

**Journalistic Reality as Material for Hollywood:  
Comments on Investigative Journalism in Film**

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## Journalism in Film

Filmmakers have paid considerable attention to journalism (Zynda 1979: 17). In his stocktaking of American journalism films, Langman refers to over 1,000 works that came into being between 1900 and 1996 (Langman 1998). More than 2,100 titles for the same period of time may be found in the cinematography *From Headline Hunter to Superman*, which also includes international films and TV productions (Ness 1997).

What is first of all striking in the genre of journalism films is the enormous quantity of productions. All of these films create and transmit a (fictional) image of journalism, which also affects the general picture of the profession. Journalists themselves have continuously referred to these films when choosing their profession and admit to having been influenced by their film idols. Tom Wolfe, the most famous representative of *New Journalism*, states the following:

“Chicago, 1928, that was the general idea . . . Drunken reporters out on the ledge of the News peeing into the Chicago River at dawn (...) Nights down at the detective bureau – it was always night-time in my daydreams of the newspaper life. (...) I wanted the whole movie, nothing left out.” (Wolfe 1973: 3).<sup>1</sup>

However, what image of journalism is being transmitted via film? Is it positive or negative, and to what extent does this portrayal border on reality?

It is conspicuous that journalistic screen heroes have dedicated themselves in most cases to their profession, often in an almost obsessive way. They have either a marginal private life or none at all: “Reporters and editors marry the newspaper making a private life almost impossible” (Ghiglione/Saltzman 2002: 5). In the case of the evaluation of journalistic figures, the results are contradictory.<sup>2</sup> Some publications make the point that there is a generally positive image of journalists. Others conclude:

“Journalists are rude, many times divorced, hard-drinking, cigarette-smoking, social misfits who will do anything for a front-page byline, with few women or minorities in managerial positions and editors concerned only with profits – that is, if you believe what you see in most movies” (Gersh 1991: 18).<sup>3</sup>

Some go as far as calling this negative stereotyping “one of the profoundest smear campaigns in the history of film”<sup>4</sup> (Behnert 1992: 22). Whether too positive or too negative, unity – and often annoyance – is expressed about the issue that journalism films do not present an adequate picture of the profession. The fact that this is neither the aim nor the task of Hollywood has been ignored. Hollywood wants to entertain, to offer diversion and an escape from reality. This is the reason why some films glorify journalism whilst others depict journalists as unscrupulous and amoral characters: “In journalism movies, viewers have the satisfaction of seeing the press confirm their fondest hopes and deepest fears” (Ehrlich 1997:

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<sup>1</sup> More statements of well-known journalists may be found in Ghiglione 1990: 8f.

<sup>2</sup> A brief overview of research may be found in Ehrlich 1997: 267ff.

<sup>3</sup> To what extent at least some of these negative clichés correspond with reality is not part of this research.

<sup>4</sup> Translation by the author. The original quote is: “eine der nachhaltigsten Rufmordkampagnen der Filmgeschichte”.

278). The contrast between positive and negative journalistic heroes spans throughout the entire history of the genre. In one year films are released that could simply not be more contrary in their representation of the journalist. Examples are *Network* and *All the President's Men* (both from 1976) or *Shattered Glass* and *Veronica Guerin* (both from 2003). In spite of their totally different characterisation, the journalistic film heroes always have one thing in common: No matter whether glorified or cursed – journalism is portrayed as an exciting profession. What Hollywood does not pick as a central theme is the broad spectrum between those extremes; the zone concerning journalistic reality with all its routine activities that are hardly exciting.

Nevertheless there are many references to reality in journalism films. As early as the 1930s it was common for journalists to move to Hollywood and work as script writers. Up to the present day a whole series of journalism films have flown from the pen of authors who themselves have worked in the field for a long time (Good 1989: 22). Autobiographic elements are therefore no rarity and very often the fictional hero's origin lies in a real person. Classic examples are Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941), derived closely from the biography of American media tycoon William Randolph Hearst, or the journalistic characters from *The Front Page* (1928). Written by two former Chicago journalists, Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, the original script was used on stage in 1928. There have been four subsequent film versions (1931; 1940; 1974; 1988), and *The Front Page* has become known as "the prototype of the journalism movie genre" (Ehrlich 2004: 20). The main protagonist as well as the side characters are based on Hecht's and MacArthur's old colleagues and superiors and even share their names.<sup>5</sup> The authors labelled *The Front Page* as "a romantic and rather doting tale of our old friends – the reporters of Chicago" (Hecht and MacArthur cited in Ehrlich 2004: 20). Despite this, Hecht and MacArthur's biography, as well as referring to real personalities, presents a certain amount of reality to the audience.

