

ABSTRACT

A Director's Approach to Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*

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Garson Kanin's 1945 play, *Born Yesterday*, depicts the transformation of a former chorus girl from an ignorant young "lady" into an educated and cultured "woman". *A Director's Approach to Garson Kanin's Born Yesterday* explores the analytical and production aspects of producing the play on Baylor University's mainstage. Chapter One explores the author, his works, and a critical assessment of previous *Born Yesterday* productions. Chapter Two gives analytical insight used to create a unified concept while Chapters Three and Four relay the practical application of the analysis and investigate collaboration with designers and actors. Finally, Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the final production.

A Director's Approach to Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

The Playwright Garson Kanin

Introduction

If you take a stroll down Library Way, located on 41st Street, from The New York Public Library to Grand Central Station, on the sidewalk you will discover the following quote from Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*, "I want everybody to be smart. As smart as they can be. A world full of ignorant people is too dangerous to live in" (Kanin 57). The sentiment seems to be Kanin's personal philosophy instilled during his early childhood and explored throughout his canon of work. The following chapter briefly examines Garson Kanin's life and analyzes his works between 1946 and 1954, using *Born Yesterday* as a focal point.

The Playwright

Garson Kanin was a prolific playwright, director, and actor with a career spanning forty-seven years, from 1933 to 1980. He wrote plays, screenplays, novels, short stories, and documentaries, and worked with numerous arts organizations until his death in 1999. A collaborator and friend to many of show businesses' top stars, including Thornton Wilder, George Abbott, Ruth Gordon, Spencer Tracey and Katherine Hepburn, Kanin was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 1985. Remarkably, Kanin accomplished all this without a high school diploma. He was self-educated, and throughout his life he sought opportunities to learn from some of the most prominent names in show business.

Garson Kanin was born in Rochester, New York on November 12, 1912 to David M. and Sadie Kanin. His parents fostered respect for reading, the arts, and education. David Kanin's acquisition of a small movie theatre during World War I helped cultivate the younger Kanin's interest in show business. Garson Kanin studied silent films, occasionally frame by frame, and demonstrated a strong desire for knowledge and a rich curiosity. This self-motivation and self-education would serve him well as he was unable to finish high school after the Great Depression made it necessary for him to help support his family. Kanin was introduced to vaudeville while briefly working as a saxophone player in a band that also performed comedy skits and this experience aroused his interest in Broadway theatre. At the first opportunity, Kanin enrolled, without a high school degree, in the American Academy of the Dramatic Arts in New York. A part in George Abbott's 1935 play, *Ladies' Money*, gave way to other roles and a job in Abbott's office as an assistant. This position led to opportunities to cast and direct Abbott's road companies.

Kanin directed his first Broadway production, *Hitch Your Wagon*, in 1936 and subsequently left George Abbot to become Samuel Goldwyn's protégée in Hollywood. Kanin worked with Goldwyn for a year though he was released from his contract when he expressed his desire to direct against Goldwyn's wishes. Kanin moved to RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Pictures and directed his first feature film, *A Man to Remember* (1938). Kanin stayed with R.K.O. until 1941 when he was drafted into the U.S. Army's film unit. After marrying film actress, Ruth Gordon, Kanin transferred into the Office of Strategic Services, a precursor to the CIA. Kanin's time in the army proved fruitful as he directed multiple documentaries including *The True Glory*, Dwight D. Eisenhower's

record of the Ally invasion. The film, co-directed with Carol Reed, won the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 1945.

Kanin's writing career became very active after he left the army. Thornton Wilder—the friend and mentor whom Kanin met in 1936—had encouraged him to begin writing as another creative outlet while he was still in the service. When Kanin was stationed in London, after being transferred from Washington D.C., he wrote his first draft of *Born Yesterday*. The play premiered on Broadway at the Lyceum Theatre on February 4, 1946. Kanin helped adapt the play into a 1950 film, though he did not take a screen credit. The next few years solidified Kanin's popularity as a screenwriter and director. He wrote four screenplays with Ruth Gordon, two of which featured the popular acting team of Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy, with whom Kanin and Gordon became close friends. In the late 1950s, Kanin began writing short stories, novels, essays, and non-fiction books in addition to his film and stage work. He wrote two memoirs honoring friends: *Remembering Mr. Maugham* in 1969 and *Tracy and Hepburn: An Intimate Memoir* in 1971. Kanin titled his 1974 reflection on show business the entertaining moniker, *Hollywood: Stars and Starlets, Tycoons and Flesh-Peddlers, Moviemakers and Moneymakers, Frauds and Geniuses, Hopefuls and Has-Beens, Great Lovers and Sex Symbols*.

Kanin continued directing and writing into the 1980s and was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 1985. Ruth Gordon, his wife of more than forty years, died that same year on August 28 and five years later he married actress Marian Seldes. Kanin received many awards and accolades for his work in the theatre, including a William Inge Lifetime Achievement Award, before his death on March 13, 1999.

Kanin's early life and dynamic career had a tremendous impact on his writing. Stories promoting education, equality, respect for the law, democracy, and show business characterize his plays and novels. For this study, I am focusing on Kanin's plays and screenplays between the years 1946-1954, including those written with his wife, Ruth Gordon.

Garson Kanin's Works, 1946-1954

Kanin was exceptionally busy during the years following *Born Yesterday*, writing a total of nine plays and screenplays, four of which were co-written with Gordon. The plays include *Born Yesterday* (1946), *The Smile of the World* (1949), *The Rat Race* (1949), and *The Live Wire* (1950). The four screenplays written with Gordon are *A Double Life* (1947), *Adam's Rib* (1949), *The Marrying Kind* (1952), and *Pat and Mike* (1952). While Kanin helped write the 1950 film version of *Born Yesterday*, the only screenplay which is credited solely to Kanin as author during this time is the 1954 film, *It Should Happen to You*. A complete list of Kanin's canon can be found in Appendix A. The works between 1946 and 1954 focus on strong characters rather than plot and investigate gender roles, democracy, education, and the dangers of fame and ambition.

In his colorful memoir, *Hollywood*, Kanin relates a conversation with Samuel Goldwyn in which he tries to sell Kanin a story by stating, "It's the greatest story of the year. The most important. With great characters. I know how you like great characters. I remember how you once said that is the most important thing—the characters—more important than the story. And you want to know something? You're right!" (165). Perhaps Kanin's interest in character stems from the fascinating people who surround him—Samuel Goldwyn, Thornton Wilder, George Abbott, Charlie Chaplin, to name a

few. Perhaps his interest originated in the books he read or the silent films he studied as a child. Whatever the reason, Kanin's writing exhibits a high regard for interesting characters. Kanin's penchant for creating compelling characters is evident in each of his plays and screenplays. Characters propel the story along, rather than being moved by the plot, and his characters frequently become platforms for expressing social views.

Kanin's Female Characters

Bold and audacious women are the most prominent characters in Kanin's plays and in Kanin/Gordon's screenplays. His principle female characters have spirit, spunk, and strong backbones. "Several of Kanin's post-war films paid unusually sympathetic attention to the aspirations of women as they challenged conventional sex roles," writes Judith E. Smith in her book, *Visions of Belonging* (249). However, I argue that while Kanin's female characters question male dominance, they never become fully independent or emancipated. For instance, *The Rat Race* (1949) follows Helen, a young, disenchanted woman living in New York, as she dwells on her former glory as a dancer. Kanin describes Helen in the following way: "All who attempt to guess her age guess wrongly. She is barefooted. She wears a skirt, but no blouse as yet, only a brassier....She is smoking" (3). When a man whistles at her through her window, she yells, "If you got nothin' better to do, you nosey goddamn half-wit" (3). She is not modest and is comfortable enough with her body to walk around half-dressed. Some may even label Helen brazen. This scene is the first of many in the play that portrays Helen as a lonely woman who has been forced into—and is quite capable of—taking care of herself until she meets Gus, a new roommate and future lover. Gus forces Helen to question her lifestyle choices until she alters her personality and becomes dependent on Gus.

Adam's Rib (1949) portrays a husband and wife, Adam and Amanda, who are both lawyers. Amanda is a capable, tenacious, and intelligent lawyer defending a young woman who has shot her husband for being unfaithful. Her principal argument is that men and women should be treated and tried equally by the law. The film shows Amanda to be highly educated but it also reinforces the importance of her role as wife and helpmate to Adam. *Pat and Mike* (1952) follows a young female athlete who wears pants, can out-play men in sports competitions, and comes to the defense of her trainer when he is in danger of being severely beaten. But in the film, this boyish girl falls in love and agrees to the conventionality of marriage with Mike. At the beginning of *Born Yesterday*, protagonist Billie Dawn has the acumen to get what she wants in life, even if she only desires two mink coats, but she uses her sex appeal as a tool instead of her mind. She therefore presents, like other women in Kanin's work, a contradiction between liberation and convention.

Kanin was writing immediately following World War II, a time when American women were transitioning back to domestic duties after having filled roles in society left open by enlisted soldiers. For this reason, post-war America emphasized specific and distinct gender roles for both men and women. On the surface Kanin's plays revolt against the cultural distinction of these gender roles; however, there is always a subversive trait undermining the progressive nature of Kanin's female characters. They might be dumb (*Born Yesterday*, *The Marrying Kind*, *It Should Happen to You*), immoral or in contradiction to the law (*Born Yesterday*, *The Rat Race*, *Adam's Rib*, *It Should Happen to You*), and/or too masculine (*Adam's Rib*, *Pat and Mike*). These qualities impede the characters and prevent them from becoming successful examples of female

independence and power. The following sections will investigate each of these subversive female traits found in Kanin's plays.

Dumbness is predominate in the protagonists of *The Marrying Kind*, *It Should Happen to You*, and *Born Yesterday*, roles which were all originated by the same actress: Judy Holliday. The "dumb blonde" aspect of these characters in Kanin's work may not have been as prominent had they not been portrayed by Judy Holliday. Her high-pitched voice and absent minded disposition combined with her blonde hair and good looks conveyed a particular stock character. The quality of being "dumb" is not necessarily written into the characters Florrie from *The Marrying Kind* or Gladys from *It Should Happen to You*, but rather appears as a symptom of their focus on things other than knowledge. Florrie cares more about her family and making her husband happy than about getting an education. Gladys is wrapped up in the pursuit of fame and consequently leaves any quest for intelligence by the wayside. Interestingly, Holliday had played Billie from *Born Yesterday* before working on her roles in *It Should Happen to You* and *The Marrying Kind*. It is possible that Holliday imposed parts of Billie's disposition from *Born Yesterday* onto the other two characters, magnifying a sense of their essential ignorance that Kanin may not have originally intended when he wrote the scripts.

Dumbness is a critical element to the character of Billie Dawn. The entire premise of the play is based on the ignorance of the former chorus girl and the plot develops due to her subsequent education. Billie has street smarts and knows how to use her body to get what she needs, but she is oblivious to etiquette, current events, or academic knowledge. On the surface, it may appear that Billie's eventual education in

the play is progressive, however, her education is sculpted by and for men rather than for the purpose of self-improvement. She begins her journey under her boyfriend's, Harry Brock, orders and in the hope of impressing Paul Verrall. Even as Billie becomes more and more educated during the play, Kanin inserts lines that make an audience laugh at Billie's remaining stupidity. These serve as reminders of how much more Billie has to learn to undermine her agency:

BROCK. You think you know so much—what's a *peninsula*?

PAUL: It's a—

BROCK: Not you.

BILLIE: (*Confidently and with condescending superiority.*) It's that new medicine! (60)

Thus, even as Billie becomes educated, she retains some of the idiosyncratic “dumbness” which keeps her within a traditional gender stereotype and shows her to be intellectually weaker than the men around her.

Immorality, the second of the subversive traits typical to Kanin's female characters, can be seen in the sexual promiscuity and aggressive ambition found in *The Rat Race*, *Born Yesterday*, *It Should Happen to You*, and *Adam's Rib*. Helen of *The Rat Race* offers to sleep with a telephone man in an effort to retain her telephone service. This is not the first time Helen has suggested a similar proposition, nor does she seem to think anything wrong with her offer until she meets her new roommate, Gus. Helen's relationship with Gus causes her to re-evaluate her moral standing and she ultimately tries to operate in a manner consistent with cultural standards. Instead of sleeping with men to get what she needs or cheating people to get what she wants, Helen shows a renewed sense of morality in her interactions with Gus and others. Helen's independence is therefore connected to her incorrect moral stance; she will be reformed by her

interaction with Gus and eventually become a better person. In the process she will also become more dependent.

Billie Dawn's immorality manifests as promiscuity. A woman living with a man outside of wedlock would have been scandalous in 1946. Billie and Brock have been living together for eight years. Her father does not support the relationship, calling Billie a "concubine" (Kanin 51). Billie sinks further into sexual debasement by suggesting to Paul early in the play that they start an affair of their own; she lets him know there have been a few others before him. However, as Billie's education develops, so does her moral compass. Billie acknowledges her immoral situation after Paul reminds her she traded something for her two mink coats. Her response, "Don't get dirty you're supposed to be so wonderful, so don't get dirty" (56), concedes her acts are immoral. By the end of the play Billie has decided to leave Brock and marry Paul, legitimizing their relationship. Billie's moral problem is solved but only through participation in marriage. Billie's move from one relationship to the other also undermines the new sense of freedom that she has found in education.

