

State of Play: An Analysis of the Image of the Journalist in the Hollywood

Movie and the British Television Series

By Mohammed Rahman

Abstract

This work analyzes the image of the journalist presented in *State of Play*, the British miniseries by Paul Abbot as well as the cinematic adaptation directed by Kevin Macdonald. Through a study of the various journalists portrayed, this piece will deconstruct the standard representations of journalists in film and television, analyzing each journalist biographically as well as each journalistic act. This study will conclusively examine what Abbott's overall image of the journalist was and how that concurred or differed in the film version. That image presented in *State of Play* will then be compared and contrasted with the previous and current images of journalists in popular culture. The paper will ultimately conclude that the image in the film and miniseries is in line with previous images of journalists with just a few differences and updates.

Introduction

State of Play in simplest terms is about two seemingly unrelated deaths that turn out to be part of a bigger story of government corruption. That story is uncovered by a newspaper and its reporters. Though the miniseries and film are quite similar, in certain plot elements they differ.

The six-part miniseries begins with the murder of Kelvin Staag, who is a black, teen-aged, amateur thief on the streets of London. Staag steals a silver-colored aluminum briefcase, which we come to learn is the property of a hitman and contains a dossier on his next target. Before Staag is murdered by the hitman, he hands off the suitcase to his girlfriend and calls the next target warning them about what he's come across. The dossier is on Sonya Baker, lead researcher to British MP Stephen Collins.

Baker also dies that morning in a metro station, an event reported as an apparent suicide in news reports, which say she jumped in front of a subway car. Through the simultaneous police and newspaper investigations, the viewer learns that Baker was murdered by the hitman, Robert Bingham. Collins meets with party leaders where he acknowledges having an affair with Baker. The party advises him to come clean, which he does in a press conference alongside his wife Anne Collins. His wife puts on a brave face for the media, but the relationship is over.

Investigative reporters Della Frye and Cal McCaffrey are in the newsroom of *The Herald* when the news of Baker's death reaches them. McCaffrey is especially concerned since he was Collins's campaign manager. He leaves Collins a message as a friend and not as a journalist. To avoid the paparazzi and with nowhere else to stay, Collins stays at McCaffrey's home. Collins complains he'll get more coverage about this affair than anything he'll ever do, to which McCaffrey responds, that's the "nature of the beast." McCaffrey sees himself separate from that pariah culture. He's doing honest

work, covering public affairs. He's the lone or dying breed of the pro-bono lawyer part of a bloodsucking law firm that the public sees. McCaffrey believes Baker didn't commit suicide and advises Collins to be proactive or else the bloggers will keep taking shots. Collins, echoing the feelings of the public, says, "Bloggers? Have you seen *The Globe's* website today?"

Frye and McCaffrey investigate the murders as separate events until McCaffrey checks Staag's phone log at the coroner's office to see that his last call was to Baker. Through the course of their investigation, Staag's girlfriend comes forward with the briefcase, confirming in the reporters' minds that Baker's death wasn't a suicide, but rather a murder. Frye looks over security tapes of the Metro to confirm the likeness of the hitman as the same one as identified by a witness at the scene of Staag's death. McCaffrey in the film wakes Frye up in the middle of the night to go see the tapes in a clandestine meeting he arranged for her. She asks, "Right now?" He responds, "Yes, now. Who am I calling? I was trying to get Della Frye, the reporter?" Ultimately, he's trying to be helpful. In his mind, these are learning experiences and the dig is just part of that.

Frye and McCaffrey postulate who would want to see Baker dead. They assume it wasn't Collins because it becomes clear he loved her and it was more than just a fling; she was pregnant with his child. During this part of their investigation while interviewing Baker's friends, one name keeps being mentioned over and over. Dominic Foy, Baker's ex-boyfriend, was the one who got her the job in Collins's office. The reporting duo of Frye and McCaffrey, with the help of a subsidiary reporting team, follow a paper and digital trail to link Foy as the middle man between U-Ex Oil and Baker.

Collins, as a member of Parliament, was investigating U-Ex Oil's business dealings in the United Kingdom. Foy was sought out by U-Ex Oil to plant a spy in Collins's committee for a fee. Foy's recommendation was Baker; the viewer would know later that among a handful of more qualified candidates, Baker was hired on a personal recommendation from a party superior, George Fergis. Baker would dutifully report back to a U-Ex oil employee on private parliamentary meetings. She did this

until she fell in love with Collins and reneged on the agreement.