An additional aspect of presenting journalistic reality involves giving real-life journalists a role in the film. Amongst others, the directors of *The Pelican Brief* (1993), *Mad City* (1997) and *Veronica Guerin* (2003) made use of this.<sup>6</sup> It is evident that films based on true stories show the strongest reference to reality. If the life and work of real journalists is being portrayed, they are indeed – whether positive or negative – individual cases that stand out.<sup>7</sup> In spite of the reality content of these films, they do not offer a definitive connection to journalistic reality as a whole.

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<sup>5</sup> In a few instances the names have been slightly changed. This happened in the case of the disliked editor of the 'Chicago Tribune', Walter Howey. MacArthur worked for him as a journalist. Out of fear of Howey's reaction, he was named Walter Burns in *The Front Page* (Ehrlich 2004: 30).

<sup>6</sup> In *The Pelican Brief* the journalistic film hero Gray Grantham (Denzel Washington) is being interviewed by real-life journalist Edwin Newman. CNN journalist Larry King appears in *Mad City* and in *Veronica Guerin* RTÈ news presenter Bryan Dobson reads the news of the assassination of the journalist.

<sup>7</sup> Examples are films like *All the President's Men* (1976), *The Man Inside* (1990), *The Insider* (1999), *Shattered Glass* (2003) or *Veronica Guerin* (2003) as well as the recently released *Capote* (2005) and *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005).

According to Howard Good, journalism films can be divided into three subgenres, each dealing with different aspects of the profession. Put together, they form the diverse and very often contrasting image of the journalist that is being referred to repeatedly:

1. the journalist as a war correspondent in areas of crises,
2. the obsessive reporter destroying innocent human lives in his pursuit of a headline story,
3. the investigative journalist who exposes social injustice and extensive conspiracies through his inquiries (based on Good 1989: 5).

The third type, the investigative journalist as film hero, is in the centre point of the following examinations. This subgenre especially serves as the motivation for a lot of people when choosing the journalistic profession. These films tend towards glorification and often seem like a hymn of praise to the journalistic profession.

### **In the Interest of the Public – the Reporting of Investigative Journalism**

Investigative journalism is a form of journalism that reached major popularity in the 1970s, most of all in America. Investigative journalists aim at exposing the abuse in politics, economy and society. They refer to the often cited ‘public right to know’ – therefore acting in the interest of the public. As the emphasis lies on the critique and control functions of journalism, the media has in this connection often been called the ‘Fourth Estate’ within a democracy.

So-called ‘Muckraking’ is regarded as the predecessor of investigative journalism. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this journalistic movement caused mayhem in America with its revealing publications. Numerous journalists, amongst them Upton Sinclair, Ida M. Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens, exposed corruption and abuse of power in politics and economics and drew attention to the increasing social misery among the population. In their widely noticed articles they publicly denounced the abuse of power and corruption. This way of reporting provoked a political reaction from Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, when he gave his speech ‘The Man with the Muck Rake’. In this speech the American President insulted the journalists in calling them ‘muckrakers’. They, however, raised the insult to a name of honour. Therefore the expression ‘muckraking’ is still in use and describes this early form of investigative journalism to the present day (Redelfs 1996: 75f).

There have been numerous attempts to define this type of journalism.<sup>8</sup> According to the organisation of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), investigative journalism may be defined by three main characteristics:

“It is the reporting, through one’s own work and initiative, matters of importance which some persons or organisations wish to keep secret. The three basic elements are that the investigation be the work of the reporter, not a report of an investigation made by someone else; that the subject of the story involves something of reasonable importance to the reader or viewer; and that others are attempting to hide these matters from the public” (Greene 1983: viif.).