Like sexual promiscuity, the desire for fame and money in Kanin's characters is often demonized and viewed as immoral because it resides outside the confines of a relationship built on the desire for a loving family. *It Should Happen to You* shows how ambition can lead to broken dreams and broken people. Protagonist Gladys Glover possesses fortitude to follow her dreams, but the trait becomes her downfall. Gladys is so focused on her quest for fame that she throws aside any and everybody else's feelings until confronted with her own selfishness. Peter Shephard—a documentarian and main love interest—attacks her penchant for fame, exclaiming,

What's this craze to be so well-known? You think everyone is so anxious to be above the crowd?...In the first place, everybody can't be above the crowd, can they?...But why isn't it more important to learn how to be a part of the crowd?... It's not about making a name. It's about making a name stand for something... It's better if your name stands for something on one block than nothing or something bad all over the world. (Kanin and Gordon)

Shephard's words summarize how *It Should Happen to You* denounces fame and greed to champion self-worth and honor. Gladys has a one-track mind, focused solely on a life inside the spotlight, but the film suggests there is more to life than being on top. After achieving fame at the cost of her honor, Gladys discovers she would rather have a loving relationship and simple life with Peter than be rich and famous. Her ambition and independence are replaced by marriage and domesticity. Through the correction of sex outside of marriage and ambition, *Born Yesterday* and *It Should Happen to You* both suggest crimes of immorality are greater than, and overshadow, the characters' positive attributes such as intelligence and independence.

Masculinity, the third subversive trait, is inherent in both Amanda in *Adam's Rib* and Pat in *Pat and Mike*. Both women create chaotic relationships as they take on masculine roles. Amanda holds the same job as her husband, suggesting she provides for the family the same way a man should. Pat competes against women and men in sporting events, beating both. The women's masculine traits disrupt conventional views of gender roles, generating disorder in their own lives. Demeaning masculine qualities in these women implies that honoring the distinction between what is traditionally male and what is conventionally female will contribute to a happy, and peaceful existence. While Kanin's plays call for strict gender roles, they also advocate democracy and equality in

relationships. Consequently, gender roles and democracy cannot be separated when discussing *Adam's Rib* or *Pat and Mike*.

Democracy and Gender Roles

Kanin's screenplays with wife, Ruth Gordon, suggest democracy is ideal whether in politics or relationships. The plays *The Live Wire*, *It Should Happen to You* and *Born Yesterday* suggest the best environment is within a state of democracy, where the people yield the power. Kanin and Gordon's screenplays stress the necessity of democracy in relationships, but also the need for gender roles to remain distinct. In both *Pat and Mike* and *Adam's Rib* the female characters may appear revolutionary but merely bend the hegemonic discourse for a short while only to conform to cultural expectations in the end. Like Gladys, in *It Should Happen to You*, who gives up her dreams of being famous and marries Peter Shephard, Amanda (*Adam's Rib*) and Pat (*Pat and Mike*) never truly break the cultural norms regarding gender roles and domesticity.

In *Pat and Mike*, the character of Pat portrays a "new woman," a term that originated in the late nineteenth century and which was popular into the early twentieth century. Gail Finney describes a "new woman" in the following way,

The New Woman typically values self-fulfillment and independence rather than the stereotypically feminine ideal of self-sacrifice; believes in legal and sexual equality; often remains single because of the difficulty of combining such equality with marriage; is more open about her sexuality than the 'Old Woman'; is well-educated and reads a great deal; has a job; is athletic or otherwise physically vigorous and, accordingly, prefers comfortable clothes (sometimes male attire) to traditional female garb. (Finney)

Pat is the epitome of the "new woman." She wears pants, plays sports, and takes care of herself. However, her natural instincts are at war with cultural standards and her fiancé,

Collier. This struggle materializes when Pat is playing sports. She is extremely competent, unless Collier is around. When Collier is watching her play, Pat falters, loses her athletic competitiveness, and cries. Oblivious to Pat's worth, Collier treats her as an object rather than a partner. His failure to acknowledge her value degrades Pat's sense of self-worth. Mike seems to be the only character that notices Pat's value, although initially his interest is akin to an investment in a racehorse. As the movie progresses, Mike quits objectifying Pat as he sees her worth as a person instead of a commodity.

Mike understands that a partnership between a man and a woman has to be equal. He tells Pat, "This man and woman thing. That's got to be a fifty/fifty thing. Five-O/Five-O....He's seventy-five. You'll never be five-O with him" (Kanin and Gordon). Mike's beliefs are put to the test when Amanda rescues him from two bookies who are about to beat him up. Mike expresses his hurt pride and desire for distinct gender roles, saying,

I built ya up into some kind of Frankenstein monster. That's what you are. You're just a great big Mrs. Frankenstein... I thought I'd like the combination. I thought I would, but I don't, you see. I like things to be five-oh—five-oh. I like a he to be a he and a she to be a she. (Kanin and Gordon)

Mike suggests a problem with Pat as a "new woman," but he is finally able to accept her for who she is at the end of the movie. He knows she does not need him, but he wants to be in her life anyway. This indicates a potentially democratic relationship and possibly even a relationship outside the restraints of traditional gender roles. *Pat and Mike* is the only one of Kanin's works to end with any resemblance of equality between men and women. However, Pat kisses Mike and tells him how much she needs him, negating and undermining her own disposition. Once again, even within a democratic, equal

relationship, gender roles prevail and the subversive trait—masculinization—is squelched.

Adam's Rib's Amanda and Adam initially appear to have a democratic relationship. Both are lawyers who speak to each other with tenderness and respect and who are truly interested in the other's work. Amanda is intelligent, courageous, and holds a prestigious job. These positive attributes, and the couple's democratic relationship, are undermined when Amanda makes a mockery of the court during a case Adam is prosecuting. Amanda defends a woman accused of attempted murder and by doing so announces that men and women should be tried equally. Adam becomes a sympathetic character as he strives to maintain a level head while Amanda quite literally turns the court into a circus. Amanda questions women of various occupations until a female entertainer picks Adam up in the court. This display is meant to exhibit each woman's capabilities as equal to that of a man, even at the expense of professionalism.

Amanda's effort to prove women should be treated equally becomes comedic and irrational. Eventually the legal process breaks her family apart. Adam leaves Amanda after the courtroom scene, declaring, "All of a sudden, I don't like being married to what is known as a new woman. I want a wife, not a competitor. Competitor! Competitor! You want to go and be a big he-woman, go be it, but not with me" (Kanin and Gordon). Adam accuses Amanda of being a "new woman" and a "big he-woman," suggesting the terms are one and the same. Adam's use of both "new woman" and "he-woman" in the same sentence suggests the "new woman" was too masculine and independent for him. The two decide to separate after Adam teaches Amanda a lesson about law and equality by bursting into a neighbor's apartment with a candy gun. He then fakes a crying episode

during their divorce hearing to get Amanda to come back to him, a scheme that works. Amanda does not realize Adam can cry on cue to get what he wants, a tactic women stereotypically use, until the end of the film. This moment is used to create humor and to further the point that the inversion of gender roles should be humorous, rather than accepted as the norm.

“Yellowing” Democracy

Kanin’s emphasis on egalitarianism does not end with male/female relationships, but focuses also on democratic social thought and the citizen’s obligation to abide by the law. *Smile of the World*, *Adam’s Rib*, and *Born Yesterday* focus on ideal democratic values and the law before it has been corrupted.

Adam’s Rib questions respect for the law and who the law should protect. The play’s dramatic question is announced overtly on a sign that rests on the side of a Court House wall: “Equal and exact justice to all men of whatever state or persuasion” (Kanin and Gordon). It is this principle that is explored and tested through *Adam’s Rib*.

As mentioned earlier, Adam and Amanda are on separate sides of a trial of a woman who shot, but did not kill, her husband. Amanda’s argument is that women should be tried equally as men, and while Adam does not disagree with Amanda, he believes that nobody has the right to infringe on another’s safety. If the defendant shot somebody, they should be tried and found guilty for their violent act. Adam warns Amanda at the beginning of the trial process about turning “the court of law into a Punch and Judy show” and later criticizes what he sees as her disdain for the law: “You’re having the wrong kind of fun down in that courtroom. You’re shaking the law by the tail and I don’t like it. I’m ashamed of you Amanda” (Kanin and Gordon). The play asserts that the law should be

followed and respected whether you endorse that particular law or not. Kanin reserves inquiries about the possibility of unjust law for his works, *The Smile of the World* and *Born Yesterday*.

The Smile of the World depicts Justice Boulting of the Supreme Court, his wife Sara, and his new clerk Sam as they battle disenchantment with the law and each other. Justice Boulting had once been a headstrong, courageous young man, who championed the rights of women and individuals. However, he allowed the corruption of Washington D.C. and the stress of judging Supreme Court cases to produce a hollow man who no longer identifies with his former beliefs. Justice Boulting allows politics rather than principles to influence his rulings. Sara, Boulting's wife, is extremely unhappy in Washington. Sara does not realize her dissatisfaction with her husband until she meets his new clerk, Sam, who reminds her of the younger Boulting. Sam is the epitome of democratic ideas and is passionate about American law. He holds government officials in high regard until he gets to know them. After working with the Supreme Court Judges, Sam realizes they are common men with common flaws and he finds himself suddenly disenchanted with the democratic system. Sara reminds him, "But isn't that as it should be? Men governed by men—judged by men?" (46). Here Kanin suggests that common people should be the makers and regulators of law. America is, after all, a democracy created for and governed by "the people." The play does not try to persuade an audience that government is perfect but, instead, it calls for those in government positions to remember democracy is intended to represent power given by "the people."

The Smile of the World raises questions about the American system through a specific trial depicting a man who should have freedom of speech, but has been found

guilty of a crime because he distributed materials with quotes from Karl Marx and Thomas Paine. We see the negative effect that holding a government position has had on Boulting when he defends his sentencing of the man by saying, “I don’t make laws. I don’t approve, in my heart, every decision I render. The law is the law and, good or bad, I am sworn to uphold it” (Kanin 70). Boulting believes he has faithfully upheld the law even though his decisions have often required him to go against his conscience. The audience is made to feel that the law should not be simply black and white, but rather subject to interpretation through the application of ethical principles.

Boulting’s shift from idealistic lawmaker to jaded judge is similar to the idea of “yellowing democracy” described in Paul Verrall’s article “The Yellowing Democratic Manifesto.” In *Born Yesterday*, Paul explains the concept to Billie in the following conversation:

PAUL. Well, look. You know what ‘yellowing’ means?
BILLIE. Not this time.
PAUL. When a piece of paper gets old, what happens to it?
BILLIE. Throw it away?
PAUL. No, it turns yellow...Now, ‘democratic’. You know what that means, don’t you?
BILLIE. Not Republican.
PAUL. Well, not exactly. It just means pertaining to our form of Government, which is a democracy. ... All right now, ‘manifesto?’
BILLIE. I don’t know.
PAUL. Why don’t you look it up?
BILLIE. I did look it up. I still don’t know.
PAUL. Well, look—when I say ‘manifesto’, I mean the set of rules and ideals and—principles and hopes on which the United States is based.
BILLIE. And you think it’s turning yellow?
PAUL. Well, yes. I think that a lot of the original inspirations been neglected—and forgotten. (53)

In *The Smile of the World*, Boulting is the old, yellowed version of democratic law that was once young and idealistic. America’s Founding Fathers who wrote democratic law

championed power given to the people. However, as the government has aged it, like Boulting, has ceased to protect people's rights. The younger lawyer Sam, like Paul Verrall in *Born Yesterday*, signifies change and rejuvenation inspired by the "original inspirations" that "have been neglected—and forgotten." (53). Through the example and efforts of idealists like Adam, Sam, and Paul, Kanin's plays seem to suggest, America can stand firm on the principles of democracy as a nation governed by its people.

Production History and Critical Assessment

Born Yesterday opened on Broadway on February 4, 1946 at the Lyceum Theatre to mostly high praises. It is interesting to note that early critical responses to the play focused on structure and content rather than production values. These general critiques of *Born Yesterday* can be summarized by two reviews of the play. The first, written by Lewis Nichols of the *New York Times* on February 5, 1946, describes *Born Yesterday* in the following way:

Mr. Kanin has flung into *Born Yesterday* whatever his hand, being quicker than the eye, could grab. There is the lonely wisecrack, raised indeed to a high degree, there is melodrama; there are pathos, earthiness of expression and even brisk burlesque. There are times when the author could have used his red pencil less sparingly, for some of the scenes, even the funniest are drawn out a little too long.

Nichols believes it would have been beneficial if Kanin had tightened the script, cutting the play in an effort to make *Born Yesterday* less "drawn out." In this review, Nichols had little to say about the production of the play, although he gives a nod to the scene design by Donald Oenslager which "is worth every cent of \$235 a day" (Nichols).