Frye and McCaffrey finagle this information out of Foy during extensive interview sessions. They conclude that U-Ex Oil must have hired a hitman to murder Baker when her reconnaissance and correspondence died down after they see first-hand, direct emails specifically naming Sonya Baker between Foy and U-Ex Oil top brass. Collins, feeling set up and betrayed by his party, is willing to go on the record about everything; Fergis's role in planting Baker, meetings and hearings where U-Ex Oil were uncannily prepared, etc.

At the end of the on-the-record interview where Collins tells all, he casually mentions how much he was offended that his life and career were ruined because Baker was given 25,000 pounds monthly for her services. This tidbit triggers McCaffrey to wonder how Collins knew this information when it wasn't shared with him. It was something *The Herald* reporting team discovered through their own investigation. McCaffrey tracks down Collins and the ending plot twist is, after all the evidence points to U-Ex Oil nefariously murdering Baker, Collins confesses to hiring Bingham to murder Baker.

The movie adaptation follows the same narrative structure.¹ Certain details are changed, but the backbone remains. In the film, McCaffrey wasn't Collins's campaign manager, but his college roommate. Collins is the American equivalent of an MP, a congressman. The editor is changed from a male to a female, from Cameron Foster to Cameron "Cam" Lynne. The female reporter's name is changed from Della Smith to Della Frye. Kelvin Staag's first name is changed to Deshaun. All the other major characters' names remain the same. The arc of the movie remains the same; all the evidence and all that the viewer is witness to suggests Collins is exploited, until the twist at the end revealing Collins to be the murderer.

The plot points become Americanized in the film. Collins holds hearings on a Blackwater-inspired defense contractor, Pointcorp, rather than an oil company. A subplot is introduced about the financial instability of the paper, *The Washington Globe*, where McCaffrey and Frye work under Cam

Lynne. Hollywood's presumption is that American audiences would be more invested if the investigated company is inspired by Blackwater, a company routinely in the headlines of papers across the nation. This aspect of the plot is ripped straight from the headlines. Including the element of a struggling paper isn't in the original miniseries, but adds a sense of realism by incorporating the difficulties facing newspapers today.

Discreetly, the movie comments on the current state of affairs in newspaper journalism. *The Washington Globe* is bought out by a conglomerate a la the *Tribune Company* or Rupert Murdoch's *News Corporation*. Lynne says, "Our new owners (Mediacorp) have this odd idea that the paper should be turning a profit." The movie is commenting on how once locally owned papers served a region and now outsiders buy up regional papers, only concerned about the bottom line.

More overtly, the film is, according to its director, about "how much we can trust newspapers. How independent the press is, how much real investigating is conducted, and how much is taken on faith from lobbyists and PR sheets."²

Reception

The film was a modest disappointment, grossing \$37 million domestically and \$87 million worldwide. With a cast including megastars Russell Crowe and Ben Affleck, up-and-coming newcomer, Rachel McAdams, Jason Bateman, Robin Wright Penn, and Jeff Daniels in secondary roles, and acclaimed actress, Dame Helen Mirren, commercial success or expectations were higher. In a script adapted by the writer (Tony Gilroy) of the "Bourne" films and directed by Kevin Macdonald (*The Last King of Scotland*) it would be ingenuous to categorize this film as a success considering the amount of firepower behind it and hence box-office expectations.

Though not specifically about Iraq, *State of Play* falls into the trap of preaching. It paints a

gloomy picture of an America run by private defense contractors at home and abroad. All the recent films about Iraq or U.S. involvement in the Middle East in some way or another have been commercial disappointments (*Body of Lies*, *The Kingdom*, *Green Zone*, and *In the Valley of Elah*).³ Even the critical successes (*The Hurt Locker*) have fared poorly at the box office.⁴ Preachy films about American policy are not entertainment, despite the timeliness or as recent history indicates, because of it.⁵

The premiere episode of *State of Play*, the miniseries, was watched by 5.2 million viewers and got 22 percent audience share, relatively robust but not earth-shattering numbers in the U.K.⁶ However, the miniseries was a critical smash. One review points out the dearth of heroes that are journalists and without missing a beat points out Clark Kent wasn't a hero because he was a journalist.⁷ Gareth McLean in *The Guardian* suggests that most often journalists on television are seen as a “malign force” and if they're not, then they are at least “amoral and mercenary.” McLean suggests it would be easier to make heroes out of lawyers.