The journalist perceives him or herself consequently in a very active role. Under no circumstances do the concerned individuals or institutions want the information to be made available to the public. It is because of these obstacles that the investigation itself becomes the journalistic priority. Investigative journalism is therefore also a matter of cost because time consuming research does not necessarily lead to success. It may take months or even years and may be bordering on illegal action – as the opposition does not provide information voluntarily. The emphasis on politically and socially relevant subjects separates investigative journalism from sensational journalism, which focuses on entertainment. Although the latter aims at something drastically different, both forms often use similar methods of investigation (Redelfs 1996: 29).

The ideal case is marked by three phases of investigative exposure: Firstly, the media inform the public about social or political injustice. Secondly, the public is outraged, asks for changes and exercises pressure on the responsible politicians. Thirdly, the politicians are forced to take action: reforms are made or laws are changed. This ideal course of action is also called the ‘mobilisation model’ and draws attention to the public’s central role in this process.<sup>9</sup> For this reason investigative journalism has also been called ‘Journalism of Outrage’ (Protess et al 1991: 15).

### **Of Public Interest – Real-life investigative Journalists as Screen Heroes**

There are several reasons for the investigative journalist to become a screen hero: his research topic is of generally acknowledged importance and usually includes a scandal that outrages the (film-) audience. The only weapons in the battle against injustice, corruption or organised crime are pen and paper. It is a fight between David and Goliath and usually it is the journalist who wins in the end. All these obstacles the screen hero fights against with his investigations guarantee continuous excitement. The boundaries of Good and Evil are well-defined, and amongst numerous journalistic film characters the investigative journalist may be described as the most positive hero. Furthermore, in most cases he is obsessed with his profession but acts in the interest of the public and in some cases even risks his life for it.

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<sup>8</sup> An overview may be found in Protess et al. 1991: 4f.

<sup>9</sup> The basis of this is the traditional understanding of democracy: the media – by providing information – contribute to a development of a political will in society. The informed citizen then acts as the catalyst for political change.

With the help of two films it will now be demonstrated to what extent the definitions of investigative journalism are justified and what image of the journalistic hero is being created. The chosen films are *All the President's Men* (1976) and *Veronica Guerin* (2003). Both films are based on the real lives of investigative print-journalists and their widely publicised exposés.<sup>10</sup>

### ***All the President's Men* (1976)**

With his film version of the Watergate affair, Alan J. Pakula erected probably the most glorious memorial ever to investigative journalism. The expression 'Watergate' represents an enormous American political scandal in the 1970s. Its exposé finally caused the resignation of the then-President Richard Nixon. *All the President's Men* is based on the book of the same title written by 'Washington Post' reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and deals with the key role both journalists played in exposing the scandal.

The film concentrates on only one part of the entire Watergate affair and tells the events from the perspective of the two journalists. *All the President's Men* starts with Nixon's return from China on 1 June 1972 and ends in January 1973 with the inauguration of his second term in government. The film audience is informed about all subsequent events – until Nixon's resignation in August 1974 – solely via article headlines written on a teletype. Because the film only concentrates on this period of time, one gains the impression that Woodward and Bernstein's investigations alone revealed the scandal. The contributions of the lawyers and the hearings that started in May 1973 are not part of the film (Good 1989: 157).<sup>11</sup>

On 17 June 1972, five men were arrested after they were caught breaking into the headquarters of the Democratic Party in the Watergate building. The journalistic part of the plot starts with Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) being sent to their trial. He stumbles over certain ambiguities that he cannot explain to himself<sup>12</sup> and initiates further investigations with his colleague Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman).

The characteristics of investigative journalism in *All the President's Men* can be found in almost their purest form. First of all there is crystal clear political and social relevance of the subject: the dishonest and illegal methods of the American government are being exposed. The

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<sup>10</sup> Also in these films there are evidently deviations from the real sequence of events. A detailed presentation may be found in Naziri 2003: 173ff who deals with the issues of authenticity in *All the President's Men*.

<sup>11</sup> The different interpretations of Woodward and Bernstein's role in the 'Watergate' affair can also be seen in the Oliver Stone film *Nixon* (1996). The two journalists are only mentioned briefly, because in Stone's opinion *All the President's Men* has glorified the press for no good reason (Hanson 1996: 45).