The second review, authored by Australian critic Leslie Rees, is not concerned with the original production, but echoes Nichols comments indicating script flaws that

requires a liberal use of a “red pencil.” Rees says of a 1948 Australian production, “I found the first act entertaining; the second rather dull; and the third sententious,” (126). His scrutiny of the play resonates with any *Born Yesterday* production because it is based on structure rather than production values. Rees exonerates the Australian production team by placing blame at Kanin’s feet, exclaiming: “No! It was the playwright who gave short measure. It happens in so many modern plays” (126). He continues by giving suggestions to make the play better: “For *Born Yesterday* to have maintained its initial interest, I think its problem should have been worked out on a plane of action, whether humorous or melodramatic, not argument” (Rees 126). It is true that Kanin’s dialogue in the Second and Third Acts can become polemic. There are too many times when Kanin uses Paul as a platform to express his political ideals.

Interestingly, Lewis Nichols wrote a second article on February 10, 1946 that is in such opposition to his first it makes one wonder if the articles had separate authors. This second review extols *Born Yesterday* and offers specific points of praise about the play and its production which mirror the popular opinion of the show in 1946. The article states, “Mr. Kanin throws in funny lines at just the right moments, and he has a basket of wisecracks to cut off the sentiment when there has been enough of that” (Nichols). In addition to his praise for the script, Nichols also comments on Kanin’s direction: “As a director, Mr. Kanin sees that the evening goes briskly along, and when on occasions he dispenses with words, he and the players demand that the pantomime be funny too” (Nichols). Indeed, the “players” get most of the acclaim in Nichols’ second review of *Born Yesterday* as well as in other New York press coverage of the production. Nichols exclaims that Judy Holliday is, “...excellent as the girl,” adding, “As the former chorine,

no thought ever could have passed through her mind; as she learns about Sibelius and art, she clearly is headed for an intellectual salon of her own” (Nichols).

Born Yesterday played for 1,649 performances, making it the seventh longest running Broadway show at the time. It still holds the record for the longest running production at the Lyceum Theatre, though it moved to Henry Miller’s Theatre on November 11, 1948. Judy Holliday stayed with the part until replaced by Jan Sterling on May 4, 1949. The play’s success led to many international productions, including a London version directed by Laurence Olivier. *Born Yesterday* also received a national tour, numerous regional productions, and was translated to the big screen by Columbia pictures, who had purchased the rights to the play for the sum of \$1,000,000. According to Thomas F. Brady of *The New York Times*, Rita Hayworth was originally slated to portray Billie Dawn in the screen version of *Born Yesterday* but Holliday was finally chosen to reprise the role. The film solidified Judy Holliday’s popularity and earned her an Academy Award for Best Actress. Bosley Crowther, critic for *The New York Times*, wrote in 1950, “No actress in Hollywood’s employment shone more brightly than she...and we personally ranked her with Bette Davis as the year’s best in every regard” (Crowther).

While Judy Holliday’s performance gained great recognition, the 1950 film had other accomplishments to boast about as well. In addition to Best Actress, *Born Yesterday* was nominated for Best Costume Design, Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay. It was also nominated for “Best Motion Picture (Drama)” and “Best Motion Picture (Director)” at the Golden Globes. “But the point that remains to be repeated with

respect to this gratifying film is,” commented *Times* critic Crowther, “that it actually represents an improvement upon the hilarious play.”

Since the original stage production and film, *Born Yesterday* has had two Broadway revivals and a new film adaptation. Criticisms of these generally fall under two categories: 1) the timeliness and relevance of the play and 2) a commentary on the actress playing Billie Dawn. The first point, relevance, raises questions about the ever-changing attitudes toward both the U.S. democratic model and toward the “dumb blonde” stereotype. The second issue is related to the iconic performance of Judy Holliday as Billie Dawn, a portrayal that was so well-received that every actress to play the character since has been compared to her. In fact, the fear of severe comparison to the original production contributed to Garson Kanin’s reluctance to permit a Broadway revival for decades before allowing the 1989 production at the 46th Street Theatre, which featured Madeline Kahn as Billie and Ed Asner as Brock. A 1989 article in the *New York Times* by William H. Honan relates Kanin’s opinion about the revival:

Born Yesterday has been revived hundreds and hundreds of times, but I didn’t want it to be revived on Broadway because I could have written the reviews myself. They’d say it was O.K. but not as good as the original. I just didn’t want to get those reviews, so we set a very careful map for it and always kept the productions at least 200 miles from New York City. Still, I’ve always hoped that someday there would be a cast who would be so good in their own way that they would eradicate the memory of the original. I’m not speaking ill of the dead...but if I had a choice between the original production and this one for a New York Presentation, I’d choose this one. This girl has got sex. (Honan)

Madeline Kahn’s sex appeal and potential to expunge Judy Holliday’s performance from the audience’s memory inspired Kanin to risk a revival with the 1989 cast. However, he may have been idealistic in thinking that after 42 years he could find a cast able to “eradicate the memory of the original.” Kanin’s focus on Kahn, rather than the talent of

the entire cast, implies that the success of the play is highly dependent on the actress playing Billie.

Reviews of the 1989 revival, which lasted for five months and 153 performances, reveal that the new cast was indeed compared to the original one and found wanting. All of the reviews expressed the difficulty of living up to Judy Holliday's original performance.

To be successful in a role so well known that it has become a fixture of American theater she must not only impress the audience and the critics that she has made herself more "right" for it than might be such competing queens of comedy as, say, Goldie Hawn, Bette Midler or Lily Tomlin. But she must also not suffer by comparison with the memorable and greatly beloved - adored is a better word - Judy Holliday, who created the role on Broadway in 1946 and later in the film. (Honan)

Even Madeline Kahn states,

I knew, accepting the challenge of the role, I might fail...A lot of actresses who are known and who are risking a reputation, rather than an unknown and risking nothing, would not do this role because they don't want to be unfavorably compared to her. I decided to do it, but it was always a ghost in the back of my mind. (Modesto Bee)

While Kahn may have failed to eradicate the memory of Judy Holliday's Billie Dawn—a feat that may be near impossible—she did not necessarily fail in her performance. The comedienne received a 1989 Tony Nomination for Best Actress for the role.

The second criticism levied by critics is whether or not the play is “timely” and effective for a contemporary audience. Frank Rich of *The New York Times* described the 1989 revival as “flat” and “enlivened solely by Madeline Kahn's game stab at the heroine...” (Rich). Rich blames this largely on the play's lack of relevance:

Mr. Kanin set his play in the nation's capital at a time of bustling transition that makes our current change of Presidents seem of little historical moment. . . . In place of Mr. Kanin's innocent 1946 valentine to democracy's resilience, we're left with a morality play that leaves us

feeling as jaded and dispirited as if we'd stayed home to watch tonight's network news. (Rich)

Rich alludes to a political and cultural climate shift from 1946 to 1989 as the main reason for *Born Yesterday*'s failure to capture the attention of audiences. He calls *Born Yesterday* a "valentine" to American ideals. Audiences had become jaded after living through the Korean and Vietnam wars and witnessing how America's government and democratic ideals could fail its citizens. It is possible they did not have an interest in a sentimentalizing of the U.S. government and that this seriously contributed to a short-lived revival.

The relevancy and timeliness of the work was also questioned in the 1993 film adaptation of *Born Yesterday*, which starred Melanie Griffith as Billie, Don Johnson as Paul, and John Goodman as Harry. Once again, reviewers questioned whether or not the story and characters were relevant. Addressing the producer's decision to update *Born Yesterday* for a 1990s audience Vincent Canby wrote,

They don't make 'dumb broads' like Billie Dawn anymore, or, if they do, they don't call them that in our sensitized society. This may be one of the reasons why *Born Yesterday*, based on Garson Kanin's classic 1946 Broadway farce, plays so lamely in its glitzy new film version updated to the 1990's. You can take Billie Dawn out of the chorus, but you can't take her out of her own post-World War II time. (Canby)

Canby does not argue the relevance of patriotism found in Kanin's script, but rather Billie Dawn as a representative of a woman in the 1990s. "There is a fatal disconnection between place and characters who, conceived in one era are crazily transported into another in which they don't quite fit," the critic wrote (Canby). In answer to Canby's assertion that women of the 1990s were considered more independent with better access to education, I would argue that this fact does not necessarily negate popularity of the

“dumb blonde” stereotype. The popular film comedies *Clueless* (1995) and *Legally Blonde* (2001) both depict a young uneducated female protagonist who fits the “dumb blonde” type. *Clueless* dramatizes a high school girl who decides to better herself in an effort to impress her ex-step brother in whom she has taken a romantic interest. *Legally Blonde* recounts the story of Elle Woods who decides to go to law school when her boyfriend ends their relationship because she is too “dumb.” These two widely-known examples demonstrate the continued interest in the character of the “dumb blonde” who chooses to better herself to impress a man. Therefore, since the stereotype of the “dumb blonde” still existed in the 1990s, the failure of the 1993 film adaptation must be found elsewhere, perhaps at the feet of the screenwriter, director, and actors.

One cannot review a revival of *Born Yesterday* without mentioning Judy Holliday’s influence on any actress portraying Billie Dawn. Melanie Griffith’s performance was described as “adequate” (Canby), but lacking, “the kind of classic performance Holliday gave...Griffith’s line deliveries are uninflected and flat” (O’Toole). Steven Hunter of the *Baltimore Sun* gives Griffith slightly better marks by describing her work as “extremely confident and vivid in the part of Billie Dawn” (Hunter). Hunter is more forgiving than he should be as Griffith’s portrayal lacked the energy, sass, and believability necessary to play Billie.

The actress who took on Billie Dawn in the 2011 Broadway revival seems to have escaped Judy Holliday’s shadow. Charles Isherwood of the *New York Times* exclaims that Nina Arianda, “who made a spectacular Off Broadway debut last season as the actress-seductress in David Ives’s *Venus in Fur*, colors this cartoon role with her own set of Crayolas” (Isherwood). David Finkle of *TheatreMania* says Arianda, “proves here

that she's more than ready to take Broadway by storm,” and that, “She's fully alive to the way Billie's mind works” (Finkle). While Arianda’s performance may have presented the character of Billie in a somewhat new light, reviewers still questioned the play’s relevance. “Billie is still a classy variation on a dusty stereotype,” quipped Isherwood. Once again, the treatment and portrayal of women is questioned. Isherwood seems to suggest that Billie is an outdated character because her transformation is still reliant on Paul, the “sympathetic” man, rather than herself. I agree that this story presents false progress, that Billie’s education is less empowering because of the way it is linked to her ultimate acceptance of traditional gender roles in a marriage with Paul. And yet, the story line continues to interest popular audiences. The “dumb blonde” film *Legally Blonde* became a Broadway musical in 2007, seven years after the movie was released.

Isherman has conflicting opinions where the politics of *Born Yesterday* are concerned. The play exposes government and political corruption in 1946. Sixty-seven years later, the majority of Americans realize that political corruption is prevalent in the United States government. Isherman argues that Paul and Billie’s stand against political exploitation is “quaint,” but he also recognizes Brock’s character as someone with whom Americans can identify—a man above the law, capable of buying a senator. The only difference Isherman observes between 1946 and 2013 is that now, “Harry wouldn’t be spending his millions to buy himself a senator. He’d be spending them on his own campaign to become one” (Isherman).

A play studded with dusty stereotypes or a relevant production to modern audiences, *Born Yesterday* invites audiences to find humor in political and social ideals. No matter if one has seen *Born Yesterday* before or they are new to the play, Garson

Kanin invites theatergoers to poke fun at Billie Dawn, Harry Brock, and Paul Verrall as he engages the audience in social commentary of women's education rights, gender roles, and post-war politics. The play's popularity and expansive revival history, whether in film or on stage, generates nostalgia for many patrons and calls attention to challenges in staging the play.

CHAPTER TWO

Analyzing *Born Yesterday*

Chapter One examined Garson Kanin's female character roles and the depiction of democratic relationships in his plays and films from 1946-1954, years fundamental in the development of containment culture and the emergence of an "ideal" American family. The characters and plot of *Born Yesterday* present dual sides of the feminist progressive movement. The play encourages Billie's education, which can be seen as liberating, but criticizes her free sexuality and pushes her into a marriage with Paul. Thus the play depicts contradictory views of female empowerment within the play. *Born Yesterday* may appear progressive, but in fact, implies that Billie becomes the new "ideal" American woman of 1950s containment culture as defined by her monogamous relationship with Paul and her traditional role within a domestic relationship. The following will explore and investigate how post-war containment culture in America shapes *Born Yesterday* and the characters within, making Billie Dawn the precursor to and symbol for the "ideal" American woman.

Plot Synopsis

Garson Kanin's 1946 play, *Born Yesterday*, follows former chorus girl and bombshell Billie Dawn as she accompanies her boyfriend, Harry Brock, to Washington, D.C. A boorish businessman who makes his living trading junk and pushing people around, Brock is in Washington to finalize his underhanded schemes with corrupt government officials in an effort to expand his business. After an encounter between one

such official, Senator Hedges, and his wife, Brock quickly realizes that Billie does not have the skills or intellect required to maneuver Washington's social circles. Brock hires journalist Paul Verrall as Billie's tutor, even though Brock's lawyer Ed Devery, a self-loathing, alcoholic man, strongly disapproves and cautions Brock against the plan. Devery's warning proves prophetic and instead of merely helping Billie understand social expectations, Paul ignites a genuine spark for knowledge within Billie. Their blossoming romance is an unintended outcome of this teacher/pupil relationship.