Critical reception to the film was mixed. It was universally praised in its attempts, but the consensus was that it didn't hit all the notes; it didn't soar, it was just OK. It was “more tangled than taut.”⁸ Of course, some reviewers were willing to overlook the faults because the film was a rallying cry of sorts for reporters.⁹ It was journalism's *Braveheart*, dying valiantly. Claudia Puig of USA Today voiced the sentiments of many in that the film's plot didn't work in a film format, it felt rushed and edited down. David Denby in *The New Yorker* said, “something is hinted at—a relationship, a motive, an event in the past—then the movie rushes ahead and produces another fragment filled with hints, and then another. The filmmakers send dozens of clues into the air at once, but they feel no obligation to resolve what they tell us.”¹⁰ Mentioning the numerous rewrites and Pitt's departure only adds substance to the 'chop job' argument taken by most reviewers.¹¹ Rather, the highlight was the subtext on the state of print journalism more so than the heart of the story about “governmental shenanigans.”¹² Again and again, reviewers revealed an attachment to the film for its portrayal of the dying print journalist. The

plot was secondary in most reviews (“The journalist in me loved *State of Play*”).¹³ Peter Rainer of the *Christian Science Monitor* saw the film as a “last hurrah” for journalism.¹⁴ He describes the film in such a manner: “Not since *All the President's Men* has a movie celebrated with such brio the ink-stained wretches who compose our Fourth Estate.” Most reviewers are speaking from the heart in pain at their world crumbling around them.¹⁵ Ann Hornaday of the *Washington Post* simply ends her review by saying, “thanks for caring, guys.”¹⁶

Characters

Cal McCaffrey is an old-school journalist.¹⁷ He knows his job inside and out, the news angle or hook is his forte. In the film, he's even more grizzled, but that's partly due to Crowe's age difference compared to the actor playing McCaffrey in the miniseries, John Simm. Crowe's McCaffrey is poor, driving around in a lemon of a Saab listening to Irish folk songs. He missed the lecture on materialism and modern music tastes. In both versions, McCaffrey is a working-class guy. In the miniseries he is from Manchester and in the movie, he is from Pittsburgh. A la Stew Smith, is a representative of the working class.¹⁸ McCaffrey also happens to be an excellent journalist chasing the story of a lifetime akin to Woodward and Bernstein.¹⁹ His demeanor is more like Bernstein's however. He's a descendant of Michael Keaton's character (Henry Hackett) in *The Paper*, with disheveled hair, life, and desk all because of a job he knows too well or loves.²⁰ Keaton goes to sleep in his work clothes, wakes up and has a soda, and is completely consumed by his job. Though *The Paper* saw that world through a comedic prism, it's based on certain truths and stereotypes. Journalism is the only thing McCaffrey is good at. But, sodas, burgers, and pubs are what he knows best.

Upon hearing news of Collins's indiscretion, McCaffrey is reticent to chase the story at his editor's behest. He's a proper investigative journalist and not a tabloid reporter. He's not interested in

investigating whether Collins was “knobbing” Baker. The reporters gather around and take bets on whether Collins was “holing” her. The metro editor, ever concerned, laments aloud about Baker, “Let's hope she's not 52 and 300 pounds.” He advises Collins to speak to Baker's family or the “hacks” will crucify him. Hacks is a slang term used derisively by government types to describe the press, but the upper-echelon of the press (McCaffrey and reporters of *The Herald*) use it to describe paparazzi, TV reporters, etc. The hacks are all over this story, outside Collins's home - pestering his wife, Anne; the flashing bulbs and ringing phones are ubiquitous. A party boss tells Collins, “The next 72 hours will be hell, brace yourself.”

McCaffrey gets an earful from the editor-in-chief about his pointless coverage of Collins whenever he chairs a hearing, but now he's suddenly moot when Collins has finally done something that might sell papers. When a rival paper runs a personal piece on Collins's background, the editor asks why wasn't our paper on top of this. McCaffrey says, “Platitudes, padding and fluff. I'm a journalist, not a publicist.”

“Journalists don't have friends, only sources” are the editor's final words of wisdom to a stubborn McCaffrey. In a later conversation, Collins ask McCaffrey, “Who am I talking to, my friend now or am I talking to a reporter?” McCaffrey replies, “I gotta be both.” This is the compromise that he's made internally. He's being driven by the desire to clear his friend's name, only to later find out that Collins was abusing his friendship and steering him incorrectly all along. Collins only agrees to go on the record if Baker's death can be linked with Pointcorp (or U-Ex Oil), which McCaffrey works tirelessly to ferret out, thinking that he will be protecting Collins if he does. The editor's words ring true.