<sup>12</sup> The burglars had connections to the CIA, and in two of the address books there were notes about Howard Hunt. Hunt worked in the White House as an advisor to Charles W. Colson who himself was a special advisor to the President. Between 1949 and 1970 Hunt was a member of the CIA.

press acts in its role concerning the 'public right to know' as the Fourth Estate and informs the public about the long planned and extensive sabotage of the election. Furthermore, the two reporters shine through their active and enthusiastic research.

The film clearly points out the high significance of research and time consuming work in investigative journalism. In many scenes Woodward and Bernstein are to be seen making one phone call after the other – always looking for one more clue that could bring some light into the obscure darkness. They appear to be working around the clock, are often on the road at night and are the last ones to leave the office. In the hope to find another hint about the role of Howard Hunt, Woodward and Bernstein drive to the Library of Congress. For hours on end they go through the file cards of books borrowed by the White House in the last year. The following scene suggests how lengthy and arduous this procedure is: the library assistant puts scores of file cards on the table until they almost take over the whole screen (Naziri 2003: 199).

The never-ending workload is also shown in the numerous attempts of the reporters to get in touch with potential informants. When Woodward and Bernstein finally lay their hands on the list of staff members of the Committee to Re-elect the President (CRP), they begin searching for every single person. Here the two reporters encounter extreme resistance as hardly anybody wants to comment on their questions. This collective silence is expressed in the film as one sees Woodward and Bernstein in front of several doors being closed in front of their noses. After having checked the long list, the journalists still have no new clues to help them with their investigation. However, even when the two find themselves in apparent dead-end situations, they do not give up. "Just have to start all over again!" Woodward says to Bernstein, and so they begin once more to go through the names. In this scene the camera moves away from the journalists until there is only Washington's skyline to be seen, changing from the city by day to the city by night. Parallel to this one hears the endlessly repeated reading of names. Here is the Sisyphus work of the two reporters probably at its most obvious. In their search for pieces of the puzzle that bring the scandal to light, the reporters are constantly confronted with the fact that enthusiastic and investigative research is not per se a guarantee for success. On the contrary, investigations are lengthy, arduous and full of dead ends.



Image 1: Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) and Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) in the newsroom of the 'Washington Post'

The resistance encountered by both reporters extends to the uncooperative manner of the interviewees. The explosiveness of their story only becomes obvious because of a comment of their informant 'Deep Throat' (Hal Holbrook).<sup>13</sup> At their last secret meeting 'Deep Throat' lets Bob Woodward know that the FBI, CIA, as well as the judiciary is entangled in the affair: "Your lives are in danger!" he warns the 'Washington Post' reporter. Until then he did not provide the journalists with any information but solely served them as an additional cover – under the condition of not even being cited as an anonymous source. 'Deep Throat' let Woodward tell him what the reporters had found out and confirmed whether they were on the right track with their investigations. This fact is important insofar as – according to the IRE definition – revelations which are solely based on the reports of informants cannot be referred to as investigative journalism (Greene 1983: vii).

The journalistic part of the plot ends with a conversation between Woodward, Bernstein and Ben Bradlee (Jason Robards), where the reporters tell their editor about another setback in their investigations. A reaction from the public to the reporting of the 'Washington Post' is at this point not yet visible. With reference to the recent poll results, Bradlee states:

"You know the results of the latest Gallup Poll? Half the country never even heard of the word 'Watergate'. Nobody gives a shit. (...) Nothing's riding on this except the First Amendment of the Constitution, freedom of the press and maybe the future of the country. Not that any of that matters, but if you guys fuck up again, I'm going to get mad!"

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<sup>13</sup> As reported by the media at the beginning of June 2005, the last secret of the Watergate affair has now been revealed. Mark Felt, former high-ranking member of the FBI, admitted to the identity of 'Deep Throat' after decades of speculation.