Billie studies newspapers, books, music, and the great ideas on which America is founded. As she discovers the nobility of great historical figures, she realizes there is more to life than money. Billie begins to understand the depths of Brock's corrupt business practices and realizes she has been made a silent partner in some of his corporations in order to shield Brock's activity and reduce his tax liability. In a tense and volatile moment, Billie refuses to sign a document that Brock and Devery need to complete their illegal scheme. Brock's temper flares; he hits Billie and she leaves him, only to return hours later for one final confrontation. Billie informs Brock she is leaving him and has given his corporate papers to Paul's publisher. After Brock tries to strong-arm both Paul and Billie into returning the papers, Billie advises Brock that she will sign over the junkyards she controls to him, one per year if he amends his business practices. Billie and Paul exit together, leaving the audience to believe they will get married.

Politics and Morality

Political, social, and religious climates are interrelated in *Born Yesterday*, and therefore thematic references and cultural ideas are heavily dependent on the time and setting of the play. World War II had just ended when the play begins, potentially

crippling Brock's business that had made an obscene amount of money selling junk to the government for the war efforts. His plan now is to shift his business toward collecting war debris from Europe in order to remain highly lucrative. Brock is in Washington, D.C. to "buy" a senator to lobby for his personal interests in this business venture. Setting the play in Washington, D.C. allows *Born Yesterday* to investigate two different themes: 1) the corruption threatening to overrun Washington, D.C. and 2) democratic thought and nationalistic ideas. Kanin does not waste any time confronting corruption in Washington, D.C. and the state of the United States government. Within the first five minutes, Paul and Helen have the following conversation:

HELEN: Listen, anybody's got two hundred and thirty-five a day to spend
on a hotel room there oughta be a law.

PAUL: ...too many laws already.

HELEN: That's what I say.

PAUL: I know some people who'd call you a communist.

HELEN: Tell 'em I'm thinkin' about it. Seriously. Changed much, you
think?

PAUL: What?

HELEN: Washington?

PAUL: Not enough. I could stand a little more change. The idea of the war
wasn't to leave everything the same, you know. (9)

This short conversation emphasizes Paul's priorities and points to one of the play's major thematic concerns: that the government has to change. Paul criticizes the current United States government but he has not lost hope in the democratic ideals the United States symbolizes. He centers Billie's education on early democratic thought and a renewed sense of nationalism, suggesting Billie study both current events as well as writings of Jane Addams and Tom Paine, among others.

Paul wants power given back to the people and he hopes to see government corruption eradicated; but he is not naïve. He realizes there will always be a struggle

between selfish and unselfish men, but humankind does not have to live in greed and corruption. Paul explains this to Billie as they discuss Brock's selfish tendencies:

PAUL: Has he ever thought about anybody but himself?

BILLIE: Who does?

PAUL: Millions of people, Billie. The whole damned history of the world is a story of the struggle between the selfish and the unselfish... All the bad around is bred by selfishness. Sometimes selfishness even gets to be a cause, an organized force, even a government. Then it's called Fascism. Can you understand that? (56)

Paul links selfishness and greed to a neglect of the democratic philosophies undergirding the nation. His paper entitled, "The Yellowing Democratic Manifesto" speaks to this theory. Paul uses the article to explain to Billie what he thinks is wrong with the United States. His conversation with her in Act Two (also discussed in Chapter One) illustrates how the rules, regulations, and ideals on which the Government of the United States is founded are being disregarded. Paul explains his definition of "yellowing" in the following way, "I think that a lot of the original inspiration's been neglected—and forgotten" (53). Paul believes the U.S. government of 1946 no longer follows the original values upon which the country was founded.

Paul may condemn current government practices, but he fully supports the original foundation of thought the United States was built upon and still remains optimistic that those ideals can be revived. He believes the democratic "machine" can still work if the selfish and greedy people who try to corrupt it can be curtailed. Billie converts to Paul's philosophy and ultimately the two become a symbol of emancipation from political tyranny and the fight against corruption. Their faith in the ideals of the United States mirrors the philosophy of Cold War Americans and containment culture.

Containment Culture

Alan Nadel describes containment culture in the following way:

Although technical referring to U.S. foreign policy from 1948 until at least the mid 1960's, it also describes American life in numerous venues and under sundry rubrics during that period: to the extent that corporate production and biological reproduction, military deployment and industrial technology, televised hearings, and filmed teleplays, the cult of domesticity and the fetishizing of domestic security, the arms race and atoms for peace all contributed to the containment of communism, the disparate acts performed in the name of these practices joined the legible agenda of American history as aspects of containment culture. (Nadel 2)

In the years following World War II until the early sixties, American men and women were encouraged to fight communism through domesticity, even though many did not realize this is what they were doing. The combination of socioeconomic fears following the Great Depression, World War II, and the “Red Scare” renewed a sense of nationalism and a focus on domestic morality as a means of protecting the American society from communism. Instead of waging a literal war against socialism, America tried to protect itself by stabilizing social roles and encouraging patriotism.

On February 22, 1946, George Kennan sent a “long telegram” to the State Department investigating attributes of the communist ideology, assessing the communist threat, and offering solutions to battle the growing danger communism posed to democracy. In Kennan’s view, the way to battle communism was to emphasize and strengthen American culture in opposition to Soviet ideology. Kennan states:

Much depends on health and vigor of our own society. World communism is like [a] malignant parasite, which feeds only on diseased tissue. This is a point at which domestic and foreign policies meets. Every courageous and incisive measure to solve internal problems of our own society, to improve self-confidence, discipline, morale and community spirit of our own people, is a diplomatic victory over Moscow worth a thousand diplomatic notes and joint communiqués. If we cannot abandon fatalism and indifference in face of deficiencies of our own

society, Moscow will profit—Moscow cannot help profiting by them in its foreign policies. (Kennan)

Kennan's telegram suggests that America was already creating a strict division between what would be "American" and "safe" and what would be labeled "other" and a threat to the United States.

In his book, *American Theatre in the Culture of the Cold War*, Bruce McConachie uses George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theories of cognitive psychology and linguistics to forge connections between "containment" as an "image schema" and the effect of containment on American culture. McConachie focuses on "five entailments," outlined by Johnson in his book, *The Body in the Mind*, as a foundation to discuss how "containment" pertains to American Cold War culture. Johnson's five entailments are,

- (i) The experience of containment typically involves protection from, or resistance to, external forces. When eyeglasses are in a case, they are protected against forceful impacts.
- (ii) Containment also limits and restricts forces within the container. When I am in a room or in a jacket, I am restrained in my forceful movements.
- (iii) Because of this restraint of forces, the contained object gets a relative fixity of location. For example, the fish gets located in the fish bowl. The cup is held in the hand.
- (iv) This relative fixing of location within the container means that the contained object becomes either accessible or inaccessible to the observer. It is either held so that it can be observed or else the container itself blocks or hides the object from view.
- (v) Finally, we experience transitivity in containment. If B is in A, then whatever is in B is also in A. If I am in my bed and my bed is in my room, then I am also in my room. (qtd. in McConachie 10)

McConachie relates Johnson's ideas to performance culture. He uses the five entailments to demonstrate how the "image schema" of containment creates an inside, an outside, and then a barrier between the two (viii). McConachie describes how the first entailment of containment, combined with the National Security Act of 1947, are inscribed into American Cold War culture. In an effort to save America from the threat of communism,

the United States drew a distinction between America and its enemies, protecting what was inside from the outside. Instead of starting another World War in an effort to safeguard the United States, government officials decided to create a new sense of Americanism, the “inside,” that would hopefully battle outside invaders, i.e. communists.

While the first entailment of containment makes clear a distinct boundary between inside, outside, and the boundary between, the fifth entailment indicates the possibility that the threat of the “enemy” could be someone close to you. McConachie employs the fifth entailment to emphasize one of the many problems to arise from this outlook, stating, “Finally, regarding the fifth entailment, the ‘transitivity’ of containment meant that citizens in all private organizations within the United States must be suspect—a parent in a local Parent Teacher Association was also a citizen in the nation-state and might be an innocent participant in a cell of subversives” (14). This possibility made it difficult to merely establish a standard that all Americans were innocent and all Soviets were the enemy. Instead, America created social constructs and roles to emphasize an “American” moral compass that would act as a model for the rest of the world to follow.

This tactic can be seen in a meeting between Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev in 1959. According to a *New York Times* article authored by Harrison E. Salisbury, Nixon stopped Khrushchev while the two were touring a model house to show the conveniences of the modern American kitchen. Nixon explained that what Americans “want is to make life more easy on our housewives” (Salisbury). Nixon continued to parade the conveniences of the home to demonstrate the wealth of Americans and impress the Premier. Numerous scholars—including David Savran and Elaine Tyler May—look to this interaction as an example of America’s

attempt to prove to the world the magnificence of the democratic life. Savran says of the affair, “Despite their preoccupation with the world stage, the most revealing part of their exchange had little to do with affairs of the state”(3).

Nixon may not have changed Khrushchev’s view of American capitalism, but he did demonstrate to America what containment culture entails: the appearance of American society and social roles those citizens must play. If one did not fit comfortably into this new culture—socialists, homosexuals, immoral women, etc—one would be seen as the enemy. To understand the ‘new ideal’ American—specifically the ideal American woman during the Cold War—one must take into account the deprivation of the past. May suggests that the hardships of World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II influenced the perception of the ideal American, stating:

...these women and men were hopeful that family life in the postwar era would be secure and liberated from the hardships of the past. They believed that affluence, consumer goods, satisfying sex, and children would strengthen their families, enabling them to steer clear of potential disruptions. In pursuing their quest for the ‘good life,’ they adhered to traditional gender roles and prized marital stability; few of them divorced. They represent a segment of the predominantly Protestant white population who were relatively well educated and who generally lived comfortable middle-class lives. In other words, they were among those Americans who would be most likely to live out the post-war American dream. (12)

Marital stability was seen as the means toward safe, secure, and happy American lives and the way to obtain marital stability was to adhere to traditional gender roles.

Cold War America’s emphasis on traditional gender roles was not an automatic challenge of women’s educational rights. The cultural implications of women’s education are more complicated, much like containment culture and theory itself. The cultural structure is hidden behind a veil of seemingly progressive movements. Women were encouraged to receive an education but at the same time were told that their main

job was to look after their children and tend to the comfort of their husbands. Douglas T. Millar and Marion Nowak discuss this conflicting view in their book, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were*. Women's education might have been suspect to some in the older generation, they note, "But this was America, the land where equal education was promised (even required) for all" (Miller and Nowak 159).

In fact, early-1950s propaganda films designed to encourage marriage also served to address the topic of higher education for women. One film entitled, "Are You Ready for Marriage?" follows a young couple, Sue and Larry, who wish to get married. Sue laments that her parents would like her to finish school before becoming engaged and married. Sue and Larry hatch a plan to run away together in defiance of their parent's wishes. The plot at this point appears to suggest that marriage without a college education is undesirable. However, the film's message becomes clearer after a scene in which the couple seeks advice from a local pastor. The real problem is that the young couple does not fully understand what marriage entails. Guided by the sympathetic pastor, the lovers re-examine their relationship and their parents decide that they can marry if Sue attends Larry's college for a semester. If they are still compatible at that time, then they are free to marry after Larry graduates (Coronet Instructional Films). This decision exposes the film's true ideology about women's education and marriage. Sue's schooling will not be complete by the time she gets married, but this is a non-issue because the parents are more concerned about the couple's understanding of marriage than Sue's education. This film intimates that while equal educational rights may have been officially championed, the concept was not always respected in the common culture of containment.

While women's higher education was not a top priority in the 1940s, women of the postwar era still needed instruction, if only to entertain and meet domestic expectations. Education was not looked down upon as long as it was the "right" type of schooling. Millar and Nowak explain that, "special education programs for women were encouraged. The process began at secondary level...Sexually segregated elective classes had their effect. Girls took cooking, date appeal, marriage and family, or personal etiquette...Girls also might be counseled to study nurturing things after high school" (159). It is in this vein that Brock wishes to enlighten Billie and to mold her into his own ideal mate.

Cold War America required a husband and wife to work as a team. The wife's job was to support her husband in social situations—an impossible feat if the wife was not intelligent enough to do so. Brock and Billie are not yet married, a problem Devery tries to cover-up, but as Brock's girlfriend, Billie's job is no different than a wife. In order to sway Senator Hedges and his wife into helping Brock with his scheme, Billie must act the part of a domestic and enchanting woman. Brock complains about Billie's actions after their first engagement with the Hedges:

BROCK. ...she just don't fit in. Do you think so?

DEVERY. Fit?

BROCK. Every time she opened her kisser tonight, sump'n wrong come out!

