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**Nicholas David Hudac**  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8900-4168>  
(Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic)

# The Anti-Star

## *Věra Hrubá Ralston and Fault Lines of Classic Models of Stardom*

### Abstract

This article focuses on the Czech actress, Věra Hrubá Ralston, who was a champion athlete, a national celebrity in the United States and Czechoslovakia, starred in over 25 films in nearly two decades in Hollywood alongside some of the most well-known actors of her generation, married the head of her movie studio, and still failed to become a Hollywood star. By examining the career of Hrubá Ralston, we gain new insights as to the limits of star-making power in the postwar studio system as well as the tensions between assimilation and stardom.

### Klíčová slova

star studies, celebrita, česká herečka, meziválečná celebrita, Věra Hrubá Ralston, B-Movies, kulturní asimilace, filmový průmysl, modely hvězdné slávy

### Keywords

star studies, celebrity, Czech actresses, interwar celebrity, Věra Hrubá Ralston, B-Movies, cultural assimilation, film industry, models of film stardom

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In recent years, the discipline of star studies has increasingly focused on the intersection of race, ethnicity, Otherness and their interactions within the context of stardom in the American media landscape, where white immigrants from many European countries were imported and incorporated into the American starmaking machine. Many of these works, such as Diane Negra's seminal *Off White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female*

*Stardom* have focused on the assimilation of European Otherness into American popular cinematic culture as “the promise of American pluralism” which “provided the desirability and reliability of the American dream.”<sup>1)</sup> Others focus on Europeanness as marker of exoticism, or as a potentially disruptive force to be conquered or titillated by, as in Agata Framus’ recent work, *Damsels and Divas*. However, what of the foreign actors and actresses who, while part of the same starmaking apparatus as their more successful colleagues, failed to see their stars shine in the American public consciousness? What can we learn from these stillborn stars? In this article, I propose that examining these European “anti-stars” — public figures who possess most, if not all of the traditional prerequisites of stardom, but who somehow fail to capture the public imagination in the manner of established stars — provide us with a way to examine the limitations of various variables: assimilation, ethnicity, race, and political beliefs. In this sense, perhaps one can think of an anti-star as an actor or actress who either assimilates or sheds enough of their foreign identity that they no longer become the focal point of attraction, yet still remain too foreign for complete assimilation and adoption into the American star system.

It is to this end that I have composed this study examining the largely-forgotten career, star profile, and the public image of the Czech actress and athlete, Věra Hrubá Ralston,<sup>2)</sup> who was both the ideal raw material for the classic model of the foreign star in the post-war Hollywood studio system and, paradoxically, also a spectacular example of the failure of such a system to will a foreign star into being. Throughout her life, Věra Hrubá Ralston (who went by either Hrubá/Hruba, her stage name Ralston, or Hruba Ralston) attempted to become a celebrity, first as an athlete-actress in the mold of her longtime competitor and rival on the ice rinks of the world, Sonja Henie, and then as a star *sui iuris*. While the publicly available details of her life would make ample fodder for any number of movies and her private persona was no less fascinating, Hrubá Ralston’s career never really materialized into that of a star, despite repeated attempts to make her one. Although she was classically attractive, had captured the hearts of audiences as an athlete, married the head of the largest (and arguably best) B-Movie studio, caused numerous international incidents, and remained active in the movie industry for nearly 15 years, Věra Hrubá Ralston was never celebrated as either a star or a cult figure, despite possessing all the prerequisites of both. Her film career, which spanned from 1941 to the 1958, often featured her in the role of the leading lady in high profile productions with co-stars like John Wayne, Erich von Stroheim, Sterling Hayden, and other leading men of the 1940s and 50s. And yet, she often received blisteringly critical reviews of her performances, which were often considered “unadulterated corn”<sup>3)</sup> in both the American press and in the memoirs of other contemporaries. This would have suggested a re-discovery as a camp or cult star ala Maria Martinez,<sup>4)</sup> however, a second career as a camp idol or rediscovered starlet never materialized. Despite her wry and witty appearances in the American media, her personal con-

1) Diane Negra, *Off White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.

2) Věra Hrubá Ralston (b. 1919?–1923? — d. 2003, daughter of Rudolf Hrubý) should not be confused with Vlasta Hrubá (b. 1918 — d. 1996, daughter of Alois Hrubý) the Czech singer and actress.

3) Dick Lowe, “Angel at the Amazon: New Film at Paramount,” *Miami Herald*, December 14, 1948, 22.

4) Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema: An Introduction* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 81.

nections with studio heads and the elite of European exiles during the 1940s, her public scandals in love and business, her anti-Nazi activism, and her international incidents, Hrubá Ralston is at best remembered as a footnote in the lives of other products of the star system, an answer in a movie trivia contest. It is indeed this failure of the star production process which remains the most compelling. In writing this study, I do not intend this work to provide a reexamination or re-evaluation of Hrubá Ralston's performances or create the argument for her being a star-in-all-but-name, but instead to examine how her career can be understood as not as a failure of the star system, nor as a study of the divergence between a star's critical success and public memory (as in the case of an actress like Norma Sheerer),<sup>5)</sup> but as a lens which reveals some of the hidden structures and unconscious rules which help influence the ultimate trajectory of an actor or actress' career. I aim to observe how her career as an ethnic idol, a (chaste) sex symbol, and as a maligned performer reveals the fault lines of our conception of the star-making process and helps further refine our current conception of stardom during the postwar period.

### **A Star is Born: From Athletic Success to the Silver Screen**

One of the key ideas behind the classic Hollywood model of stardom as formulated by Richard Dyer is the realization that movie stars are “a phenomenon of production,”<sup>6)</sup> although who exactly is in control of the act of star production varies as per the historical, economic, and political situation in question. However, the general trajectory in which a star is “born” remains largely the same — an unknown individual is discovered by an agent or studio or director; the star's image and backstory is constructed or refined and prepared for public consumption; the star's image is distributed; and eventually, the star falls out of favor with the general public as tastes, audiences, and fashions change or the star themselves ages out of their star image. This “star image” according to Dyer, is the key concept which underlies any formal examination of celebrity; it is, in short, the realization that what the public perceives as a given celebrity is really a combination (or combinations) of two mediated personalities: a manufactured “star image” (what the star presents to the public and through their artistic roles) with an underlying nonpublic persona (a “real” person, the individual removed from these artistic creations). These two often-contradictory personages are combined for public consumption, although the exact ratio between the two can vary as per the era, tastes, or even sociopolitical situation at hand. As Richard Dyer notes in *Stars*:

Stars are, like characters in stories, representations of people. Thus they relate to ideas about what people are (or are supposed to be) like. However, unlike characters in stories, stars are also real people.<sup>7)</sup>

5) C.f. Lies Lanckmann, “What Price Widowhood,” in *Lasting Screen Taste: Images that Fade and Personas that Endure*, eds. Lucy Bolton and Julie Lobazallo Wright (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 71–72.

6) Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 10.

7) Dyer, *Stars*, 20.

Thus, in this traditional Hollywood model of stardom, the contrast between “representations of people” as Dyer puts it and the “real people” (or the unmediated, private individual) remains part of the appeal of stars for the audience and the public at large. For as glamorized as a celebrity might be, the fact that they suffer from the same prosaic ailments or like the same quotidian things as we do, allows us to connect with them, albeit through the mediation of various intermediaries in the media ecosystem. However, these intermediaries often have conflicting ideas of should or shouldn’t be revealed to the public, as do the stars themselves; Or, as Richard deCordova noted in *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America*, that:

The individual who is the star may indeed have private “individual” thoughts and feelings, but these only enter the public sphere as they are channeled through the star system and subject to its requirements.<sup>8)</sup>

The tension between the glamorizing expectation of the celebrity individual and the hunger of the public to learn about not only the scandalous details but also the unglamorous details of a given star’s life is a traditional feature of the classic model of stardom, and often the public delights in the blurring of these lines between the “star image” and the individual underneath it, indulging the general public’s voyeuristic desires while the capital behind the star image (studios, managers, artist representation, consultants, advertisers) retains some degree of control over what is revealed and how.

However, equally applicable to the star is their audience, particularly for the wave of young, immigrant female stars who emerged in the first decades of the 20th century. As a number of other critical studies such as Diane Negra’s *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* have more granularly examined the star making industry as not only an economic one, but as an ongoing negotiation between ethnic audiences and the more conservative established American public. In this process “ethnic stars” presented their ethnic identities and values in the process of assimilation or claiming space for their own identities in a fluctuating cultural landscape.<sup>9)</sup> For an immigrant star, especially a refugee like Hrubá Ralston, this process was even more necessary and pressing than for homegrown stars who could rely on the security of established “Americanness” as an aid to their careers. Instead, ethnic performers would be tasked with not only proving their right to be treated as American by film audiences but often forced into performative depictions of ethnicity to secure their own space in the American cultural landscape. These two valences, commercial worth and ethnic identity, are constantly in tension, as stars that are overtly “ethnic” often found themselves relegated to minor roles, while stars often succeeded at the cost of diluting or even hiding their own ethnicities. As many authors like the aforementioned Diane Negra, Richard Dyer, Agata Fymus, and Antonella Palmieri have noted, this process of dilution or recasting of ethnicities is also tied into the shifting notions of race in America — in particular, what is considered “white” at

8) Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 10.

9) Negra, *Off White Hollywood*, 3–4.

a given time. To paraphrase Richard Dyer, to become an assimilated European actor or actress in America often implies giving up a range of other markers of difference in order to conform to racial ideas.<sup>10)</sup>

To not be a star is easy. Nearly all of us who read this will never be considered a figure on par with even the lowest level of celebrity which Dyer and DeCordova have articulated — figures who are produced, whose public appearances and proclamations are molded and shaped to best provide the studio who wishes to profit off us with the means to do so. However, it is far more difficult to be an anti-star — a figure who is not only as deliberately manufactured as a Hollywood star is, but who is unable to find any foothold in the public consciousness — especially when one possesses many of the so-called requisites for stardom: physical beauty, charm, social connections (both interpersonal and institutional), and a degree of public notoriety. These failures of the star making system are often unremarked upon in the studies of stardom and for logical and obvious reasons — those individuals who are anti-stars are not stars *per se*, for instance, and most examinations of stars or stardom are interested in the import and meaning of stardom, not one's failure to obtain it. However, as more contemporary scholars of stardom and our contemporary permutations of it like Emily Hund have noted, “[celebrities] are, fundamentally, a particular type of influential person whose social power is wholly dependent upon media industries,”<sup>11)</sup> which, for Věra Hrubá Ralston, were not always so reliable.

For the woman who would become the anti-star Věra Hrubá Ralston, where exactly the “real person” ends, and the representation of the person began would often be difficult to discern. However, few actresses or even characters would be able to live the kind of life that she claimed she did, even allowing for the generous amount of exaggeration and reinvention which took place during her life. What we do know with any degree of certainty is that Věra Hrubá was born in Prague on July 12 sometime between 1919 and 1923,<sup>12)</sup> the daughter of a wealthy Prague jeweler, Rudolf Hrubý.<sup>13)</sup> She had one brother Rudy, who went on to become a film producer and worked under her future husband Herbert J. Yates, the owner of Republic Pictures. Although the sources differ greatly on the year of her birth (an ambiguity which Hrubá Ralston often encouraged in her public interviews), what is known is that she attended the Charlotte G. Masaryková gymnasium (at least until 1934),<sup>14)</sup> she displayed exceptional promise in figure skating and dance, and by her mid-teens, she was competing nationally in Czechoslovakia in figure skating competitions. As a teenager in 1936 (she might have been anywhere from 17 to 13, depending on which source one trusts for her date of birth), she was one of the Czechoslovak representatives in the 1936 Winter Olympic games, where her skating (allegedly) caught the eye of the Nazi Führer,

10) Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 2017), 39.

11) Emily Hund, *The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 22.

12) Dennis McLellan, “Věra Hrubá Ralston, 79; Czech Ice-Skating Star Turned Film Actress,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 2003, B22.

13) The fate of Hrubý is unknown but several newspaper articles suggest that he was interred (and likely perished) in a concentration camp during the war. See for example: Anon., “Miss Hrubá's Troubles,” *The Albertan*, March 30, 1939, 4.

14) Anon., “Seznam žákyň na konci školního roku,” *Výroční zpráva městského dívčího reálného gymnasia Charlotte G. Masarkové v Praze I.* 11, no. 1 (1934), 29.