McCaffrey shows up to a hostile reception at Staag's mother's house. *The Herald*, not knowing the larger picture yet, assumes Staag's murder is part of a gangland killing. Staag's mother's attitude is part of a large segment of the population feeling disenfranchised and the press serves to only buttress

that assumption. In an argument, Collins has a few choice words about journalism: “It's not a job, it's a waste product. You can't move until someone spoon-feeds you misery or shit or gossip.” In the opening image of the miniseries, we see Collins on the subway with the newspaper folded under his arm on the page of a half-finished crossword puzzle. That's the extent of much of the public's involvement with the press. To the public, the newspaper is page after page of lies and half-truths and a crossword puzzle.

After Anne puts on a brave face and holds a press conference alongside Stephen, she stays at McCaffrey's home to avoid the paparazzi encamped outside her hotel. McCaffrey sleeps with her. This differs from the film where Anne makes the same advances, but Crowe's McCaffrey rebuffs her. Her line is, “The only people my father hated more than politicians were journalists.” McCaffrey says only partially facetiously, “Smart man.” McCaffrey's self-esteem isn't one of his strong suits and the negative image the public has of his profession despite the good honest work he does, doesn't help.

McCaffrey dated Anne in college, but he decides now it wouldn't be appropriate. Simm's McCaffrey sees the ethical dilemma, yet won't stop seeing Anne. If McCaffrey were a female, his ethics would be similar to Sally Field's character, Megan Carter, in *Absence of Malice*.²¹ Against her better judgment, she sleeps with the subject, Michael Gallagher (Paul Newman). McCaffrey says, “I can't quit her.” He's willing to quit the story, but isn't allowed to because he's too essential. His editor and colleague are able to convince Collins not to go on the record about the affair: it would hamper their investigation that would clear Collins' name. Collins agrees to, but not before venting, “You have no process, you just chock shit around when it suits you.”

This is the first major difference in the characters, one displaying weakness and the other aware of the ramifications. Simm is a flawed journalist whereas Crowe is pristine only as a journalist. The only questionable thing he does is run a social security number. Frye questions the legality of what he just did, to which he retorts, “That's what you call damn fine reporting.” Everything else and most noticeably, his personal life, is in chaos.

The other difference is that Crowe's McCaffrey is known by all the police and he knows them. The detective winces when he approaches, but his work is respected. The wince turns to a smile when McCaffrey offers a cup of coffee. The officer won't divulge the name (Staag) of the victim at the crime scene, but will play a game of 'confirm or deny'; since McCaffrey will get the information one way or another, it might as well be from him.

He's friendly enough with the coroner, making small talk, to get access to Staag's belongings; stuff he shouldn't be around, but it's understood his reportage brings about good. The difference between the two is that Crowe as a journalist is impeccable. Simm and other reporters in the miniseries pay their sources for information. This goes against the grain of journalistic ethics in the US, but that is the norm in the UK. Paying sources is part of the job description; it's built into budgets and expense accounts.

Simm gets Foy to divulge the link between Baker and U-Ex Oil through tough questioning, but also because of compensation. Foy wants compensation since he believes his story will net Crowe's McCaffrey a book deal, which he denies any interest in. In the film, Crowe doesn't have any ulterior motives, he's a newspaperman through and through. Crowe's McCaffrey gets the same information by saying, "The newspaper can slant this any which way you like. The more you talk, the more you give us, the more protected you are. Your compensation is your anonymity. There's two ways this article can run, with or without your name and picture" It's comparing apples and oranges if the apple had a worm in it. Compensating sources is one way of conducting journalism, but no one will argue it's ethically sound or ideal.