The ideal course of events in investigative journalism is consequently not presented in *All the President's Men*. We do know about the final resignation of Nixon; however the role the public has played in this scandal is left open. The reason for this is of course due to the chosen time period depicted in the film.<sup>14</sup>

*All the President's Men* shows one of the most optimistic portrayals that the genre has to offer. Journalistic ethics are written large in the newsroom of the 'Washington Post' and are a central theme in the film. When Bernstein is drawing conclusions from the Watergate break-in, metropolitan editor Harry Rosenfeld (Jack Warden) rebukes him: "I'm not interested in what you think is obvious. I'm interested in what you know". Editor Ben Bradlee personifies the journalistic ethos. He insists on hard facts, valid proof and careful research. He asks of his reporters that their articles be confirmed by at least two different sources. In this regard, Bradlee inquires whether Woodward and Bernstein really stated to their interview subjects that they were journalists. Both reporters lead ethically correct investigations; questionable methods in their research hardly occur.<sup>15</sup> Here there are already signs of the eminent and much discussed dilemma of investigative journalism: Is a journalist allowed to use illegal research methods in order to expose illegal deals? Does the aim justify the method? And where does one draw the line?

Woodward and Bernstein are positive heroes throughout the film and in some ways they are almost depicted as guardian angels of the public. They seem to be devoting their lives to uncovering the truth and are solely defined by their profession. We are left in the dark about their private lives – the few scenes taking place in their apartments are the only indications for a life outside the newsroom and work.

*All the President's Men* clearly distinguishes between Good and Evil. The two journalists of the 'Washington Post' oppose those with political power. A biblical comparison of David fighting Goliath can hardly be ignored (Naziri 2003: 186). The written word is the only weapon for the reporters in their quest for truth. In the final scene journalistic writing is being put on the same level as the use of artillery: Nixon's inauguration after his re-election as President can be seen in the editorial room – accompanied by the noise of cannon shots. As Woodward and Bernstein work on their typewriters, the shots slowly blend with the noise of their typing and after some time the typewriting noise takes over. Bulletins inform about the subsequent events and at the same time they symbolise the power of the written word.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Watergate' was only registered by the American public as an important issue when it became clear that the government was involved in the affair and when intensive coverage by all of the media began. The polls of the Gallup Institute show that only 52% of the population were aware of the affair in September 1972, compared with 83% at the beginning of April 1973. When the hearings were broadcast live on TV in the middle of May 1973, 91% of the public were finally aware of the issue (Lang/Lang 1981: 467).

<sup>15</sup> However, Bernstein consciously tries to make a secretary leave her desk in order to get through to the right man. Furthermore, both reporters use certain tactics with one of their female interviewees. They pretend to know more than they do, and hope that she will correct them in case of error.

The last bulletin announces:

“AUGUST 9, 1974 -- WASHINGTON  
NIXON RESIGNS  
GERALD FORD TO BECOME 38TH PRESIDENT AT NOON TODAY”

With their journalistic weapons Woodward and Bernstein ended the battle in their favour and led truth to victory.

### ***Veronica Guerin (2003)***

*Veronica Guerin* tells the story of the Irish journalist of the same name, who came to fame because of her revealing articles in the 1990s. After successful investigations about church scandals and cases of corruption, Veronica Guerin turned to organised crime and drug dealing in Dublin in 1994. Her reports for the ‘Sunday Independent’ made her a target of the Irish drug lords. In order to stop Guerin’s investigations and further publications, she was cruelly shot in the street in June 1996.

The first film version of Veronica Guerin’s life was *When the Sky Falls* (2000). This film was only released in Ireland and Great Britain. The life of the Dublin journalist reached maximum exposure with the Hollywood film version *Veronica Guerin* (2003) directed by Joel Schumacher and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer (Cullen 2003). *Veronica Guerin* commences on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1996, the day of the journalist’s assassination. After flashing back to 1994, the last two years of Guerin’s life are told in chronological order. As a consequence the audience perceives the sequence of events throughout with the knowledge of the journalist’s violent death.