Adolf Hitler. Hrubá Ralston maintained that following her performance in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, the SS pulled her aside for a private meeting with the Fascist dictator. According to one 1977 telling of the story, after winning a “silver medal” Hitler “asked her to skate for the swastika,” however she replied “I’d rather skate *on* it...” and that following that teenage act of defiance, “[Hitler] shook my hand so hard it hurt.”<sup>15</sup> Several historical discrepancies abound with her story (for one, she never medaled in the ’36 Olympics, she placed 17th, losing to long-time rival Sonja Henie from Norway) and it should be noted that Hrubá Ralston’s life story was a frequent exercise in reinvention, especially in her later years, and the ability to reinvent one’s self as necessity demands was very useful for potential stars in the Hollywood system. However, while the exact details of Hrubá Ralston’s possible encounter with Hitler remains unverified, it was indeed reported in the American press as early as 1940<sup>16</sup> and was repeated often during World War II,<sup>17</sup> often as a way to mock the fascist dictator as “a hysterical, neurotic little man even then drunk with power,”<sup>18</sup> as one journalist put it, whose petty tyranny then foreshadowed even larger future crimes.

Following her amateur finale at the Olympics, Hrubá Ralston became a professional ice skater in North American and European markets. This meant she often left for short tours with professional skating companies in the United States, only be forced to return to Czechoslovakia when her contract expired, or she ran into visa troubles. Fortunately, during this first visit to the United States, she managed to attract the attention of James “Jimmy” Johnston, a former heavyweight boxer turned manager and promoter, who quickly signed the young Hrubá Ralston to a management deal despite her limited English.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps because Johnston was a controversial figure (he was in the midst of being sued for breach of contract when he signed her to a management deal) Hrubá Ralston was immediately thrust into the spotlight in the American press. The young Czech skater received even more attention when, in the weeks that followed the 1938 the Munich Agreement and subsequent dissolution of Czechoslovakia, she immediately cabled Johnston, her manager, and requested two tickets out of her home country.<sup>20</sup> The rapid slide of Europe into fascism and war would make any attempts at stardom purely American in scope.

### **Ethnic Identity and Political Identity**

As tempting as it might be to ascribe the notion of a celebrity as a representation or manifestation of political ideology to contemporary sensibilities, many film and theatre historians have long noted the connection between political activism, ideology, and the entertainment industries. For example, Richard DeCordova mentions that political identity

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15) Paul Rosenfeld, “The Cult of the Clinker Queen,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 26, 1982, 18.

16) Anon., “Czech Skater Threat Victim,” *Miami Herald*, June 2, 1940, 6.

17) Anon., “Vera Hrubá Met Hitler in 1936,” *The Colfax County Press and Clarkson Herald Consolidated*, April 15, 1943, 6.

18) Anon., “Arcadia,” *The Portsmouth Herald*, January 26, 1943, 6.

19) Al Wolf, “Astute Mitt Pilot Signs Skating Star,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 30, 1941, 10.

20) Anon., “Johnston Rescues Girl Skater from Czechoslovakia,” *The Evening Star*, September 23, 1938, C1.

was a “final aspect of a star’s identity, though one not developed very elaborately,”<sup>21)</sup> a component which appeared relatively early on in the formation of the Hollywood star manufacturing process, often as a way of fending off criticism of decadence or immorality via public support of mainstream political stances and patriotic sentiment. However, as Steven J. Ross noted in his article “The Politicization of Hollywood before World War II: Anti-Fascism, Anti-Communism, and Anti-Semitism,” the anodyne political beliefs of the first generation of Hollywood stars had rapidly begun to give way to a more increased activity in the political sphere by various film stars and celebrities. Indeed, the late 1930s might have represented the apex of what Ross declared “the Golden Age of Hollywood politics,”<sup>22)</sup> where stars were publicly aligning themselves with political causes and movements which might have even been contrary to the wishes of the general public, such as anti-fascism and anti-Nazism.

Even before the annexation of Sudetenland and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Věra Hrubá Ralston had long maintained a vehemently personal distain for Nazism, however it is worth noting that this was not always the case for much of her American audience. In fact, as Nancy Snow has reported, even as late as July 1941 (less than 6 months away from the attack on Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war against the United States by Nazi Germany and its allies), polling reported that nearly 79 percent of American respondents were opposed to any military intervention against Germany and Italy.<sup>23)</sup> Even more unusual for an immigrant celebrity during these last few years before World War II, Hrubá Ralston was publicly proud of her origins, wearing traditional Czech costumes and proclaiming, “I’m still a Czech even though we have no country at this time”<sup>24)</sup> during a period where American popular sentiment was drastically pro-isolationism and decidedly rather anti-immigrant. After America entered the war in 1941, Hrubá Ralston’s anti-Nazi sympathies even more prominently displayed; as the Hollywood correspondent Robbin Coons quipped in 1942, “[Věra Hrubá Ralston] has a Scandinavian fondness for herring, an American liking for ice cream sundaes, and a Czech’s hatred for Adolf Hitler,”<sup>25)</sup> who often lent her image and presence to various Czech charitable organizations, such as Joliet, Illinois’s memorial to the victims of the Lidice massacre.<sup>26)</sup>

However, even before the war, Hrubá Ralston had managed to turn her anti-Fascist views into a part of her celebrity. Shortly after her immigration to the United States in 1938, Hrubá Ralston’s anti-Nazi stance was immediately put in the forefront of her public

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21) DeCordova, *Picture Personalities*, 110.

22) Stephen J. Ross, “The Politicization of Hollywood before World War II: Anti-Fascism, Anti-Communism, and Anti-Semitism,” in *The Jewish Role in American Life: An Annual Review*, eds. Bruck Zuckerman and Jeremy Schoenberg (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), 2–4.

23) Nancy Snow, “Confessions of a Hollywood Propagandist: Harry Warner, FDR and Celluloid Persuasion,” in *Warners’ War: Politics, Pop Culture & Propaganda in Wartime Hollywood*, eds. Martin Kaplan and Johanna Blakley (Los Angeles: The Norman Lear Center Press, 2004), 69.