The painstaking process by which McCaffrey and Frye get Foy to talk, soothing him, consoling him, ensuring his safety, etc., is reminiscent of Lowell Bergman (Al Pacino), the *60 Minutes* producer, coaxing an on-the-record interview out of Jeffrey Wigand (Russell Crowe) in *The Insider*.²² The difference being that in the miniseries Foy is surreptitiously videotaped in the hotel room, while in the

adjacent room, a logger is noting down the transcript. Foy is the key that links Baker's death with big government and big oil and they'd prefer his interview to be on tape. The justification is that this method is insurance of *The Herald's* credibility. McCaffrey, as a friend, invites Collins to the hotel where Foy is being interviewed. Frye is ticked: "You're polluting the story. You're such a hypocrite. This is my story, too, and you're gonna kill it forever by letting him come in here." McCaffrey can't even appease Collins by this gesture who says derisively, "You're such a hypocrite. You don't care about me, me coming here was all about you and getting your story." He's right; McCaffrey wanted Collins there so he could get him on tape as well. He wanted to kill two birds with one stone as a journalist, but it burned bridges with a friend.

McCaffrey in the miniseries goes to jail for obstruction of justice when he will not divulge the name of his source, who passed along the briefcase to him. It shows a dichotomy of his journalistic ethics; he will go to jail to uphold a certain code by which he abides, but he doesn't see the dilemma in sleeping with Anne Collins. In fact, with his one phone call, he calls Anne to arrange when he can see her next. The tension between the police and *The Herald* (mostly McCaffrey) is highlighted when he asks to be released so he can get on with the story, to which Detective Chief Inspector Bell responds, "It's a case, not a story." It also juxtaposes the cavalier sentiment of journalists and their disregard for sources felt by many in the public.

Della Frye in the miniseries is a veteran, but still a youthful-looking reporter.²³ She's an equal to McCaffrey and they work as a team. She's not one of the guys, just one of the reporters. Her sexuality doesn't come up; there isn't a career versus family subplot. She is a modern spin on the character of Gallagher in the film *Platinum Blonde*.²⁴ She is street-wise, yet her vulnerabilities are just below the surface. She's as cunning as Babe Bennett from *Mr. Deeds Goes to Washington* and the remake, *Mr. Deeds* without the subterfuge.²⁵ She's experienced enough that she tells a "media virgin" officer how their relationship works, how information will be swapped. She's as confident in her abilities as Hildy

Johnson in *His Girl Friday*.²⁶ Yet when she is standing next to the “media virgin” as he is shot, she is shaken to the core. Before that, she's just a reporter, nothing overtly masculine or feminine about her role, but the officer's murder brings her to tears. McCaffrey consoles her and the viewer is reminded of her fragility. She says, “We should have told the police about the evidence, we can't let people get killed.”

Frye has a gift for making contacts and developing sources. She earns D.C.I. Bell's trust and is thus able to be privy to confidential information, such as the description of the hitman. In exchange, she tips off the police to the contents of the briefcase, which they in turn seize. McCaffrey is disappointed in her, but she responds, “No way I'm risking my life for this.” Her near-death experience puts into perspective her journalism ethics and the value of life. She doesn't see the value anymore of McCaffrey being in jail. He goes to jail to protect Staag's family (they know the secret whereabouts of Staag's girlfriend), to keep them out of police radar, but she says, “He's a journalist. He's in no position to help the Staags.”

After her apartment is ransacked by the hitman, Frye isn't reticent toward the police at all anymore. She's as invested in their investigation as much as *The Herald's*. She confirms the image of the hitman as seen on surveillance tape of the Metro. D.C.I. Bell is being pressured to shut the case down and he asks Frye if she has any information, for which he'll repay with information of his own to trade that might shift the case. She offers him the information previously unknown to the police about Foy's involvement with Baker. The tradeoff? The paper will get the first crack at questioning Foy before even the police in the hope that he'll talk for money.

Foy still isn't talking, so Frye pays D.C.I. Bell a visit. She asks him to put pressure on Foy to get him talking. He says, “We can't invent reasons to just pick him up. Unlike you lot, we actually have to justify aggressive maneuvers.” Despite what he says, the police do show up at Foy's workplace; word gets back to him. Frye sees Foy as the key to their story and is willing to bend the rules just enough.

Frye creates the illusion that he's safe with them, that the cops don't know his whereabouts, as long as he talks.

In the film, Della Frye is a cub blogger, not a reporter. Kelly Macdonald as Della Smith is modestly pretty. Rachel McAdams as Della Frye is undeniably hot. Surely, this is Hollywood being aesthetically pleasing, but she isn't miscast and the role suits her. Similar to the miniseries, there isn't any sexual tension between Frye and McCaffrey. In the miniseries, her being a female isn't even an issue save for one scene when she cries. She's more into gossip and less concerned about hard news. Her blog posts generate page views about who's dating whom along the Potomac, there is investigation and digging involved, but she's not uncovering Watergate. The editor doesn't think she's up to this story. Rather she wants Frye to shadow a seasoned reporter, dismissively saying that she'll learn a lot. Yet McCaffrey is the one who feels she can do it, claiming, "Inexperience isn't fatal."

