, reminiscing about their previous adventures together and their marriage, the framing is such that the two are never separated, remaining onscreen side by side. Not only do the two remain in the frame together, but also Walter himself enters the frame, as if forcing himself to be filmed with her and placed with her. It is soon after this change that Walter expresses that "Divorce doesn't mean anything nowadays Hildy, just a few words mumbled over you by a judge, we have something between us nothing can change." The sudden lack of cuts in the next section of the sequence seems to speak to this idea of the unchanging steadfastness of their relationship by preserving the shot from being fractured. When the next cut arises, it does not separate the two characters the way the first few did, but zooms in upon them. As the problems they discuss get more serious and closer to home, the camera moves in closer as well, visually implying intimacy. Once again, the camera only zooms out once the couple begins to talk of their professional relationship instead of their personal relationship, but again, maintains the visual of the two of them together. However, the editing soon switches back to the shot reverse shot, splicing the two of them, once the topic of Hildy's Bruce surfaces. During times when it seems that their hopes of an easy reunion between the two dwindle, the cuts become more frequent, always isolating the characters in the frame alone. Although subtle, the editing of this sequence works to visually manifest the internalities of the characters. Whether it is attachment and intimacy or disconnect and uncertainty, the editing works to reflect and thus illuminate for the audience, the real situation that exists beyond the masks of apathy the characters often

put on. The constant framing of the two of them together, only interrupted by short rough patches, suggests that emotionally that they do in fact remain a team and that's what they both want.

The unity of the two is also illustrated by their proximity to one another and their placement within the mis en scene. Like the ways in which the presence of lack of cuts and style of cuts is determined by the tone of their conversation and their true feelings, so is the way in which the characters stand in relation to each other. During the majority of the scene, the two work together in a partnership with each other. Normally they maintain a position of equality, standing next to each other, but if one character moves to sit, soon does the other and when one character rises, the other does as well. Even when Walter and Hildy move around the room arguing over her leaving the paper, they seem to sway back and forth, moving together, as opposed to one following the other. It is if they have always been wearing the pair of handcuffs that they are forced to wear in the final scene, symbolizing their unity.

This game of follow the leader is always mutual, as they both work to accommodate one another. The way in which they often parallel themselves on screen highlights the remaining structure of their professional and romantic partnership. Even if they will not verbally own up to it, their bodies and the placement speaks for them. The way their bodies are visually aliened within the shot mirrors Walters claim, "We are a team, that's what we are, you need me and I need you." However, when they do reach moments of uncertainty about their relationship, and certain problems threaten their ability to reunite, their positioning changes from two parallel images to a diagonal shape. The tilt of their stance suggests an imbalance in both intentions and emotions. The obvious shift, having one actor in the forefront, the other behind, allows the viewer to see everything, but prevents them from seeing each others reactions, further suggesting the disconnect between the two. This becomes most noticeable after Hildy reveals that she is getting married the following day, Walter takes a step forward, placing himself in the foreground, away from the position of equality with her and into the diagonal position. The change in proximity between the characters suggests an inequality in feeling between them, as the audience sees visually what Walter believes on the inside, that his feelings for Hildy no longer match her feelings for

great catch

which ties in to the leading/following stuff

him. The contrast of such a change makes it more evident how much time the two spend in a position of comfortable equality with one another. Although intercut with moments of doubt and separation as a result of their previous issues, the visual aspects of this scene illuminate for the audience that unlike many other leading couples, the union of these two characters did in fact exist and does remain.

As a result of this visual revelation, the lack of change in their relationship between the opening of the film and the closing becomes more visible. With the knowledge that physically and visually, their union as a team remains unchanged, the viewers must then ask themselves what did change. When the opening scene is compared against the final scene, the lack of a change in their actions and saying also becomes apparent. As soon as they decided to get married again, Walter accidentally destroys the promised plans for the honeymoon and falls back to his old un-chivalrous ways, failing to carry Hildy's suitcase the way Bruce would have. Therefore the audience then must come to the conclusion that it is not the creation of a union or a change in character that allows them to get together.

*nicely put*

With these thoughts in mind, it must then be concluded that what alone is the deciding factor in their ability to once again reunite, is Hildy's realization that she both needs Walter and wants this life with him. In the final scene in the pressroom, she states, "Tell Walter I need him." Although meant to express that Hildy needed his help with the story, the phrase contains a double meaning, suggesting that she also needs him in her life and as her husband. Furthermore, as Bruce attempts to convince her to leave, she replies to him, "If you want me Bruce you have to take me as I am instead of trying to change me into something else, I'm no suburban bridge player, I'm a newspaper man." As if speaking to Walter's previous claim, "You don't realize you want the water until the well runs dry," she realizes that this is what she wanted all along. Therefore, it becomes clear that it is with Hildy's own acknowledgement that she is in fact where she wants to be, with who she wants to be with, that she transforms, learning about herself and completing the necessary education of a female in the Remarriage Comedy genre. By isolating this occurrence as the defining factor in allowing their second marriage to occur and be

successful, this film makes the argument that this characteristic in itself is most important factor of the genre as a whole.

A great, great report Savannah.

Well done.

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