24) Anon., “Unconquered by Hitler; Prettiest Skater on Ice Will Perform in Miami,” *The Miami Herald*, May 26, 1940, D-10.

25) Robbin Coons, “Vera Hrubá and Sonja Henie are Doing Hawaiian Numbers,” *Asbury Park Press*, June 30, 1942, 4.

26) Anon., “Dvě vynikající krajanky u pomníku lidických mučedníků,” *Amerikán: Národní kalendář na rok 1944* 67, no. 1 (1944), 103.

image, when partnered with fellow refugee Hedy Stenuff<sup>27)</sup> (who had fled Austria for France and then the US) to form an anti-fascist “Anschluss” of their own, which was often seen as critical of Nazi Germany.<sup>28)</sup> Furthermore, Hrubá Ralston frequently performed selections from her competition routines which included her 1936 Olympic “česká polka” while dressed in Czech *kroj* (traditional dress), a sequence influenced by the popular Czech polka dances which were often performed during the Czech National Revival<sup>29)</sup> and which had acquired additional nationalistic significance in the months since the annexation. A few months later in 1939, Hrubá Ralston publicly accused the German embassy in New York of a pressure campaign in the Czech-language American press, claiming they (or their sympathizers) attempted to force her change the content of her routine by eliminating this dance as well as other elements they found to be provocative<sup>30)</sup> including the playing of the Czechoslovak national anthem during her performances. As one newspaper column put it:

Beauteous Vera Hrubá, Czechoslovak ice skating star now performing in New York, defies Herrs Hitler, Goering, and all Nazis in general and the German consul in New York in particular to make her stop dancing on ice to the tune of the Czechoslovak national anthem. When the German consulate ordered her to do just that, the un-anchlussed [sic] ice queen retorted: “Mr. German consul — not for one little minute can you tell me what to do. You my boss? Ha! Ha!”<sup>31)</sup>

Hrubá Ralston’s defiance of Nazi officials ranging from Hitler to unnamed functionaries in the New York consulate was a highly visible aspect of her star image in the late 1930s and early 1940s, however it was not without its risks. Although the German consulate and diplomatic figures publicly disavowed any pressure campaign or attempts to intimidate Hrubá Ralston, the possibility of attacks by fascist sympathizers or German nationalists remained a constant threat until well after the United States entered the war and public opinion swung against Nazi Germany. For example, in another highly publicized incident from 1940, Hrubá Ralston returned from a performance in New York to find a pulp magazine story about the murder of a figure skater slipped under her door with an attached note expressing the sender’s desire to do the same to the young Czech.<sup>32)</sup>

As mentioned previously, Hrubá Ralston’s defiance of fascism and enthusiastic embrace of the anti-fascist cause was outside of conventional Hollywood norms. While ethnic female stars were often faced with the pressure to assimilate (as Hrubá Ralston’s rival Sonja Henie or early Irish star Colleen Moore often did in their public personae as well as their roles) in a manner consistent with contemporary ideas of American femininity,

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27) Anon., “Anschluss on Ice,” *The Times News*, October 7, 1938, 4.

28) *Ibid.*, 4.

29) It is worth noting here the long association of the polka with Czech and other Slavic nationalist movements, not just Polish ones. For more about the Czech polka in particular, see: Daniela Stavělová, “Polka jako český národní symbol,” *Český lid* 93, no. 1 (2006), 3–26.

30) Anon., “Hrubá trvá na svém prohlášení,” *Telegraf*, August 4, 1939, 3.

31) Anon., “Defies Hitler,” *Norfolk Ledger Dispatch*, August 28, 1939, 8.

32) Anon., “Czech Skater Threat Victim,” 6.



Hrubá Ralston's active early resistance to European fascism was atypical. Her enthusiastic embrace of American culture was often lauded but her constant opposition to fascism even before the war was seen as provocative and even occasionally masculine in its fervor. However, more trouble was soon to come. Throughout the end of the 1930s and into the first few years of the 1940s, Hrubá Ralston also made headlines due to her constant legal problems regarding her visa status, and eligibility to travel, problems made worse by the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1939. On March 23, 1939 a mere week after the country was formally dissolved and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia had been established by the Nazi regime, Hrubá Ralston was refused entry to Canada as her working permit had been issued by the Czechoslovak government — a country which no longer existed — which meant that she was, in the eyes of the Canadian government, a “woman without a country,”<sup>33)</sup> and thus in dubious legal standing. Although Hrubá Ralston was allowed to return to the United States and continue working, further legal problems would soon be on the horizon.

In early 1941, Hrubá Ralston once again became a cause célèbre and the focus of national interest in the United States when the press discovered that her temporary visitor's visa was expiring and she was in danger of deportation back to the now-occupied Bohemian and Moravian Protectorate, an especially risky proposition for a young woman who had taken such a public stance against fascism.<sup>34)</sup> American newspapers were flooded with stories about how the young Czech skater was given the ultimatum to either to marry an American citizen, flee to Chile, or to be deported to a hostile Germany, to which Hrubá Ralston replied that “she would rather die than return to Europe.”<sup>35)</sup>

While visa troubles were not uncommon for female actresses in wartime (and even postwar Europe),<sup>36)</sup> what was unique for Hrubá Ralston is how the actress dealt with this setback in the public eye. Although she received hundreds (eventually thousands)<sup>37)</sup> of marriage proposals, Hrubá Ralston refused all offers as she “didn't want to make a business out of marriage,”<sup>38)</sup> another move that was widely covered in the national press. Although her case was aided by heavy lobbying of the United States Department of State by her manager and private citizens,<sup>39)</sup> no solutions were reached and in March of 1941, Hrubá Ralston was forced to relocate to Canada for several weeks until a compromise could be negotiated. Although seemingly heartfelt, this public performance of chastity would be unremarkable in an earlier era. However, in the era of Hollywood “vamps,” when foreign celebrities whose unabashed sexuality and agency proved threatening, yet alluring, to a

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33) Anon., “People in the News,” *Tacoma Times*, March 25, 1939, 12.

34) Anon., “Czech Skating Star Residing Here after Making Movie — Fled Nazi Invaders,” *The News*, June 24, 1941, 42.

35) Anon., “Men Would Aid Czech Girl Skater; Proposals Made by 2500 to Avert Deportation,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1941, 9.