McCaffrey is writing about the personal side of the story of Baker's death. She comes to McCaffrey for leads, knowing he and Collins are friends. She asks plainly, "Was he having an affair?" McCaffrey responds curtly, "I don't know, I'd have to read a couple of blogs before I form an opinion." The dynamic between the two is hostile at first. McCaffrey doesn't like her and he doesn't respect her line of journalism. He doesn't think she could cut it in his world and it has nothing to do with her being a female, just what he surmises of her capabilities as a reporter. He complains about her, "I use a 16-year-old computer. She can launch a Russian satellite with the thing she has." The editor comes to her defense, "She's hungry, she's cheap, and she churns out copy every hour." She is the diametric opposite of McCaffrey who is "overfed, too expensive, and takes too long." As they work together on the story, he sees her reporting instincts shine through and the relationship shifts from forced to McCaffrey taking her under his wing. By the end of the film, he sees her as a colleague and friend: "When I see you, I don't see a girl, I just see a reporter." As McCaffrey puts the finishing touches on the final piece encompassing the entire investigation of Frye and McCaffrey as a team, he types her name first in the

byline.

Frye as a blogger is updating the adaptation from the miniseries. Frye's position is a reflection of how much journalism has changed in the six-year span between the two miniseries and film; Frye is working on bulky desktops and chunky monitors in the miniseries. In the film, she works on a razor-thin laptop.

In the miniseries, Cameron Foster is the editor of *The Herald*,²⁷ a sharp-tongued wise-ass, who seriously enjoys being the head honcho. More so than the power, he likes being able to mouth off. He's a firm backer of his reporters, a modern Ben Bradlee (Jason Robards) of the *Washington Post* in *All the President's Men*.²⁸ He stands up for them, he buys them drinks, and is as invested in the story as his reporters. He doesn't like McCaffrey, more so after news of the affair breaks, but he stands by him because he's a good reporter.

When McCaffrey shows Foster the briefcase, he contemplates whether to turn it over to the police since it is evidence. Frye suggests turning it over. She's the reporter most afraid to take a chance in subverting a police investigation. Foster glares at her. He believes the paper's investigation is just as important, maybe even more so, than the police's. "I want something solid, damned if we can't do a better job with it than those cops," he says. Foster decides against turning it over to the police; the story or the scoop is more important to him. The editor is seen as a "foaming-at-the-mouth" type, partly because many screenwriters came from a journalism background and were familiar with editors' penchants.²⁹ Abbott's script doesn't reflect that domineering style, however. Abbott's a television writer; Foster wants the story badly, but he's calm about it. Yet, Foster's desire or drive for the story is similar to the editor in *The Front Page*, willing to hide a murderer from the police to preserve a scoop.³⁰ Foster only hands over the briefcase to the police, who brandish a warrant to search and seize, after his office and the newsroom are raided and ransacked.

Foster is the antithesis to Henry Connell of the *New Bulletin* in *Meet John Doe*.³¹ Connell is

concerned primarily with the viability of the newspaper, then journalism. Circulation numbers are his primary focus. He believes the nature of the stories ought to increase circulation. Foster, on the other hand, is more concerned with the story, circulation be damned. He is pressured by the publisher to wrap up the investigation, but in the worst way he doesn't want to have his story change focus from governmental shenanigans to lurid details of an MP's affair, even though it's something the public would eat up. Foster is the reporter's best friend, yet McCaffrey cannot see the predicament his boss is in and accuses him of colluding, just like the government and U-Ex Oil. Foster says that McCaffrey is the actual thorn. "You have injected yourself into this story from the beginning. This story cannot be printed unless someone major is on the record and the only person who could [Collins] won't because you shagged his wife [Anne]."

In the film adaptation, editor Cameron Foster becomes a British female, Cameron Lynne, played by Helen Mirren. There is no explanation for how she comes to be in charge of the *Washington Globe*, a stand-in for the *Washington Post*. Nevertheless, she tries to be a rock in the midst of new ownership and the pressures to appease two sides of a coin—a worried reportorial staff and demanding higher-ups.