DEVERY. The hell of it is she doesn't realize. ... It's a big job, Harry. It's not easy to make a person over. Maybe impossible. She has to have a great many things explained to her. (Kanin 51)

This conversation identifies Billie's basic misunderstanding of cultural practices. The schooling Brock wishes for Billie to receive does not push any cultural bounds because she needs to learn common practices for supporting her man in social situations.

Brock's primary goal in having Paul tutor Billie is to elevate her social skills to the level of a senator's wife, giving her the qualities necessary to entertain guests and support Brock's business. However, the type of education Billie ultimately receives challenges the boundaries of social expectations. Billie not only gains knowledge pertaining to her domestic responsibilities, but learns about the power of the ethical principles on which the United State was originally founded. Paul Verrall introduces her to the joy of learning, and Billie begins to take ownership of her education. Realizing that Brock has created a monster, Devery declares: "a little learning is a dangerous thing" (114).

As Billie's interest in education grows, her discontentment with Brock also increases. She begins to take notice of his corrupt business practices and confronts Brock: "If a man goes and robs a house—that's work, too" (111). She finds enlightenment through education as she realizes,

I just hate my life. There's a better kind, I know it. If you read some of these books you'd know it, too. Maybe it's right what you say I'm still dumb. But I know one thing I never knew before. There's a better kind of life than the one I got. Or you. (114)

Billie's education mimics Nixon's belief, symbolized by the model home, that the American way of life is more satisfying and desirable than communism. Brock represents the totalitarian enemy while Paul and Billie represent the admirable American ideal as seen in their love for democracy and strong sense of morality. For this reason, Billie's education does not create a break in the hegemonic discourse; she at best bends it slightly.

Billie's free sexuality, a female subversive trait, falls into the same category as her education. Kanin uses Billie's sex appeal to continue his discourse on morality and to

exploit the sensual nature of the ideal 1950s woman. Nadel describes the contradictory sensual roles of containment, requiring women to juggle multiple, sexual images:

As many have noted, moreover, the responsibility for this containment in postwar era fell on women, whose role was to resist and channel the 'natural' sexual energies of men. Female sexuality thus had the burden of supporting the monolithic goals of Cold War America through the practice of duplicity; the woman had to attract and stimulate male sexual drives, but not gratify them. Female sexuality was thus always double—it had to be the thing that would gratify a normal male's sexual desires for the rest of his life while not doing so during courtship; it had to signify abstinence and promise gratification; it had to indicate its presence through absence. (117)

Women in Cold War America had to fulfill various sexual roles. If they were single, they were expected to keep their men interested enough in them sexually so that they would not stray during their courtship. Ironically, sex before marriage was condemned for both genders. May explains that,

Many high-level government officials, along with individuals in positions of power and influence in fields ranging from industry to medicine and from science to psychology, believed wholeheartedly that there was a direct connection between communism and sexual depravity. (94).

Men and women who could not contain themselves sexually were considered weak and unprepared for the communist threat. "It followed that men who were slaves to their passions could easily be duped by seductive women who worked for the communists" (May 94). Not only were sensual women accused of communism, but they were blamed for the 'weakness' of their husbands if they were not sensual enough in their marriage.

Billie's sensual nature and unmarried status mark her as "other" in post-war America. Like her education, Billie's sexuality could push the bounds of hegemonic discourse. She is described as "breathhtakingly beautiful," (Kanin 17) and she walks around in "a resplendent negligee" (56). The playwright does not try to hide her

sensuality; rather, he emphasizes her sexual drive through interactions with both Brock and Paul. Billie's first interaction with Paul indicates not only her interest in sex but also her awareness that she is capable of acquiring whatever she wants through her feminine allures

BILLIE. Lemme ask you—(*Looks at BROCK'S door, then leans toward Paul*). Are you one of these *talkers*, or would you be innarested in a little action?

PAUL. (*amazed*) Huh?

BILLIE. I got a yen for you right off.

PAUL. Do you get many?

BILLIE. Now and then.

PAUL. What do you do about them?

BILLIE. Stick around. You'll find out.

PAUL. All right, I will.

BILLIE. And if you want a tip. I'll tell you. Sweet talk me. I like it. (42)

Kanin sets Billie up as a sexual deviant in post-war culture. Not only is she living with a man who is not her husband, but she is trying to seduce another man as well. Her sexual desires are well exposed. Even Devery responds to Brock's "She coulda gotten raped" with a simple, "Not to Billie. Maybe the other way around, but not to Billie..." (120).

Kanin punctuates Billie's sexual nature by exploiting the popular assumption and stereotype that chorus girls were gold-diggers. Susan A. Glenn discusses this belief in *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism*, stating:

In the popular imagination of the times, no group of young women was more likely to be singled out as sexual suspects than chorus girls. Many people assumed that women whose occupations placed them on the lower rungs of the theatrical wage scale, and whose roles tended toward impersonality, were especially prone to gratify their desires by using their beauty and charm to seduce and exploit men for financial gain. (200)

The chorus girl stereotype is also explored in Tracy Davis's 1991 study, *Actresses as Working Women*. Billie's status as a former chorus girl heightens audience acknowledgement of her sexual practices.

In addition to Billie's lack of an education and her sensual desires, Kanin makes clear that she has been functioning as a sexual play thing. In a tutoring session, Paul implies to Billie that she has been serving Brock as a prostitute:

PAUL. Has he [Brock] ever done anything for anyone, except himself?

BILLIE. Me.

PAUL. What?

BILLIE. Well, I got two mink coats.

PAUL. That was a trade. You gave him something, too. (86)

Billie's deviant behavior is reiterated when she recalls her estranged father's opinion of her, "he didn't want to see me if I was still living the life of a concubine" (78). The education that Paul offers Billie also teaches her about morality through literary influences as well as Paul's own actions. He does not fall prey to Billie's seductive nature; he falls in love with her. But instead of sleeping with Billie, Paul tries to convince her to marry him. The moral superiority of monogamous marriage is glorified when Billie agrees to marry Paul in Act Three.

The play's insistence that Billie ultimately marry demonstrates an overall lingering conservatism regarding women's social roles. *Born Yesterday* would be a progressive play pushing the bounds of hegemonic discourse if Billie were to remain single, move away from Brock, and take control of Brock's business. However, the play ends instead with Paul and Billie's impending marriage. Billie's previously questionable sexuality will be confined to her role of loving wife. The play suggests that Paul and Billie will share an egalitarian relationship based on democratic equality and Paul's wish to further educate Billie about matters of American politics and morality. While *Born Yesterday* does not clearly indicate that Billie will become the ideal domestic housewife, containment culture has been championed.

The audience is left to assume that she and Paul will fall into traditional gender roles as they both strive to become, “the happy peasant” that Paul describes during their studies:

... and I said I would rather have been a French peasant and worn wooden shoes... I would rather have been that poor peasant with my loving wife by my side, knitting as the day died out of the sky—with my children upon my knee and their arms about me—I would rather have been that man and gone down to the tongueless silence of the dreamless dust, than to have been that imperial impersonation of force and murder, known as ‘Napoleon the Great.’ (84)

When Billie exclaims that she wants to be like the “happy peasant,” she is declaring that she wants to live a life free from Brock’s tyranny and her own immorality. The life of the peasant is happy, peaceful, and free of the burdens and hardships associated with Napoleon the Great—Napoleon signifying a totalitarian “other” outside of the American system. The idea of the “happy peasant” seems to contradict The American Dream, which promotes wealth and prosperity; however, Nixon’s explanation to Khrushchev that, “any steel worker could buy this house. They earn \$3 an hour. This house cost about \$100 a month to buy on a contract running about twenty-five thirty years,” suggests that even humble Americans could enjoy a life of ease in a new, modern home (Salisbury). Thus, the American ideal was not only about money, but also—and more importantly about fighting communism through the safety of the family unit. The “happy peasant” both extols those beliefs and alludes to traditional gender roles. Safety from the “outside” is found within the peace and quiet of the domestic family unit. The happy peasant’s wife contributes to the well being of the household as she knits, with her children and husband surrounding her. Even if Billie’s moments of independence opens up a discourse on the dual role of women in containment culture, the overall message

extols Billie as a newly educated, proper woman possessing a sexuality that will be satisfied only within the confines of marriage.

Characters of the Revolution

Billie's transformation from an uneducated, loose woman and threat to the American ideal, to a domesticated patriot and champion of ethics and morality led me to develop a revolutionary concept for Baylor University's production of *Born Yesterday*. The character of Billie Dawn lives under a corrupt form of government, led by Harry Brock, until she is liberated from her former lifestyle through Paul's instruction. Billie's education leads her to reject the corrupt principles Brock upholds and to accept a new government, espoused by Paul, which conforms to America's ideal cultural structure. Therefore, Billie's education is like a revolution, spreading quickly, infecting those around her, and ultimately leading to freedom from tyranny while gaining a sense of self-worth. The following discussion will focus on each character's roles within the concept of a revolution.

Harry Brock

Harry Brock has relocated to Washington, D.C. to create unsavory alliances with government officials to extend his junkyard business overseas. He has taken the most expensive and luxurious suite at the best hotel in Washington, D.C. Room 67 D is extremely expensive at two hundred thirty-five dollars a night, a price only an important and wealthy individual can afford. Kanin describes Brock as a boorish man who "stomps" into the room. He is "a huge man in his early forties. Gross is the word for him" (10). He is loud-mouthed and boisterous, and has "always lived at the top of his

lungs” (64). Brock’s main focus is making money by any means necessary. In an interview with Paul, Brock boasts about his rough reputation and the objectionable measures he took to build his empire. He believes he has a right to own anything he desires, including Billie Dawn. At the end of Act Two, Brock spits at Billie, “I don’t own nothing cheap, except you!” (70). Brock’s belief that he can gain power through buying and controlling people supports Billie’s retort, “Big-Fascist!” (70). This altercation marks Brock as the monarch of *Born Yesterday*, representing the tyrannical rule that must be extinguished. Billie, Devery, Eddie, the Hedges, and all the hotel staff are subjects of Brock’s wealth and power until Paul’s lessons on the American ideals of a democratic system ignite a revolution.

Billie Dawn

Billie is both Brock’s concubine and his downfall. She is his prized possession, something Brock believes he owns. In fact, one might hardly notice at the beginning of the play that Billie is a major character instead of a “prop” in Brock’s world. Her first appearance lasts only a moment when she enters the hotel room. The stage directions state, “Billie is breathtakingly beautiful and breathtakingly simple...Billie wears a mink coat and carries another. Also a large box of candy and an armful of movie magazines” (7). Kanin’s description of Billie illustrates a woman who does not want for anything. She is little more than a concubine, a slave trapped under the guise of beauty and riches. She is nothing more than Brock’s plaything until she learns that she is worthy of being treated as a human being. After Paul nurtures Billie’s curiosity, she becomes a revolutionary and joins him in his fight against government corruption.

Paul Verrall

Paul Verrall is the rebel leader in the revolution. A reporter for the *New Republic*, Paul is full of ideas and energy having just returned to Washington, D.C. after some time in Europe, most likely covering World War II. Paul's mission is "to find out what goes on and get it to the people" (83). He has been trying to root out government corruption for years, but has never collected enough evidence to really make a difference and initially sees Brock as nothing more than an opportunity to uncover the corruption of Washington, D.C.'s inner circles. Like a good revolutionary, Paul converts those under the power of the regime to stand with him against tyranny. In Act One, he is polite, enigmatic, and gains Brock's attention through his intelligence and good humor. In Act Two, he has become friendly with Billie, educating her on his theories of government, literature, and culture. Clearly a well-educated man, he displays restraint and patience with Billie, offering her better treatment than she has received from Brock and introducing her to a new way of life. His growing affection for Billie is shown through respectful gestures that contrast the forceful and coercive behavior Brock exhibits. As the play progresses, Paul becomes more aggressive towards Brock, confronting him with both intellectual prowess and physical stamina. Ultimately Paul, the revolutionary, triumphs over Brock's tyranny and wins the war waged in *Born Yesterday*.

Ed Devery

Ed Devery is an alcoholic lawyer, who acts as the "brains" of Brock's operation. He once served as Assistant Attorney General, but has since given up on himself and the law. Instead, Devery acts as council to Brock, having sold his self-worth for one hundred thousand dollars a year and a lot of alcohol. Devery's alcoholism began long before

working with Brock and arose from his need to hide possible homosexual tendencies from the greater culture of containment. Devery says of the Senator, “I think he’s cute” (74). The line could be interpreted as mere sarcasm or that Devery is finally revealing that he is homosexual, something that would have been considered “other” in Cold War America. However, Devery says this line while he is in a drunken stupor, which suggests he is revealing his sexuality rather merely making a joke. If this is the case, then Devery cannot leave Brock at the end of the play even if he wants to because Brock represents the “other” of containment culture to which Devery would belong as a homosexual. Devery’s drinking may have begun as a means of coping with his inability to talk about his sexuality, but continues as an excuse for the rest of his actions. An astute young audience member stated after seeing the production, “I like that they all drank a lot. I think the drinking was symbolic of their excuses. The lawyer drank so much because he knew that he was losing his morality” (Beard). Devery is more reliant upon his liquor than Brock, who does not make excuses for his lifestyle. Even Billie, who is constantly in search of alcohol during Act One, stops drinking during Act Two when she begins to understand her self-worth. Devery gets progressively more intoxicated through the production as Billie’s education exposes his flaws. Billie describes Devery’s fall from grace saying, “And look at him now. He hangs around and helps you promote, and lets you walk all over him just because you pay ‘im for it” (68). Devery continues to drink to cover his shame, realizing he has sold his allegiance to a corrupt leader for a bottle of alcohol.