36) Antonella Palmieri, “America is Home... America is her Oyster: The Dynamics of Ethnic Assimilation in Alida Valli's American Star Persona,” in *Stars in World Cinema: Film Icons and Systems Across Cultures*, eds. Andrea Bandhauer and Michelle Royers (London: I.B. Taurus, 2015), 81–82.

37) Wolf, “Astute Mitt Pilot Signs Skating Star,” 10.

38) Anon., “Proposals Shunned by Czech Skater; She Refuses to Wed to Remain in Country,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 09, 1941, 2.

39) George Ross, “In New York,” *Waterbury Evening Democrat*, June 23, 1939, 6.

substantial portion of the American public, Hrubá Ralston's chaste disavowal of her own physical charms and their utility must have removed any temptation to view her as another "vamp," or seductive, unassimilated, sexually confident European woman, in the model of Pola Negri. Instead, Hrubá Ralston's demure disavowal of her own physical beauty and sexual desirability resembled more assimilable stars like Irish silent film star Colleen Moore or the Hungarian actress Vilma Bánky,<sup>40)</sup> who in the course of assimilating into American culture consciously modeled the behaviors, codes, and attitudes which most closely matched the predominant cultural mores of white Protestant American identity.<sup>41)</sup>

Although Hrubá Ralston's story was seemingly tailor-made for the public consumption during the war, upon closer examination, a number of contradictions emerge. She was an innocent-faced, attractive young girl, who was feisty in her opposition to Nazi Germany, fiercely supportive of her adopted country, yet eager to assimilate to the American way of life. Evidently, Hrubá Ralston's story resonated deeply with the American public, as she received a number of declarations of support, including financial, when in a scene right out of a Hollywood melodrama, an unknown female elderly benefactor (one Mrs. Nan Foley, of Lafayette, Indiana) interceded on her behalf during the deportation proceedings with a \$1000 appeal bond, which extended her stay in America,<sup>42)</sup> and then an offer to adopt the young Czech, shielding her from the legal proceedings as her legal guardian until she came of age. Although Hrubá Ralston did not take up Mrs. Foley on the offer of adoption, she did receive a gift of \$20 000 from Mrs. Foley's estate following the later's death in 1941 while Hrubá Ralston was in Canada.<sup>43)</sup>

Although these incidents reveal that Hrubá Ralston was indeed a celebrity athlete during the late 1930s and early 1940s, she was certainly not a film star. While her image could be found in any number of American publications from 1936 onwards, this was not really indicative of her celebrity being self-sustaining. Instead, Věra Hrubá Ralston made her money like many entertainers before her: by traveling performances, endorsements, and short-to-longer term engagements in various shows being held towns and cities across America, and as a result often had to rely on the strong social pressure in immigrant communities to support one of their own. And while Hrubá Ralston was obviously an *athletic* star for the Czech and American populations, her inability to breakthrough with the same ethnic audiences in her film career is also puzzling. In post-war Hollywood, Hrubá Ralston was in good company with some of the finest Czech and Central European actors and directors of the interwar generation: Hugo Haas, Karel Lamač, Jiří Voskovec, Hedy Lamar, and others who stayed after the war had finished,<sup>44)</sup> however, her films with these stars were scarcely covered in the Czech language press; nor were they widely promoted among Czech or Slovak enclaves in America the way that other films by similar actors and actresses were.

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40) Agata Frymus, *Damsels and Divas: European Stardom in Silent Hollywood* (Camden: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 100.

41) *Ibid.*, 119.

42) Anon., "Men Would Aid Czech Girl Skater; Proposals Made by 2500 to Avert Deportation," 9.

43) Anon., "Hoosier Woman Leaves \$20,000 to Czech Skater," *The Indianapolis News*, April 3, 1941, 4.

44) Jolana Matějková, *Hugo Haas: Život je pes* (Praha: XYZ, 2005), 158–159.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint a single point of failure in Hrubá Ralston's struggle to achieve acceptance in both America and her homeland during this early portion of her career, it is striking how her early years in the American popular consciousness differed from those of more successful European stars like the Austrian Hedy Lamarr or Polish vamp, Pola Negri. On the one hand, Hrubá Ralston's inability or unwillingness to capitalize on her sexuality and physical beauty ran counter to the predominant models of starmaking for foreign (especially Central and Eastern European) female celebrity in the 1930s and early 1940s. On the other hand, her defiant opposition to German fascism was equally jarring at a time when celebrities were expected to minimize their own public political identities for fear of harming one's own marketability.

What remains curious about Hrubá Ralston's inability to capitalize on the postwar political climate was that numerous actors with much more dubious wartime records were able to transcend the baggage of their potentially anti-American (or even neutral) wartime activities while Hrubá Ralston's very well-documented anti-Fascist and pro-Allied activities during the war seem to have been scarcely mentioned after her transition into a full-time film actress. While other actresses like the Italian actress Alida Valli had to actively work to allay any suspicion of anti-American wartime behavior in order to grow their postwar careers,<sup>45)</sup> Hrubá Ralston's active antagonism of the Nazi regime, her vocal defiance of fascism and allegiance to the country of her birth made it clear that, while she supported American values, she was also conspicuously foreign, a fact which underlined her early immigration problems. Although she would later assimilate and largely abandon her Czech identity as her career progressed and the postwar situation in Czechoslovakia evolved, her assimilation never proved to be as complete or seamless as other foreign actresses; likewise, since she had largely abandoned her Czech heritage, she was unable to attract attention through an emphasis or manipulation of her Europeaness in the public eye.

### **Transition to Film: A Star is (Still)Born**

Even as a relative newcomer in the American entertainment industry, Hrubá Ralston clearly realized that film was a more lucrative and desirable destination than years of competing in figure skating competitions with mediocre results, sharing the stage with side-show attractions like "stilt skaters,"<sup>46)</sup> posing with automobiles at trade shows, and performing on college campuses.<sup>47)</sup> Nearly every mention of her early career mentioned that she had "movie aspirations,"<sup>48)</sup> and that her management was eager to get her a screen test to prove her viability in cinema. The model of a skating starlet-turned-silver-screen-actress had already proven successful in the case of Hrubá Ralston's erstwhile rival on the rinks of Europe, Sonja Henie, who "through a series of productions, has made a mint of

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45) Palmieri, 84–88.