Initially, Lynne sides with the ownership over the story. The investigation is becoming too costly, she is being taken to task behind the scenes, and she wants to run with what they've got. "I don't give a shit about the rest of the story" are her exact words. The salacious story about a congressman's affair will have to do. Lynne is analogous to the editor in *Five Star Final*, who uses a love-tryst murder to boost circulation.³² Lynne sympathizes with her reporters, but for the stability of the paper, she caves just a little bit to management. The viewer, however, is sympathetic to her situation knowing the dual forces pulling at Lynne. *The Globe* is beat again on a story about Baker's friend and her tawdry details of night life and partying. McCaffrey's call was that the friend was not credible. He insists that the real story is about Pointcorp. Lynne angrily responds, "The real story is the sinking of this bloody

newspaper. This new management is interested in sales, not discretion.”

Lynne's biggest decision as editor is when McCaffrey is ever so close to sealing the deal. All he needs to wrap up his reporting is one on-the-record comment from George Fergis about his involvement in hiring Baker. He almost has the whole story, not just the affair, but the juiciest bit about government corruption. He calls Lynne asking for a deadline extension. She decides to trust her reporter and stops the presses to the tune of 20,000 dollars per hour. Her decision was akin to the editor in *The Paper* also extending the deadline to ensure the paper got the story right.³³

The publisher of *The Herald*, Bob Coutts, is seen in just one scene, but his power is undeniable.³⁴ A character only in the miniseries, Coutts is portrayed as the master puppeteer. He sits down with Foster and asks about the cost of the investigation into the government and Collins. The normally brash and quick-witted Foster becomes a shy and demure schoolgirl around him. Coutts is emasculating. He hears Foster's answer, but he's already made up his mind. He sets the limit of the investigation at 40,000 pounds despite knowing that this will hamper any further progress or scoops. Foster knows that Coutts is closing the lid only because his company is up for two radio licenses and he doesn't want to irk the government, but Foster doesn't openly question Coutts's motives.

Coutts as a power-hungry publisher willing to set aside journalistic integrity has origins in the real-life figure William Randolph Hearst and the films depicting him.³⁵ Hearst was catered to because his set of nationwide newspapers could be used as publicity for one enterprise, industry, entity or another. The “Hearstian” publisher in *The President Vanishes* uses his clout, his newspapers, to seize power. Coutts wants the same thing essentially, the only difference being his methods of gaining power.³⁶ Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *Meet John Doe* also are examples also of publishers exploiting the Fourth Estate for their personal gain. Coutts isn't as nefarious or even as overt about his intentions as Jim Taylor or D.B. Norton.³⁷ A reader wouldn't ever know there was a power play and how it has affected journalism at *The Herald* because of Coutts's subtlety.

Enculturation

The newsroom is a subculture. Cub reporters like Frye in *State of Play* learn the requirements, the language, the accepted behaviors, and values of that newsroom through a process called enculturation.³⁸ Undeniably, each culture has a unique set of rules, language, behaviors, etc., and the newsroom is no different. A fish out of water cannot acclimate unless taught how or absorbed literally by osmosis. Frye is McCaffrey's reporting partner, a peer, and will learn the ins and outs of the newspaper business. She will learn also just by being in that milieu of hundreds of reporters and editors. These methods of learning coexist simultaneously and overlap. The litmus test is when McCaffrey sees her as an equal. She knows the ropes and the nuances of the profession and would be a capable teacher to the next cub reporter thanks in part to a crash course in enculturation of a newsroom. The end result is that she is a newspaper person, part of a clique connected by a process or collective experience defined as enculturation.

Conclusion

Collins says to McCaffrey in the closing sequences of the film, "It's laughable your own sense of self-worth." McCaffrey responds eloquently, speaking on behalf of a dying institution, "Why is that? Because nobody reads the papers anymore? Just another story. Couple of days of shit-storm and then it's wrapping paper. I think people still know the difference between real news and bullshit and they're glad someone cares enough to get things on the record and print the truth."

Newspapers or no newspapers, journalism or news content will exist, and hand in hand film and television will be there capturing the changes, reflecting on the image, and building upon a long legacy. That's a given or the "nature of the beast."

Twenty years from now, maybe sooner, this miniseries and adaption will be dated. Newspapers are dying and presumably will be extinct. McCaffrey, Frye, Foster/Lynne, Coutts, are part of the culmination of images of journalists in film and television. From a vast collection, *State of Play* will be remembered as a depiction of vintage tactile newspapers, vintage newsrooms and, most certainly, vintage journalists. The underlying theme in the miniseries is that the Cal McCaffreys of the world aren't at every newspaper, in fact, they're once in a generation. In the film, that theme is pushed even further: Cal McCaffrey is a dying breed part of a dying establishment.