In this film the three constituent elements of investigative journalism can also be found. In the mid-1990s illegal drug dealing in Ireland prospered. The socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods on Dublin’s Northside had to cope with this problem especially. Many young addicts ended up in prostitution and criminality; however neither the Irish police nor the politicians at the time were successful in fighting this social problem. When Veronica Guerin (Cate Blanchett) talks to an adolescent drug addict in one of the afflicted areas, she becomes aware of the discrepancy between their misery and the wealth of the drug dealers. She is deeply affected and reports the dreadful picture to her husband (Barry Barnes):

“What a state, on the street. There were needles everywhere. Right where the kids were playing. You should have seen these wankers. Standing there with their new Mercedes. (...) Nobody’s writing about it. Nobody cares. Somebody needs to get after these bastards. They’re making megabucks. That’s what I should be writing about.”

Besides the social relevance of this subject, the already active role of the journalist becomes clear. Guerin chooses the subject herself and wants to drag the issue onto the public agenda and therefore contribute to an improvement in the situation. She begins her relentless investigation of the wire-pullers of the drug mafia and is not afraid to enter further into criminal circles. Her informant John Traynor (Ciarán Hinds) plays a central role. Traynor himself is at home in the criminal circle and had helped Veronica Guerin before with her earlier investigations by giving her important clues. In this case, however, he shows a remarkably uncooperative attitude. Regardless, Guerin stubbornly continues with her enquiries. She exposes those behind the scenes due to her relentless research, including police, criminals and other sources.

In contrast to *All the President's Men*, *Veronica Guerin* is not shown from the journalist's perspective. Therefore the audience finds out about Traynor's behaviour before the journalist herself. He is an important gang member and confidant of drug lord John Gilligan (Gerard McSorley) and later is even involved in Guerin's killing.



Image 2: Veronica Guerin (Cate Blanchett) in conversation with John Traynor (Ciarán Hinds), her informant from the criminal circle

Several times the film hints at an aspect of investigative journalism that has not been named before: the financial risks of the media companies. Investigative reporting always has to be aware of the possibility of judicial disputes, especially libel action (Redelfs 2003: 175ff). Gerry Hutch (Alan Devine), one of Guerin's main suspects involved in drug dealing and the murder of the legendary Martin Cahill (Gerry O'Brien), threatens her with such action. Her informant from the Dublin police confronts the journalist with the same problematic issue: "Your paper's so scared that some big criminal is gonna sue them if you use his real name – they employ more lawyers than journalists, for Christ's sake!" The lawyers want to be paid

and therefore investigative journalism – in addition to requiring time consuming research – is always a matter of money for the media.

Just like Woodward and Bernstein, the Irish journalist is being confronted with resistance concerning her investigations. They, however, take on much severe forms: Veronica Guerin does not only have to face personal threats,<sup>16</sup> but also physical dangers. The physical resistance spreads throughout the entire film and culminates in the murder of the journalist. Shortly after the start of her investigations, a stranger shoots through a window of her home. On Christmas Eve she is shot by a masked man and barely escapes death. Also here the viewer knows before Veronica Guerin that the assassin was hired by John Traynor. Therefore it is evidently easier for the audience than the journalist herself to judge the danger that she is in.

Although the physical attacks increase during the time of her investigations, the reporter does not remotely think of stopping her investigations. When she has finally found out John Gilligan's whereabouts, she drives to his estate and confronts him with questions about his income. As a result, Gilligan beats her up brutally. He threatens her with the kidnapping and the rape of her small son Cathal (Simon O'Driscoll), followed by her own assassination, should she write one word about him or go to the police.

After the failed assassination attempt Veronica Guerin's editor Aengus Fanning and two colleagues visit her in the hospital. Clearly shocked, Fanning tells his reporter in this scene:

“Veronica, please, stop this. Write about fashion, write about football. Write about anything you like, but stop this. You don't have to do it any more. (...) What if I told you I wouldn't publish your stuff any more?”

Guerin's answer demonstrates that this was only a rhetorical question: “But you never would tell me that”. Without doubt she is right, because her reports increase the prestige of the ‘Sunday Independent’. As much as investigative journalism is connected to financial risks, it also provides the concerned media company with a certain prestige. This may increase the circulation numbers and therefore lead to financial gains. A scene shortly after shows that Aengus Fanning would never voluntarily omit the work of Veronica Guerin. In this particular scene Guerin is presented as marketing icon of the ‘Sunday Independent’ and her portrait can even be found on Dublin's busses (see image 3).