46) Richard D Murray, "World's Best Skiers and Skaters Will Thrill Crowds — Latest Paraphernalia on View," *Boston Globe*, December 1, 1937, 21.

47) Anon., "Junior Prom At Cornell Friday," *Waterbury Evening Democrat*, February 10, 1938, 13.

48) Anon., "Jimmy Johnston Shoulders into Winter Sports Game," *The Bismark Tribune*, December 22, 1937, 10.

money for 20th Century Fox.<sup>49)</sup> In 1936, Heine shocked the sporting world when she announced in the lead-up to the 1936 Olympics that she had decided to retire from amateur sports after the Winter Games.<sup>50)</sup> Following her gold medal victory, Henie stayed true to her word, leaving both Europe and the world of amateur figure skating for the United States where she began skating professionally and angling for screen tests at major A-list studios like Paramount.<sup>51)</sup> A bidding war soon ensued and in the end, and Darryl Zanuck and his 20th Century Fox were the victors, signing Henie to a reported \$300,000 contract, making her one of the highest-paid female stars in Hollywood.<sup>52)</sup> Although Henie was not a particularly gifted actress but “frequently cast as a diminutive performing doll,”<sup>53)</sup> critics were thrilled by her skating abilities<sup>54)</sup> which often formed the dramatic axis around which her films revolved, and while these films provided diminishing returns as the novelty wore off, they set the template for the ice skating films which would prove to be a short-lived, but lucrative fad.

In 1941, Republic Pictures sought to capitalize on the waning enthusiasm for ice skating pictures, which had partially begun with the rise of Sonja Henie at 20th Century Fox but was nurtured by the emergence of nationally touring ice-skating companies who would perform lavish spectacles across the country year-round. As one of the members of the newly formed Ice Capades (a touring ice skating and figure skating show) Hrubá Ralston was one of several skaters to feature in a Republic Pictures B-movie (*Ice Capades*, 1941) treading on their touring success. Directed by Joseph Stanley, the film was a lightly plotted (and often plodding) comedy where the impressive ice-skating sequences (based largely on the touring company’s show) were secondary to the hackneyed plot about mistaken identity. As Bosley Crowther griped in the *New York Times*:

...the little bit of ice and skating which are shown in the Republic picture of the same name give it about as much claim to the title as one icicle would have to the name of iceberg. And instead of a glittering, frosty film in which skaters keep coming at you in droves, this one turns out to contain a dull and silly backstage story, played mostly in offices and gloomy rooms, with only occasional skating sequences to break the monotony.<sup>55)</sup>

While Hrubá Ralston did not have any special billing as one of several of the company’s ice skaters to appear in the film, (including fellow rival of Henie, Belita<sup>56)</sup>) the specter of her longtime rival, Henie lingered over several reviews, such as one in the *Rutland Daily Herald* which, while praising Hrubá Ralston’s performance, noted that “none [of the

49) Edwin Schallert, “Band Leaders to Hold Super Film Jam Fest; Ice Capades Planned,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1942, 17.

50) Anon., “Sonja Henie Will Retire From Activities this Year,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, January 25, 1936, 20.

51) Sidney Skolsky, “The Gospel Truth,” *NY Daily News*, April 27, 1936, 34.

52) Jeanette Meehan, “Look Out for the Girl on Skates,” *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 6, 1936, 81.

53) Negra, *Off White Hollywood*, 88.

54) Anon., “Sonja Henie Stars in Warfield Film,” *San Francisco Examiner*, January 1, 1937, 12.

55) Bosely Crowther, “‘Ice-Capades,’ a Slow Comedy (With Incidental Skating), at Loew’s Criterion,” *New York Times*, September 25, 1941, 29.

56) Tom Vallance, “Belita: Olympic ice skater turned Hollywood star,” *The Independent*, December 27, 2005, 35.

skaters] can hold a candle to Miss Henie though.”<sup>57)</sup> As ice skating pictures were never seen as more than thinly veiled contrivances to display attractive young female skaters, these negative reviews seemed to have little effect on the ultimate profitability of this subgenre. A sequel to *Ice Capades* (entitled *Ice Capades Review*) also featuring Hrubá Ralston was produced in 1942 and a feature ice skating film *Lake Placid Serenade* saw her take a starring role as a Czech figure skater, and her film career began to boom. This surge in film production was helped by the fact that Republic Pictures’ president Herbert J. Yates had fallen for Hrubá Ralston in 1941 after seeing her in the *Ice Capades*. Although Yates was married and his intentions were seemingly and initially platonic, by 1948, he had divorced his wife and in 1953, he and Hrubá Ralston were married in a private ceremony, kept secret from most of the Hollywood press.<sup>58)</sup>

As far as studios went, Republic Pictures, was in many ways the best of the rest. As the so-called “strongest of the minors,”<sup>59)</sup> the studio’s low budgets belied its loftier ambitions. Republic Pictures was the brainchild of Yates, a self-made millionaire in tobacco who retired to pursue other moneymaking interests, such as film development laboratories in his late 20s. Yates had been a long time investor in film technologies with his Consolidated Film Laboratories and had even invested in Darryl Zanuck’s 20th Century Pictures early in its existence.<sup>60)</sup> In 1935, Yates decided since that major Hollywood studios were increasingly relying on their own in-house development labs instead of his services, the most logical business strategy was to obtain a studio of his own, despite the fact (or perhaps due to the fact) that the Great Depression was rapidly forcing scores smaller, independent movie studios to close their doors. Republic Pictures was born out of the consolidation of several smaller Poverty Row studios, such as Mascot Pictures,<sup>61)</sup> and by the late 1940s Republic was producing not only scores of formulaic genre films (Westerns remained a specialty), but also releasing films by celebrated directors like Orson Wells, Nicholas Ray, Fritz Lang, and John Ford.<sup>62)</sup>

Yates made consistent usage of loaned out A-list actors like John Wayne (who starred in several films opposite Hrubá Ralston, including the only two of her films which reportedly made a profit at the box office), employed well-known screenwriters like Ben Hecht, and yet, thanks to its tight budgeting still “enjoyed annual profits in the half-million dollar range,” a remarkable sum that put them nearly on par with some of the A-list studios.<sup>63)</sup> Although Republic produced a sizable amount of Westerns, they were also known for a range of other genres, such as science fiction and horror films, which is where Hrubá Ralston would get her first dramatic role in George Sherman’s *The Lady and the Monster*

57) Anon., “Ice Capades,” *Rutland Daily Herald*, September 15, 1941, 5.