With her newfound belief in democratic values, Billie provokes Devery until he outwardly supports her views; “They’re right,” Devery declares of Paul and Billie’s

revolt against Brock. Devery's final lines in the play are a cynical but poignant acknowledgement of what he has learned:

To all the dumb chumps and crazy broads—past, present, and future—
who thirst for knowledge—and search for truth—who fight for justice—
and civilize each other—and make it so tough for sons-of-bitches like
you—and you—and me. (89)

Devery's identification with Brock and Senator Hedges at the end of the play suggests that he regards himself as beyond redemption. He will not leave Brock because he is too reliant on the dirty money and alcohol that covers his shame.

The Hedges

Senator and Mrs. Hedges represent social and political pretense. They are courtiers in Brock's monarchy whose sole desire is to move up in the world. The Hedges marriage and social standing is outwardly acceptable in Washington, D.C., however, they do not fit within the true ideals of a democratic relationship. The couple epitomizes Devery's quip that, "No matter what goes on underneath, these people make sure of their respectable fronts" (36). Senator Hedges engages in corrupt lawmaking and illegal practices and his wife pretends to have a knowledgeable understanding of great works of literature. Billie's discovery, reported to Paul in Act Two, that Mrs. Hedges is only pretending to have read *David Copperfield* foreshadows her later recognition of the corrupt government practices in which Brock and Hedges are engaged. Just like courtiers of restoration England, the Hedges make sure their appearances are flawless, while scandal rages beneath their seemingly illustrious veneer.

Eddie Brock and Helen

Eddie is Harry Brock's cousin, lackey, and right-hand man. "He knows me insides out," Brock brags to Paul (15). Eddie functions as Brock's servant, and even his court jester at times, emulating everything Brock does, including pushing people around when needed. The only problem is that Eddie is not as tough as Brock, nor is he very intimidating. Like Brock, he does not learn anything from Billie that truly changes him. When Billie tries to explain her issues with people who just "take it," Eddie replies, "Listen, don' get me thinkin', I got enough trouble now" (77). Eddie would rather be safe under Brock's protection than make any move towards emancipation through education.

Some of the members of the hotel staff, on the other hand, are influenced by Billie's new education. Helen, the maid, becomes friends with Billie, reading books Billie has loaned her. This is a significant change for Helen and suggests that education spreads to those who are near its influence. However, Helen does not join the revolution; rather, she decides to earn more money in Brock's kingdom. She gives Billie her book back stating, "I don't go for these stories where it shows how miserable it is to be rich" (62). Helen is not interested in the enlightenment Billie has found. This demonstrates that Billie is quite different than those in her same level of society. She has a capacity for learning and revolution that makes her special.

Conclusion

The text of *Born Yesterday* play depicts some characters who are emancipated from tyrannical thought and ignorance and others who fall victim to greed and indulgence. This is in keeping with Garson Kanin thematic interest in idealistic

democracy, the power of education, and the dangers of unchecked ambition. However, as the previous analysis of *Born Yesterday* suggests Billie is never fully emancipated. Instead, she moves from one form of government (Brock) to another (Paul), thus reinforcing post-World War II cultural norms and the distinct, traditional gender roles of American Containment Culture. The design and staging of Baylor University's 2013 production of *Born Yesterday* aimed to emphasize the concept of revolution and to highlight Billie's transformation from dumb blonde to "ideal woman."

CHAPTER THREE

Design

As *Born Yesterday*'s director, I collaborated with faculty and student designers to create the world of the play with specific attention to the directorial concept that Billie's education is like a revolution, spreading quickly and infecting those around her. The concept which was inspired by Paul's line, "Education's pretty hard to control Harry. One thing leads to another. It's a matter of awakening curiosity—imagination—independence" (citation) and supported by the analysis discussed in Chapter Two. The focus of the design would be the creation of Suite 67D. The play dictates that the events unfold in an extravagant hotel room expands across two floors, contains two separate bedrooms, a large window overlooking the Capital Dome, and two upstairs bedrooms. This is Harry Brock's kingdom, "a large part of the best hotel in Washington, D.C....A masterpiece of offensive good taste, colorful and lush and rich" (7), and it is the setting for a revolution by Paul and Billie.

Initial conversations with the designers clarified "revolution" as the over-arching metaphor for this production of *Born Yesterday*. Unfortunately, time constraints would not allow a large, collaborative meeting with the entire design team at once, so we met individually in the earliest phase of production development. The same information was given to each designer. They were shown a digital presentation detailing how "revolution" might be incorporated into the play, specifically emphasizing the setting in Washington, DC and Paul's line about education's connection to independence. The concept of a revolution also leads to the idea of change or progression in the design of

Born Yesterday. My directorial presentation to the designers stated that, “Billie’s revolution leads from tyranny to freedom, gaudy to elegant, excessive to simple, and uneducated to educated.” The designers were asked to take these concepts and the inspiration of various images of the American Revolution to create the world of the play. The following chapters detail how “revolution” as a directorial metaphor was used for inspiration and implemented in each design area.

Scenery

The Mabree theatre at Baylor University is a unique thrust space and a challenge to both directors and designers. Sight lines and staging are often difficult in the oddly shaped thrust space and the issues are exacerbated when the play requires a realistic interior. The very first meeting with the faculty scene designer for *Born Yesterday* was a brief ten-minute encounter as we passed each other in the hallway and quickly discussed our initial ideas about the play. The concept, “Billie’s education was like a revolution,” was given to the scenic designer without any of the extra digital presentation information. It was exciting to discover we shared similar thoughts about the play and both recognized that there were a number of inherent problems that required creative solutions. The three main challenges identified were, 1) the need for the set to reflect the concept of revolution through scenic progression while emphasizing the location of Washington, D.C. and staying historically accurate, 2) a restricted time-frame to build the set and 3) the importance of creating a hotel suite that was sufficiently grand and opulent while constrained by a fixed budget.

Incorporating the concept of revolution into the scenic plan was the least challenging of the three design obstacles. The set designer quickly produced two

different thumbnail sketches for Suite 67D (See Figure 1 and Figure 2). He had latched onto the historical American aspect of the “revolution” concept, and focused on federal architecture to indicate democratic values. Both initial sketches included federal-style architectural details, such as columns, paneled doors, and federal blue drapery, to reflect the lavish and affluent atmosphere of Washington, D.C. and the pervading theme of political decadence. Windows in the sketches offered the opportunity to look out onto the Washington, D.C. skyline, emphasizing the influence of the outside world upon the more private suite. The second sketch featured a larger window and also displayed a rounded veranda that resembled the Oval Office or the rotunda of the Library of Congress. Each sketch presented a pristine and luxurious set, indicative of post-World War II wealth and power. Every entrance and exit, including the two bedrooms, were placed upstage in the initial sketches, essentially forcing the thrust space to function like a proscenium theatre configuration. I brought this problem to the attention of the designer and he suggested moving the bedrooms to the vomitoria, providing a space that was more open and conducive to thrust staging. The scenic designer worried that the change produced architectural irregularities because the bedrooms were now downstairs instead of upstairs, a design that would not have existed in a sophisticated hotel. The actors also had to alter their lines to indicate the bedrooms were no longer “upstairs,” but across the room. I was willing to accept the structural irregularities and line changes if it created playing space for the actors downstage. In the end, we took what we liked about each sketch—such as the main entrance in one and the larger window of the other—and combined them (with the new bedroom placement) to create a preliminary design plan. The amalgamation of the two sketches detailed an elegant front entryway stage right, a

veranda with a large window overlooking Washington, D.C., and a servant's entrance stage left; two sets of stairs were situated in front of each entryway leading into the main living area.

Once the issue of bedroom placement was settled, attention turned to sightline issues. Sightlines always seem to be a problem in the Mabree theatre, often restricting views from the far left and right seats. As director, I was mostly concerned that audiences could see the skyline of Washington, D.C.—discussed below—as well as the playable acting space on the second level. After moving the bedrooms downstage, the set design became more circular and the window overlooking Washington D.C. became prominent. The circular shape was reminiscent of federal architecture such as the Oval Office, but made it difficult to see the window or the veranda from the extreme audience seats.

The stage directions in *Born Yesterday* describe a window view that features a Capital Dome. The backdrop of Washington, D.C. was a combined artistic creation of the scenic and lighting designers. The designer's original backdrop consisted of skyscrapers that do not exist in Washington, D.C. today, much less in 1946. After more thoroughly researching the skyline of Washington, the designer fashioned a new backdrop that featured the Capital Dome and gave a more authentic appearance. The design for the skyline was visually stunning and I wanted to make sure the audience could see it, but the set design made it impossible for audience members in the extreme seats to view the skyline during the production; however, patrons would walk past it to get to their seats and there is enough federalist architecture in the room to give an impression of Washington, D.C. without the skyline's presence.

I was willing accept sight restrictions of the backdrop, but was not willing to agree to any sight obstructions that could be avoided. The longest debate with the scenic designer occurred when we met to look at the finished colored model (See Figure 3). The model showed the main entrance pushed further downstage than the original rendering, creating a recess to the front door that blocked part of the stage right audience's view of the second level. It also featured a small opening of two feet between the entrance and railing of the second level, which crowded the main entrance. After taping down a full-scale ground plan to get a real sense of the space issues, we decided to move the entire main entrance back six inches to improve sight lines and to increase the space between the door and the railing (Figure 4 depicts sightline restrictions). After construction on the set began, we realized the actor playing Brock had a hard time fitting between the servant's entrance up-left and the second floor railing. At my request, the technical director moved that section of the facade upstage as soon as the issue was discovered. Playing space on the second level was still limited, but it was more than would have originally been available.

The next challenge was to ensure that the set reflected the ornate location called for in *Born Yesterday*. My priority was to have a detailed set that appeared extravagant, and yet could be executed within the departmental restrictions of budget, time, and manpower. In the final analysis, the scene designer created a simple and elegant setting with lavish details which the designer and technical director assured me would be polished and completed in a timely fashion. The building process proved slightly more difficult than they had originally thought. Part of the set design, inspired by the concept of revolution, required books, magazines, dictionaries, paintings, and even globes to be

added to the space as the show progressed, symbolizing Billie's emerging revolutionary education (See Figures 5,6, and 7 for the transition). It was important that this element in the design also be executed with attention to detail.

Details of furnishings and properties for Suite 67D were a high priority for the scenic designer. We agreed that the goal was to find furniture and props that looked authentic to the period. The set designer originally wanted to use a white, tufted sofa and expected to buy the antique piece from a local store. He could not find the right type of couch or armchairs but luckily a faculty colleague was able to purchase a sofa and armchair at an auction that worked well for the play. The purchase saved a good deal of money and allowed the technical director to spend more of the budget on building materials, such as real columns, to make the room more elegant. A few properties were difficult to find, such as a phonograph that could play and automatically shift between records. I thought the phonograph needed to play onstage, however, the sound designer wanted to control the sound of changing records from the booth, an act which would have been impossible to perform on the stage. For his part, the set designer thought the look of the phonograph was too modern. Our solution was to place the phonograph inside a suitcase, fashioned to look like a turntable holder, to block the audiences from viewing whether or not the phonograph was playing and to mask its lack of historical accuracy. Ultimately, the set had a few pieces of furniture and properties that looked out of place, but overall the design captured the authenticity and spirit of a 1940s Washington, D.C. hotel room befitting of *Born Yesterday*'s monarch, Harry Brock.

Costumes

The discussions held with the student costume designer were similar to those with the set designer. The first meeting focused on directorial ideas and a suggestion that costumes should depict both the era and suggest Billie's revolutionary progression from under tyrannical rule to emancipation, uneducated girl to educated woman, and excessive wealth to a simplistic lifestyle. Each character is affected by Billie's educational revolution to varying degrees and the costume should reflect those character changes while incorporating the style and silhouette of the fashionable 1940s.