The ideal course of events in investigative journalism appears to be stronger in *Veronica Guerin* than in *All the President's Men*. In contrast to Woodward and Bernstein, Veronica Guerin knows from the start what problem she wants to address publicly and what goal needs to be reached: the punishment of the drug lords who are responsible for the social misery. A comment about the (apparent) impact of the press appears for the first time in a conversation between the journalist and a member of the group ‘Concerned Parents against Drugs’. The man hopes that Veronica Guerin's reports about the subject will raise public awareness and

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<sup>16</sup> Gerry Hutch states for instance: “You've been to my home. Maybe it's about time that I visit yours”.

will result in a positive change of the situation. Guerin herself trusts the impact of her articles. When politician Tony Gregory (Garrett Keogh) declares his dislike of her methods as well as her newspaper, she replies: “Yeah. It’s a rag. But it’s a popular rag. Use it. Use me. You’ve got to change these laws that favour the criminals”. Finally even her murder happens solely because of the drug lords’ fear of Guerin’s exposés and the possible consequences. All these points indicate that the ‘Sunday Independent’ is considered to have a strong impact on public opinion and policy.

At the end of the film a voice-over summarises the events that followed Veronica Guerin’s assassination. A massive rallying of the population took place and Irish politicians reacted immediately to the general outrage. Within a very short period of time the Irish government changed its constitution, enabling the High Court an easier fight against drug dealers. One is also told about the establishment of new institutions,<sup>17</sup> the verdicts against the persons involved and a strongly reduced crime rate the following year. Although the ‘mobilisation model’ seems to work in this case, one thing should be highlighted: The catalyst for public outrage and the subsequent actions of the politicians was Veronica Guerin’s death, not her reporting. By concentrating on this fact, the power of the press, which is repeatedly implied during the film, diminishes.



Image 3: To profit from investigative journalism: the advertising campaign of the ‘Sunday Independent’

The image of journalism in this film is mainly limited to the personality of Veronica Guerin. She embodies the role of a loner, has hardly any contact with her colleagues and is rarely seen around the newsroom. In contrast to *All the President’s Men* her private life is part of the film

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<sup>17</sup> The year of Veronica Guerin’s murder the ‘Criminal Assets Bureau’ (CAB) was founded. This institution confiscates capital and goods of suspicious criminals if they cannot disclose the origin of their income.

plot. Veronica Guerin is depicted as a loving mother and wife. Nevertheless the film emphasises her marriage to her job rather than to her family. In the scenes showing the journalist at home, the following patterns are common: Guerin is working or talking about her work whilst her husband is looking after the home and the education of their son.<sup>18</sup> Veronica Guerin has been asked repeatedly by her brother, her husband and her mother to stop investigating. When she wants to continue working on the case even after the failed assassination attempt, her husband Graham urges her: “Veronica, you’re a journalist. You write. You let the guards look after this”. But not even the worries and warnings of her family can change the journalist’s mind. Veronica Guerin experiences her profession as a personal vocation and gives the highest priority to her job. The fearlessness and obsession that mark her research are unique. In contrast to *All the President’s Men*, however, this trait of character is shown in a much more ambivalent way. Veronica Guerin risks her personal life as well as the lives of her family members because of her approach to work.

The incorruptibility of the journalist can be positively evaluated. After Gilligan’s physical attack, Veronica Guerin meets Traynor. He tells her that Gilligan would like to find a solution with mutual consent. Gilligan, through Traynor, offers her 100,000 Irish Pounds if she ceases her investigations and abandons legal action against him. When Guerin asks for triple the amount and she is also granted this, she replies: “You tell Gilligan that he’s not gonna be buying me off”. Nevertheless, she is not without her faults. When Gilligan and Traynor consider the situation too dangerous, Traynor consciously gives Veronica Guerin a false clue: besides the IRA, Gerry Hutch had also contributed to the murder of Martin Cahill. Even though the journalist does not mention Hutch’s name in her article, it is to be read between the lines that he is the suspect. Veronica Guerin does not double-check this information.<sup>19</sup> This strongly contrasts with the reporting methods of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. In *Veronica Guerin*, therefore, journalistic ethics do not carry the same weight as they do in *All the President’s Men*. It becomes clear that publishing information that has not been double-checked can have fatal consequences: in this instance the journalist becomes an instrument of the gangsters and acts in their favour.