58) Anon., “Herbert Yates to Wed Vera Ralston: Studio Head Gives Age as 72, Blond Film Star 31 in License Application,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1952, 11.

59) Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust: The American Cinema in the 1940s* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1997), 197.

60) Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Death of the Moguls: The End of Classical Hollywood* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 66–67.

61) Richard M. Hurst, *Republic Studios: Between Poverty Row and the Majors* (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), 1–2.

62) *Ibid.*, 6.

63) Schatz, *Boom and Bust*, 197.

(1944), where she plays Janice Farrell, the main love interest of both the handsome young Dr. Patrick Cory (played by Richard Arlen) and his boss, the obsessive mad scientist Prof. Franz Mueller (Erich von Stroheim). This first dramatic feature marked the beginning of a pattern for Hrubá Ralston's film career — she was often cast as the leading lady alongside better-known American and European actors, some of whom were on loan from bigger studios to Republic. For example, in 1945's *Dakota*, she received top billing as Sandy Devlin, the young, monied wife of gambler John Devlin, (played by John Wayne). Joining John Wayne in the cast were other well-known American and European actors such as 3-time Academy Award winner Walt Brennan, and the Central European star, Hugo Haas.<sup>64)</sup>

Unlike Sonja Henie at 20th Century Fox, Věra Hrubá Ralston was often marketed as a serious starlet, often at the behest of her powerful husband, Yates.<sup>65)</sup> Although, as Norbert Auerbach, put it, this seemed to be wishful thinking, more shades of Marion Davies' career under the overbearing eye of her husband, William Randolph Hearst. As Auerbach recalled:

Although Věra Hrubá was once a European champion ice skater, she was a terrible actress. She was after all the love of Mr. Yates, the owner of the smaller production and distribution company called Republic Pictures.<sup>66)</sup>

Major Hollywood star (and occasional Republic star alongside Hrubá Ralston), John Wayne, was blunter about the situation:

Yates made me use Vera Hrubá... I don't want to malign her. She didn't have the experience... Yates was one of the smartest businessmen I ever met. I respected him in many ways, and he liked me. But when it came to the woman he loved — his business brains just went flying out the window.<sup>67)</sup>

However, Hrubá Ralston's influence was not entirely detrimental at Republic. Reportedly, she was responsible for forcing Yates to agree to produce at least one prestige picture a year, such as Orson Welles' *Macbeth*.<sup>68)</sup>

However, here Hrubá Ralston remains a cautionary tale about the limits of the classic Hollywood system in "making" stars. Despite her marriage to one of the most powerful men in the B-movie studio system, co-starring with bona-fide cinema icons like John Wayne, and her pre-cinematic celebrity as an athlete and an anti-Nazi activist, Hrubá Ralston's films could not hide the "unadulterated corn," as Dick Lowe, the editor of *The Miami News* entertainment section put it. For some, the B-movie appeal of Hrubá Ralston's films seemed to be part of the charm, a nostalgic throwback to the "Saturday afternoon thrillers of my childhood."<sup>69)</sup> While Hrubá Ralston's films were serviceable (and not near-

64) Milan Hain, *Hugo Haas a jeho (americké) filmy* (Praha: Casablanca, 2015), 35.

65) Rosenfeld, "The Cult of the Clinker Queen," 18.

66) Matějková, *Hugo Haas*, 158.

67) Hurst, *Republic Studios*, 19.

68) *Ibid.*, 18.

69) Lowe, "Angel at the Amazon," 4.

ly as bad by any measure as B-movie shlock being produced by Ed Wood or similarly out-tré studios), they displayed a more fatal flaw than bad acting: the fact that Hrubá Ralston “had almost no screen personality.”<sup>70)</sup> One of the great problems of stardom (or at least according to the model first codified by Dyer) is the fact that there exists an inherent tension within the star image of duality, of the ordinary and the extraordinary existing as one. As Dyer notes:

One of the problems in coming to grips with the phenomenon of stardom is the extreme ambiguity/contradiction, already touched on, concerning the stars-as-ordinary and the stars-as-special. Are they just like you or me, or do consumption and success transform them into (or reflect) something different?<sup>71)</sup>

This duality is even more present in the so-called cult stars, specifically those cult stars who lack the physical or artistic gifts other stars have and yet have somehow transcended the boundary between ordinary individual or star — whose ordinariness or lack of talent makes them somehow exotic simply by proximity to the film industry itself. For would-be stars like Hrubá Ralston who had originally earned their fame through some sort of non-cinematic gift, like athletics or figure skating, making a lasting impression in cinema was more difficult than expected. As her longtime director Joseph Kane put it:

But you know, the public is a very funny thing. The public either accepts you, or it doesn't, and there's nothing you can do about it. If they don't go for you, well, that's it.<sup>72)</sup>

In the end it seems the public just simply wouldn't go for her.

By the mid-1970s, Hrubá Ralston, if remembered, was often referenced only as the punchline to jokes about bad acting in trade, popular, and even minor local publications. As film critic Bill Hagen wrote for the *Copley News Service* in 1975 (a wire service operated by the Copley Press which sent syndicated columns to papers all across the United States) in an article lampooning the actress by attributing various famous film quotes to her or about her:

“I coulda been a contendah.” In perhaps her finest performance, Vera Hrubá Ralston remarked on what might have been in a tearful farewell to show business at dinner arranged in her honor by Gabby Hayes. It will long be remembered by those gathered for occasion at the Bel Air Taco Bell.<sup>73)</sup>

70) Dixon, *Death of the Moguls*, 155.

71) Dyer, *Stars*, 43.

72) Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy, “Interview: Charles Kane,” in *King of the Bs: Working Within the Hollywood System: An Anthology of Film History and Criticism*, eds. Charles Flynn and Todd McCarthy (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1975), 321–322.

73) Bill Hagen, “Who the hey is Vera Ralston,” *Arroyo Grande Times Press Reporter*, December 2, 1977, 7.