During our early meetings, the costume designer and I focused on Billie's costumes because her clothing is an extension of her character. The costume demonstrates her conversion from a woman concerned with acquiring "two mink coats" to an educated woman yearning for the simplistic lifestyle of the "happy peasant." Billie's costumes in Act One should accentuate the actress's sensuality and beauty and depict extreme wealth. The costume designer originally suggested an evening gown for Billie's entrance, a design that proved to be impractical. While Billie needed to look extravagant, she would not have traveled in an evening gown. After a brief discussion, we decided to put her in a dress with a full skirt reminiscent of silhouettes from the 1950s (See Figures 8 and 9). The dress would denote wealth because of fabric rationing, from the war may still have been in effect creating slimmer silhouettes instead of the full dresses we associate with the 1950s. Billie's dress suggests she had enough money and power to afford expensive fabric. The finished costume fit these priorities and ultimately made Billie look a bit like a child's doll, suggesting she is Brock's personal plaything

Billie has multiple costume changes throughout the show. During Act One she must showcase a lavish wardrobe, except for the scene in which she meets Senator Hedges and his wife. The script calls for her to wear a “dignified” dress, suggesting that Billie wears a dress that she considers dignified but which might not necessarily be appropriate for such a somber and serious occasion. The costume designer and I decided this dress should be over-the-top glamorous, reflecting what a starlet may wear to a red-carpet event, and show off Billie’s figure to its full extent. The final evening gown was green, with only a ring connecting the top and bottom pieces together (see Figures 10 and 11). The dress would not have been appropriate for a woman to meet a senator and consequently helps communicate Billie’s inability to properly entertain and navigate social situations. After the renderings were finished, a question was raised as to why Devery would allow Billie to meet the Senator and Mrs. Hedges in the dress. The decision may have been sophomoric and an “easy out,” but we had been playing with Devery’s feelings for Billie in rehearsal and decided he was stunned by her beauty when he affirms her attire by stating, “perfect” (24).

Billie also wore a negligee at the end of Act Two when she and Paul discuss their new tutor/student arrangement. The costume designer used silhouettes of the time period for inspiration and finally settled on a coral gown with lace overlay (See Figure 12). Time and money restricted the use of lace and the final costume did not fit the actor until final dress (See Figure 13). The costume was not a complete disaster, but was never as sexy and form fitting as it should have been.

Billie’s major costume change occurs during intermission between the first and second acts. Paul has been tutoring Billie for two months and has had time to teach her

philosophy and share his idealist thoughts on American politics. The set is now scattered with books, a globe, and even a print of Picasso's "the Peasants," signifying the shift in Billie's disposition. Her clothing should therefore also reflect this change. The costume designer incorporated the idea of Billie's evolution into her clothing, adhering to *Born Yesterday's* stage directions which suggest Billie should wear a pantsuit (See Figures 14 and 15). Slacks, generally worn by men during this period, suggest that Billie is a progressive character, a "new woman" who is more concerned with comfort than fashion. However, I did not want Billie to seem too masculine or to lose her sexuality in the second and third acts, which would have completely negated her adherence to traditional gender roles. With this in mind, the designer chose a blouse made of light, flowing material that emphasized the actress's feminine silhouette. The costume design did not, however, indicate Billie's acceptance of a domestic lifestyle with Paul. It was difficult to overtly suggest my analytical idea that Billie was a precursor to the "ideal" housewife through costume choices. Therefore, we did not focus on that aspect of Billie's evolution, saving it for staging. As discussed in Chapter Five, this may have been a mistake on my part.

Paul Verrall plays the rebel in *Born Yesterday*, instigating revolution by teaching Billie his ideals about government, politics, and culture. However, at the beginning of the play, Paul's mannerisms, clothing, and eyeglasses suggest he is safe and unassuming. He looks like a stereotypical nerd. Brock does not see him as a threat until Act Two, therefore Paul needs to appear modest and self-effacing until he is forced to stand up for himself and Billie. The actor playing Paul is a very strong, athletic, and even at times, intimidating young man and it was necessary to hide these aspects of his physic early in

the play. With this in mind, the student costume designer covered the actor's rugged build with multiple layers of clothing, including a sweater vest and glasses. The first resulting design looked like a "nerdy" reporter rather than the sexy, dangerous rebel of the third act. The second set of clothing was similar to the first, with the exception of a different jacket which the actor was to don before he entered in the third act. The designer had hoped that throughout the performance the actor portraying Paul would remove specific articles of clothing in order to make him look overtly masculine at the proper time. Unfortunately, the actor never took off his coat. Because of this, we missed the opportunity to see Paul as an increasingly powerful and rebellious character in the world of the play.

Both Billie and Paul's costumes were designed to evolve through the production to clarify their changes in character. Brock's costumes, however, never changed because he never alters his outlook. Harry Brock begins and ends the play power hungry. The costume designer's initial sketches displayed a large plaid pattern for his pants in order to emphasize his exaggerated qualities, however this choice would have made it difficult to take Brock seriously. While *Born Yesterday* is a comedy, the audience has to believe Brock is dangerous and capable of destruction. I reiterated this fact to the costume designer and she decided to put Brock in a smaller plaid that would indicate wealth and status. She also selected a broad shouldered suit with large lapels to further emphasize his high status. The more comedic costumes were saved for Brock's henchman and cousin, Eddie.

Eddie Brock is Harry's right hand man and tends to Brock's every need. If Brock wants something to drink, Eddie not only gets it for him but knows exactly what he wants

before he asks. Eddie's desire to be just like Brock greatly influenced the costume design choices. Like Brock, Eddie's costume does not change during the production and featured wide shoulders and a wide lapel, with the only difference being in pattern and texture. The choice emphasized our take on Eddie as imitative and comic rather than a truly violent figure.

The cynical but loveable Ed Devery transforms, like Billie and Paul, through the performance. While Devery is a talented lawyer, he is also a drunkard and appears intoxicated during most of the play. Devery is able to conceal his drunkenness in most of the first act, but becomes progressively more intoxicated moving in the second act. Devery's drinking culminates in Act Three, when he appears totally inebriated. Devery's exponential drunkenness reflects his lack of self-worth. The worse he feels about himself and his circumstances, the more he drinks himself into oblivion. The design for Devery's clothing also follows a similar logic. His costume in Act One is appropriate for a lawyer who would spend more money on liquor than clothes. The designer originally sketched garments that were shabby and too big for the actor, but after discussion she redesigned Devery's suit to more accurately reflect a character who is a functioning alcoholic with connections in the Senate. Devery's final costume consisted of a simple suit that is classically cut, albeit disheveled, and which is indicative of his station as a lawyer. During the course of Act Three, Devery shed his jacket, un-tucked his shirt, and loosened his tie as his self-loathing and drinking increased.

The costumes of Senator Hedges and Mrs. Hedges are both modest and tasteful. The costume designer and I noted that Senator Hedges tries to keep his business agreements with Harry inconspicuous. He wears a plain suit made of material much less

expensive than Brock, Devery or even Paul. His first garment is a dark blue suit appropriate for his initial meeting with Brock. His second costume is very similar to the first, but colored a dull grey. Mrs. Hedges costume is slightly more interesting than her husband's. She has lived in Washington D.C. long enough to understand how the city runs, what to wear, and what to say. The discrepancy between her dignified dress and Billie's "red carpet" clothing makes Billie's fashion mishap stand out even more.

Born Yesterday calls for an assortment of bellhops, manicurists, and other "minions" to cater to Brock's every whim. The most important of these characters is Helen, the maid, who is brassy and outspoken when talking to Paul or Billie, but keeps her mouth shut around Brock. The costume designer created a look for Helen which was in keeping with her job at an upscale hotel but which allowed her flirty nature to show. She wore a black, knee length dress that flounced girlishly and a white apron. The rest of the minions consisted of two separate character types; hotel staff such as the assistant manager and the bellhops, and cosmetic workers such as the manicurist, bootblack, and barber. Some of these costumes were assigned to another student designer who functioned as an assistant designer for the production. Once the designers and I had decided whether or not the cosmetic team was part of the hotel staff, we gave everyone similar black and white costumes to enforce uniformity and prestige.

Hair and Make-up

The hair and make-up design in *Born Yesterday* adhered to fashionable styles of the time. However, like the costumes, the hairstyles changed through the production to signify the characters' emotional development. Billie begins the play with a front wave and curls. The hair and make-up designer wanted her hair kept down to accentuate

Billie's sensuality. In Act Two, Billie's hair is worn in a low bun that is still fashionable, but more practical.

Two hairstyles were chosen for the men. Those characters associated with Brock and his monarchy wore slicked back hair. Brock, Eddie, and Devery, all wore their hair slicked back in this style. The hotel staff and Paul, on the other hand, parted their hair on the side. In keeping with the action of the play, Brock, Devery, and Paul's hair became disheveled as the play progressed and their characters developed.

Lighting

The lighting designer for this production was a senior-level Baylor University student. As with the scenery and costumes, the lighting design was informed by the director's concept that Billie's education is like a revolution. From the beginning, the lighting designer acknowledged that her main goal was to light the actors' faces and to illuminate the setting. *Born Yesterday* is realistic in style and would not benefit from an exaggerated approach to lighting. However, as an element of her design she wanted to create moods based on color choices that would mimic Billie's transformation much as the scenic and costume designs were supporting the sense of her revolution against Brock through education from Paul. The lighting designer chose to give the first act a stark white light which emphasized Harry Brock's sleek, expensive world. The second act had warmer colors to show the transformation of Billie and the world she inhabits. We discussed using lamps on the end tables and on the desk to show how Billie's education illuminated everything around her. Fortunately, we both realized early on that the idea was too overt and did not make sense within the logic of the world of the play. But even though we decided against using the lamps in this manner, the final design did take

advantage of practical lamp fixtures in the set to enhance the moods the designer was sculpting.

Unfortunately, the lamps and a large chandelier hanging over center stage proved difficult to manipulate. Because the scenic designer had difficulty finding the right style of lamp for the end tables, the lighting designer and electricians did not know whether or not they would have them until approximately two weeks before opening night. Once we located appropriate lamps and agreed on their correct placement, the electricians had to install wireless dimmer packs. This proved to be a problem as well. During technical rehearsals it was discovered that the dimmer batteries only lasted two hours. Consequently, the designer exchanged the bulbs to a lower wattage and the lamps worked beautifully through the run of the show.

From the beginning of the design process, the scenic designer and I knew that the chandelier was going to be a major element in the set. However, it was also a piece that became increasingly difficult to find and install. The scenic designer and I went to Baylor University's lighting storage and found numerous chandeliers. Some were the right color, others were the right size, but nothing seemed to suit the designer's vision for the set. Finally, we found a rather shabby chandelier that was the right size but not the proper color of polished gold. In addition to its dilapidated state, the chandelier did not have the right glass fixtures, so the set designer decided to fashion his own using plastic crystal bowls, two of which did not come in on time. Baylor's master electrician used smaller bowls on the top lighting fixtures and larger bowls on the bottom. Two of the smaller bowls were missing until opening night when the electrician had to cut a larger bowl into pieces to mimic the smaller ones. While installing the chandelier was

frustrating to many of us on the production team, it finished off the space nicely. The scenic designer's insistence on the details helped to make the room feel more elegant and intimate. The lighting designer's incorporation of the light source also served to complete the look of Suite 67D.

Lighting the backdrop of the Washington D.C. skyline and Capital Dome may have been the most challenging aspect of the designer's job. The play moves from early evening to late evening in Act One and from early afternoon to 1:00 a.m. between Act Two and Act Three. The designer decided to showcase the skyline while indicating the time of day, a decision that proved to be demanding. Both the lighting and scenic designers worked together to solve the backdrop problem. First, they added curtain sheers to the large window in an effort to make the skyline look more realistic. Then, they painted the backdrop, created cutout buildings and lit them from behind; giving the impression the city lights were shining. The afternoon featured bright windows and a covered view of the skyline, but as the night progressed, the lights behind the drop shone brighter emphasizing the skyline. The designer also added purple down-light between the sheers and backdrop for late evening and early morning scenes.

The lighting designer originally suggested using a purple backlight to create the ambience of an old movie. I did not want to create a larger gap between audiences the play, as it has been criticized and accused of not being relevant to a modern audience. I wanted the audience to realize the themes of *Born Yesterday* are still applicable to our own society and thought a distinct "old movie feel" might hinder the connection. The designer assured me the light would be imperceptible, but only suggest a memory or the

past. I believe this idea was eliminated because the only purple light I ever saw was used for the Washington, D.C. skyline.

Sound

The sound designer focused on the music found in *Born Yesterday* to emphasize the concept of a revolution. The script does not ask for many sound cues beyond door buzzers and incidental music, but Kanin is specific about what music is played. For example, Act Two opens with Billie listening to music on her record player. Paul walks in to hear “Sibelius, *opp* Forty-Seven” playing through the apartment. Later, the record changes to something she had enjoyed before they began their tutoring sessions. Based on the necessary musical choices indicated in the text and the concept of a revolution, the sound designer and I decided to show Billie’s journey in education through music. At the beginning of the play, popular music of the 1940s was played to suggest Billie’s reliance on cultural standards. The initial songs, such as “Anything Goes” are popular and would not have been considered sophisticated, but as time progresses the music is changed to classical music that indicates Billie’s new cultured and respectable ideas.