The indelible image is of the Member of Parliament, Stephen Collins, in the opening sequence of the miniseries on a subway car with a newspaper folded under his arm turned to the page of a half-finished crossword puzzle. As much as a dwindling number of subscribers appreciate McCaffrey's efforts to seek the truth, newspapers are shown to be just fodder around a crossword puzzle to a sizable lot. No one outside the Fourth Estate will shed a tear when newspapers fade away, delivery trucks and all.

-
- 1 The second synopsis and compare/contrast is from *State of Play*, the film
 - 2 Diane Garrett, "Macdonald to Direct *State of Play*," *Variety*, March 19, 2007, Entertainment News section.
 - 3 Tom Streithorst, "Why Iraq War Films Fail," *Prospect Magazine*, March 17, 2010.
 - 4 Marjorie Miller, "Separating Fact From Fiction in Iraq War Films," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 2010, Commentary section.
 - 5 Owen Gleiberman, *State of Play*, *Entertainment Weekly*, April 15, 2009.
 - 6 Jason Deans, "BBC1 Political Drama Murdered by ITV Thriller," *The Guardian*, May 19, 2003, Media section.
 - 7 Gareth McLean, "The Genuine Article," *The Guardian*, May 19, 2003, Culture section.
 - 8 Betsy Sharkey, *State of Play*, *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 2009, Calendar section.
 - 9 J. Hoberman, "Affleck, Crowe Pump Adrenaline into a Dying Industry in *State of Play*," *The Village Voice*, April 15, 2009, Movies section.
 - 10 David Denby, "Extra! Extra!" *The New Yorker*, April 27, 2009.
 - 11 Peter Travers, *State of Play*, *Rolling Stone*, April 13, 2009, Reviews section.
 - 12 Claudia Puig, "*State of Play* Impresses with Political Intrigue, Journalism," *USA Today*, April 19, 2009, Movies section.
 - 13 Carrie Rickey, "Reporter on the Case in Juicy D.C. Thriller," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 17, 2009, Entertainment section.
 - 14 Peter Rainer, "Review: *State of Play*," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 17, 2009, Movies section.
 - 15 A.O. Scott, "The News on Paper, and Other Artifacts," *The New York Times*, April 17, 2009, Arts section.
 - 16 Ann Hornaday, *State of Play*, *Washington Post*, April 17, 2009, Movies section.
 - 17 The character definition is from the miniseries as well as movie
 - 18 Joe Saltzman, Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film (IJPC publication University of Southern California Press, Los Angeles, 2002), p. 14.
 - 19 Howard Good, (Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, NJ, 1989) p. 153.
 - 20 Matthew Ehrlich (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL, 2004) p. 145.

-
- 21 Op. Cit. p. 134.
 - 22 Op. Cit. p. 140-145.
 - 23 The character definition is from the miniseries and film
 - 24 Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film, p. 57.
 - 25 Op. Cit. p. 68.
 - 26 Op. Cit. p. 55.
 - 27 The character definition is from the miniseries and film
 - 28 Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film, p. 143.
 - 29 M. Courson, "The Newspaper Movies: An Analysis of the Rise and Decline of the News Gatherer as a Hero in American Motion Pictures, 1900-1974" (PhD diss., University of Hawaii, 1976) p. 91.
 - 30 Op. Cit. p. 92.
 - 31 Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film, p. 97.
 - 32 M. Courson, "The Newspaper Movies: An Analysis of the Rise and Decline of the News Gatherer as a Hero in American Motion Pictures, 1900-1974" (PhD diss., University of Hawaii, 1976) p. 92.
 - 33 Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film, p. 143.
 - 34 The character definition is from the miniseries and film
 - 35 M. Courson, "The Newspaper Movies: An Analysis of the Rise and Decline of the News Gatherer as a Hero in American Motion Pictures, 1900-1974" (PhD diss., University of Hawaii, 1976) p. 99-101.
 - 36 Frank Capra and the Image of the Journalist in American Film, p. 111.
 - 37 Op. Cit. p.112-123
 - 38 Conrad Kottak, Window on Humanity: A Concise Introduction to Anthropology (McGraw Hill, Boston, 2005), Introduction.