As Veronica Guerin is completely on the side of the Good, even this negative incident does not weaken her positive characterisation. She had risked her life for a higher cause and in the Hollywood film version she is elevated to a national hero and martyr figure. The end of the film shows for several minutes Veronica Guerin’s funeral and gives an overview of the events that succeeded her death. Finally improvements reveal themselves, the very ones that the journalist had hoped to be the result of her reporting. Veronica Guerin has, like Woodward and

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<sup>18</sup> On the day of his birthday Veronica Guerin’s son proudly presents a skateboard to her. As she asks who gave him the present, the six year old replies: “You and Dad”. This incident obviously points out how the family life is mainly held together not by the journalist but her husband.

<sup>19</sup> The only step that Veronica Guerin takes in order to check the information is not exactly promising success: She calls Hutch personally to account. Although he does not deny the accusation of murder, he still states that he had been abroad at the time.

Bernstein before her, won the struggle against crime for the public. Personally, she lost by giving her life for the exposé.

### **Concluding Remarks**

*All the President's Men* (1976) as well as *Veronica Guerin* (2003) present their protagonists and the journalistic profession as incorruptible and responsible. The characteristics of investigative journalism become clear in both films: the social relevance of the subject is just as obvious as the active investigations and the resistance that journalistic film heroes have to face. As their exposés are in the interest of the public, it is not far-fetched that *All the President's Men* as well as *Veronica Guerin* tend to glorify the media. Nevertheless it is important to note that investigative journalism does not necessarily put journalists and the media world into a good light. The media themselves may be the object of investigation. This is the central theme of *The Man Inside* (1990). The film deals with the exposés of German journalist Günter Wallraff and is also based on a true story. Wallraff infiltrated the newsroom of the tabloid 'Bild' in the mid-1970s and investigated for several months under cover. In his own publications as well as in the film the media is portrayed as distrustful, corrupt, sensationalist and disgusting. Of course at the same time there is the positive journalist who exposes the scandal, and in doing so improves the negative image slightly.<sup>20</sup>

With its film versions, Hollywood erected a memorial to Veronica Guerin as well as to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein and made their journalistic works famous throughout the world. The two films certainly mirror some aspects of journalistic reality. However, two points need to be regarded: whilst individual cases were presented, they form only a minimal part of the entire profession. By compressing events the films concentrate on the exciting moments of the characters' lives. A conclusion about real-life journalism is therefore only marginally possible. If one chooses to enter the profession because of their fascination with journalistic film heroes, they will probably be quite disappointed with the outcome. As mentioned at the beginning, the average journalist's life is hardly as varied, exciting and dangerous as the one shown in the movies.

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<sup>20</sup> Also in *Quiz Show* (1994) this duality could have been introduced into the film. The plot concentrates on a scandal in the American TV show 'Twenty-One' in 1958 that was revealed by investigative journalists. But in the film version (directed by Robert Redford) the journalists were replaced by a different profession – the young lawyer Dick Goodwin (Hanson 1996: 45).

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## Filmography

- All the President's Men**, USA 1976, Director: Alan J. Pakula
- Capote**, USA 2005, Director: Bennett Miller
- Citizen Kane**, USA 1941, Director: Orson Welles
- Good Night and Good Luck**, USA 2005, Director: George Clooney
- Mad City**, USA 1997, Director: Costa Gavras
- Network**, USA 1976, Director: Sidney Lumet
- Nixon**, USA 1995, Director: Oliver Stone
- Quiz Show**, USA 1994, Director: Robert Redford
- Shattered Glass**, USA/Canada 2003, Director: Billy Ray
- The Pelican Brief**, USA 1993, Director: Alan J. Pakula
- The Front Page**, USA 1974, Director: Billy Wilder
- The Insider**, USA 1999, Director: Michael Mann



**The Man Inside**, France/USA 1990, Director: Bobby Roth

**Veronica Guerin**, USA/Ireland/UK 2003, Director: Joel Schumacher

**When the Sky Falls**, UK/Ireland 2000, Director: John Mackenzie