While much of the critical and popular consensus of Hrubá Ralston's acting abilities was resoundingly negative, it is worth emphasizing that she was not without her fans, many of whom saw the criticism as largely overblown (especially for an actress in a B-movie) and who saw her as a link to a by-gone era.<sup>74</sup> Even some of her skeptics were not all that skeptical in their opposition to her. Following a high visibility human interest piece on Hrubá Ralston, Ben Sommers, a motion picture theatre owner in Denver felt compelled to write in to the *Los Angeles Times*, expressing his "happy memories" of his time as an exhibitor of Republic Pictures. Sommers noted that, while many complained about Hrubá Ralston's performances, Republic Pictures were incredibly popular and well-attended. Furthermore, Sommers noted how he "missed her", and closed his letter by chuckling at the fact that "[Hrubá Ralston] sold lots of popcorn to disgruntled moviegoers."<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, one of DeCordova's key insights into the creation of the Hollywood star production industry was the simple observation that the classical Hollywood model of stardom depends on maintaining an equilibrium between two opposite poles of a star's existence — capital's desire to market a highly controlled, public image of the actor or actress, and the public's hunger to know all details about the same actor or actresses private life, no matter how scandalous, salacious, or contradictory of the public image those might be. What remains difficult to decipher with Hrubá Ralston's public image is whether the public hungered to know anything about Hrubá Ralston's private life in Hollywood at all. While American newspapers were full of gossip items and speculation about Hrubá Ralston's personal life as a young ice-skating refugee from Czechoslovakia, by the time she had become one of the marquee names on Republic Pictures' roster, her mentions in gossip columns had nearly vanished.

This is not to say that there was not any potential dirt for the Hollywood gossip columnists to mine, however. While the Hrubá Ralston-Yates marriage was full of incidents that earlier generations of Hollywood scribes would have gladly turned into salacious content for gossip and blind item columns, Hrubá Ralston's scandals were seemingly unreported on, although mentions of them can be gleaned in the memoirs of her peers, like Hugo Haas or Norbert Auerbach. Since Hrubá Ralston eventually married to Herbert Yates, her domestic escapades (such as drunkenly lighting a barbeque grill on fire in the living room of her Hollywood mansion)<sup>76</sup> and rather public affair with a married executive were never really commented on in the press. When Hrubá Ralston was associated with scandals, on the contrary, they were financial instead of salacious. Although Republic Pictures had been making a steady profit during his leadership as a producer of B movies and genre films, in 1958 a stockholder lawsuit alleged that Hrubá Ralston's husband, Herbert J. Yates, had forced the studio to make her the star of 20 pictures, 18 of which had "flopped" and

74) Jody Jacobs, "The Diamond Circle Goes Western," *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1981, 114.

75) Ben Sommers, "The Popcorn Queen," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1982, 119.

76) Matějková, *Hugo Haas*, 158.



that Yates “was aware that Miss Ralston was no great shakes as an actress when he forced Republic to star her.”<sup>77)</sup> That same year, Hrubá Ralston retired when Republic Studios folded shortly after, marking the end of her nearly 20 year career as an actress.

Although Věra Hrubá Ralston’s life seemingly satisfied most of the basic requirements for stardom, the fact that she did not become a classically defined star of note in either the public or the cultic imagination remains inescapable. This alone is not surprising, given the rarified nature of stardom; however, what remains surprising is that Hrubá Ralston possessed nearly all the prerequisite conditions for classical film stardom. She had been an internationally feted athlete who had so captivated the hearts of an American audience that she received thousands of marriage proposals and a \$20,000 dollar inheritance from a random audience member when facing a minor immigration hurdle, and yet those extraordinary responses did not translate into any sort of lasting success within the film industry. She had been a celebrated member of the Czech expatriate community and a staunch anti-Nazi activist during World War II and yet was not celebrated by her home country or her adopted country the way countless other stars (and even cult stars such as Maria Montez) were. She was married to a studio head who worked tirelessly to make her into a bona-fide star even at the expense of his own career and the studio he had turned into one of the most successful B-movie studios of the late 1940s to early 1950s; she had starred with some of the leading actors of her day. And while other cult figures saw a belated stardom due to the championing of other artists and critics, Hrubá Ralston spent the last few decades of her life trying to reignite interest in the career to no avail. No matter what approach was taken to transform the public persona of Věra Hrubá Ralston from that of a former figure skater turned untalented actress to a film star (either as a traditional model or as a cult star), the end results were the same — nothing.

In conclusion, Věra Hrubá Ralston’s descent from celebrated athlete into anti-star has revealed several interesting insights into why some foreign celebrities were able to transcend their momentary fame into various degrees of stardom, and others, like Hrubá Ralston, did not. On the one hand, the fact remains that Hrubá Ralston had considerable personal advantages (international athletic celebrity, physical attractiveness, personal connections within the film industry, the social and industrial clout of her husband) which failed to make her a star. Although she was managed and connected to a number of powerful men, her anti-Nazi politics did not seem to garner her the same amount of credibility or favorability as had other more exotic European actresses. Similarly, although she publicly proclaimed her desire to be American citizen, the early publicity she earned through her antagonism of the Nazi regime and Czechoslovak boosterism marked her as “foreign” in the eyes of the American public. Paradoxically, however, her willingness to abandon Czech cultural identity and assimilate into an American cultural identity reduced her value globally to ethnic Czechs. Finally, although Hrubá Ralston was originally marketed as an ethnically foreign beauty, her unwillingness to be defined through her physical desirability and her adherence to more conservative norms of femininity prevented the audience from desiring her as a “vamp” like Pola Negri and, like Vilma Bánky, instead associ-

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77) Anon., “Yates Played as Head of Republic Pictures,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 20, 1958, 40.

ating her with less threatening models of European foreignness which were so unmarked, they faded very quickly in the public consciousness.

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## Biography

**Nicholas David Hudac** studied at the University of Chicago and Charles University, where he received his Ph.D. in 2020. He is currently an assistant professor in the department of Film and Theatre studies at Palacký University in Olomouc. His research interests include ethnic identity in mass media, star studies, and genre. His first book *Picturing a Nation: Cinema, Photography, and Mass-Produced Media in the Creation of Slovak Identity 1790–1972* will be published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2026.

Email: nicholasdavid.hudac@upol.cz