Conclusion

Before directing *Born Yesterday*, I was concerned about collaborating with so many different designers. I was very aware of the need for a director and designer to work together with equal artistic input. The set designer and I established a great rapport; we listened to each other and worked together well to find solutions for problems. My communication with the other designers was also strong, though I believe the best collaboration was in the area of scenery. There were a few points in my discussions with

the various designers when I had to be specific and determined about my preferences, such as the choice to move the façade back six inches or the use of different material for costumes, but the designers seemed to appreciate the decisions I made. If any changes, like moving set pieces to fix sightlines, had to happen, I tried to make note of them in a timely manner to not delay the building process and create stressful delays. I believe the designers and I had mutual respect for each other and developed a collaborative team that successfully created a unified production of *Born Yesterday*.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Rehearsal Process

The rehearsal process is the heart of directing where striking pictures are staged and characters are developed. Prior directorial experience has revealed my strength lies with the former and that I possess a weakness in character development. A thesis show that provided exploration of working with actors in rehearsals was a welcome challenge that incorporated struggles with realistic acting styles and blocking on a thrust stage. In particular, the rehearsal process of *Born Yesterday* provided an opportunity for me to investigate how movement theories such as Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's Viewpoints can be incorporated into a twentieth-century realistic play. The following chapter will describe the problems I encountered in collaborating with actors and with staging *Born Yesterday*, from the casting to opening night

Casting

As the theatre cliché goes, "Casting is eighty percent of the process." Choosing the correct actor for a role can be tedious and frustrating, but it can also negate many challenges in rehearsals. *Born Yesterday* is extremely character driven and dependant upon actors to tell the story. The actress playing Billie needed just the right mixture of sassy, sexy, and dumb. As discussed earlier in this thesis, she must also contend with comparisons to Judy Holliday, who many of Baylor Theatre patrons would remember from the 1950 film. The actor portraying Brock needed to be able to play the comedy, exude a sense of danger, and maintain a large stage presence. Meanwhile the actor

playing Paul should be intelligent, serious, and sexy. Finding just the right actors to play these complex characters made casting *Born Yesterday* a unique challenge.

Exploring the critical assessment and production history of *Born Yesterday* reminds the director to cast Billie carefully. The chosen actress must be able to portray ignorance without neglecting Billie's sensuality and sensitivity. The actress must also possess a sense of comedic timing because much of Billie's humor lies in quick line delivery and moments of comic business.

A difficult issue of expectations and assumptions can arise in some casting processes. As auditions neared, a rumor started among students that brunette actresses would not be considered for the role of Billie. Billie is described in the play as a "dumb blonde" and typically the role is cast with a blonde actress. After re-reading the play, however, I discovered that while the stage directions call for Billie to be blonde, there is nothing else in the script that specifically denotes Billie's hair color. The play only demands that Billie be sexy, sassy, and ignorant. If only female students with blonde hair had been considered, I would have had to reject most of the actresses in the Baylor Theatre Department. So in casting the show, I had already decided to consider all available actresses and to focus on the personality traits necessary for Billie, rather than the physical attributes.

For the auditions, actors were asked to prepare a one-minute comedic monologue to showcase their individuality and unique strength as actors. The performers who also incorporated essential qualities that I wanted to see in the characters, for example Billie's boldness, were called back. The second round of auditions exposed two main contenders for the role of Billie, a Hispanic actress and a Caucasian performer. Both women gave

tremendous auditions, making the decision exceptionally hard. Actress one was dark haired, beautiful, and sassy, and she performed Billie with a unique and comical “Bronx” type persona in the callbacks. However she gave the impression of Billie being too intelligent and I was afraid her dark hair would read as sinister or manipulative. The second actress I was seriously considering in the callbacks looked like the stereotypical blonde bombshell, reminiscent of Judy Holliday, and more importantly she captured Billie’s stupidity in a charming manner. This actress’s ability to display Billie’s ignorance while being sexy earned her the role. The first actress was cast as Helen, the maid, who has the first line and is responsible for establishing the pace of the entire play.

The two principal male characters presented their own challenges in casting. Brock is a difficult character to cast from inexperienced actors in a university setting. Brock represents monarchy in the concept of the production, and is the embodiment of the corrupt government from which Billie needs to be saved. The audience must believe that Brock is powerful and corrupt. Early on in the audition process, one student stood out as a major contender for the role. The combination of the actor’s commanding stage presence, humor, and strong, slightly irritating, voice secured the role for the actor.

Casting Paul required some imagination and an open mind. The character is an interesting combination of wit, charm, and intellectual seriousness. He is rebellious and subversive because his lessons instigate Billie’s revolt against Brock’s tyranny. Most of the actors who read for Paul in the callbacks were vocally weak and failed to make the character interesting. They also did not show a strong sense of chemistry with the actresses reading for Billie. The actor who was finally selected for Paul did not possess

the characteristics I had initially imagined for Paul. Instead, he exhibited a sense of masculine ruggedness as well as a nervousness that was quite unique.

Of all the other roles to be cast, the character of Devery was most important. Many of Devery's lines, especially his last toast, are central to the themes in *Born Yesterday*. He is a mediator between the patriotic Paul (and eventually Billie) and the corrupt Brock. Devery grounds the play when action and dialogue become overly idealistic in the third act. The audience should become attached to him and listen to his veiled wisdom because they can identify with his imperfections. The play requires a witty actor who can present profound knowledge and express cynicism, all under the guise of an intoxicated man. One of the faculty directors in the audition room suggested casting an experienced senior-level acting student with whom I had not worked. I feared he would not appreciate a supporting role because of his previous lead acting roles on the Baylor mainstage. He had an outstanding audition, however, and was cast as Devery. With a full cast of actors, a blend of experienced and inexperienced Baylor theatre students, *Born Yesterday* was ready to begin rehearsals.

The Rehearsal Process

Born Yesterday, which went into rehearsals on November 26, 2013, did not open until February 12, 2013. Although rehearsals began early, the project still adhered to the five-week rehearsal schedule typical of Baylor theatre productions. Beginning rehearsals on such an early date was necessary because *Born Yesterday* was scheduled to open only four weeks after winter break. Waiting to begin rehearsals until students returned from Christmas break would have left very little time to mount the production. Therefore, we scheduled one week of rehearsals during the last week of fall classes, with two additional

rehearsals held during the ‘dead days’ before final exams. The plan was to quickly block the entire play before actors left for winter break. This would allow us to jump into experimentation and character work when rehearsals resumed in the spring semester.

The first week of rehearsal felt incredibly rushed. *Born Yesterday*’s initial rehearsal consisted of a read-through and discussion of the play. As a director, I generally prefer to experiment and explore more while blocking; however, the lack of time made it necessary to move quickly through the blocking process, leaving me feeling more like a traffic controller than a director. The entire play was blocked over the next four days and the first run-through was scheduled on the fifth day. As can be expected, the basic staging created during this first week was incomplete and lacked imagination.

One special project the cast undertook during the first week of rehearsal was learning to play the card game, gin rummy. *Born Yesterday* requires Brock and Billie to play gin rummy at the end of Act One. The Mabee theatre is an intimate performance space where audience members can easily see the stage. Therefore, it was necessary that the actors appeared to be actually playing a real game. Since the actors did not already know how to play, a faculty mentor was invited to teach the game at a “Gin Rummy Party” themed rehearsal. The actors playing Brock and Billie could have been asked to learn how to play the game on their own, but the rest of the cast was taught as well. The time spent learning gin helped build a sense of camaraderie among actors while teaching the cast an activity that would be employed in the production later on.

My main concerns about the long break in the rehearsal period centered on blocking and line memorization. We videotaped the final run-through of the last rehearsal before winter break in an effort to remind actors of their blocking when they

returned. They did not take the video copies home, but they were made available after the break. There was not much the director or stage manager could do about line memorization over the break except to send the occasional email reminding actors of the off-book date. Previous experience with one actor in the cast had revealed that he had great difficulty with memorization. This had been a concern even before casting, but the issue was discussed frankly with the actor before the break and he expressed his intention to work hard to memorize his lines. In fact, when rehearsals resumed he knew his part better than most actors with fewer lines. The first run through after the break proved that the actors remembered both their blocking and their lines, without the help of the video, but the blocking was still uninspiring. At this phase in development, *Born Yesterday* showed very little characterization or energy.

The second phase of rehearsals began with a movement workshop to rectify the weak characterization and paltry energy. Working with undergraduate actors at Baylor has exposed a few issues with their attachment to psychological realism as they understand it. Many of the young performers have difficulty incorporating physical mannerisms into their internal character choices because they fear that it will result in an unrealistic performance. However, audiences are not aware of a character's internal desires unless the actor externalizes those needs. Starting with the creation of a character's physicality can help build a basic foundation for the psychological actions of the play. This physical work can also help make the production visually more interesting and engaging. The movement workshop for *Born Yesterday* was an effort to infuse the characters with energy and physical specificity, making the play more comedic and enjoyable.

The workshop utilized Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's "Viewpoints" to create a common, somatic language between the actors and director while encouraging exploration of character physicality. Bogart and Landau's *The Viewpoints Book* (2005), explains that "Viewpoints is a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage" (7). Viewpoints are also, "a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens onstage" (Bogart and Landau 8). Of the nine Physical Viewpoints the authors identifies (Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, Repetition, Shape, Gesture, Architecture, Spatial Relationship, and Topography), the *Born Yesterday* movement workshop focused on Shape, Gesture, and Topography. Shape focuses on the outline of bodies in space, and so during the workshop actors were asked to move around the space focusing on their own body and its silhouette. (It is difficult to manipulate character physicality if one does not understand their own body's movement.) After the actors identified their own physical limitations, they explored how they could make their bodies into different shapes with rounded edges, hard edges, and a mixture of both. Next, the actors explored shapes based on an object of image they had previously chosen to represent their characters. For example, Brock chose a gorilla, Billie a bird, and Paul a book. The actors created static shapes with their bodies inspired by these objects before identifying how they moved across the stage (Topography). Some actors had more trouble with carrying through with the concepts than others. Paul and Brock both struggled to disengage their minds and focus on their bodies.

Incorporating physical characteristics was important for the actor playing Brock because despite his good physical size he often looks to shrink onstage. The apelike movements the actor developed enlarged his stage presence, helping to create a Brock who moved like the ruler of his world. The actor understood the concepts and could get his body to move like an ape, but he did not seem to agree with the exercises and the physical demands tired him. He grew lazy after the first hour and a half of work. Paul, on the other hand, tried to participate, but fixated on getting it “right” instead of allowing himself to explore the object’s shape organically. As he worked to engage more with the exercises we all discovered that his stiff, awkward movements fit Paul’s character beautifully. He stood very still like a book, bowed like one opening and closing, and pivoted on his heels when he needed to turn around. The physical characteristics helped depict Paul as an intellectual man.

After the movement workshop, the actors, as well as the director, struggled to meld their discovered physicality with the psychological aspects of character in the next phase of rehearsals. Much of the rehearsal process was spent trying to find the fine line between too much attention to physicality and not enough. My greatest challenges in rehearsal was knowing when to function as an acting coach, helping actors explore character choices, and when to operate as director, building images, troubleshooting scenes, and solving staging problems. The following sections discuss some key aspects of character development in rehearsal and accompanying staging difficulties.

Billie

The actress playing Billie was creative and hardworking. She found inventive solutions to the difficulty of creating the protagonist’s dramatic arch. Her main challenge

was to amalgamate Billie's ignorance and sass without making her seem too stupid. The actress's audition suggested she might err towards making Billie too dumb and thereby downplay her brazenness, which has a quality of calculation at times. In fact, rehearsals proved that she had the opposite tendency with the character. The actress made Billie too self-aware which tended to deflate the humor of Billie's lines. After conversations in rehearsal, we decided that she should magnify the "dumb blonde" convention in order to add comedy; we trusted that Billie's boldness would still shine through within that stereotype. Interestingly, we also discovered Billie's intelligence was directly proportionate to her accent. The more the actress played dumb, the higher and more exaggerated the vocal choices became. If Billie was lacking energy or humor, I only had to ask the actress to remember the voice, and suddenly Billie's entire demeanor changed.

The scene when Billie meets Senator Hedges and his wife is instrumental to showing Billie's inability to function in social situations (See Figure 16). Staging the scene proved difficult because Billie's social blunders must be made clear even though she says very little and cannot distract from Brock's dialogue. At first, the actress playing Billie used awkward pauses to her advantage in order to clarify when the character had done something wrong. However this encouraged the problem of Billie appearing too self-aware, negating the humor of Billie's ignorant innocence in the situation. Instead of relying on the actress's reactions to the situation, Billie was given inappropriate things to do as stage business. Like the 1950 film version of *Born Yesterday*, Billie turned on music while everyone is trying to have a conversation. She then filed her nails and left the room to get a tin of chocolates, which she ate in front of

everyone without offering them any (See Figure 17). The actions demonstrated Billie's social inadequacy and helped to establish the need for Paul's tutoring.

Paul

The physical appearance of the actor playing Paul was a major concern prior to rehearsals. The actor is tall and muscular with a well-defined jaw line, making him potentially more intimidating than the actor cast as Brock. The character of Paul needed to be smaller and less threatening on stage. The actor found tight, gentlemanly mannerisms in the movement workshop, using a book as his object of inspiration, which led to very precise motions. This physicality helped to subdue his imposing stature.

There were also concerns about the actor's work ethic in the rehearsal process, specifically his inability to memorize lines and his difficulty in taking direction. However, very few issues arose from the actor's inability to memorize lines, perhaps because the unusual rehearsal calendar provided extra time to do so. This actor and the actor playing Brock struggled with an insecurity that is typical of many young performers: when they feel comfortable in rehearsal they become frustrated and have difficulty making new character choices. They both had to be reminded often that the rehearsal process was a time of experimentation and problem solving. I made a point of praising the actress who played Billie for her bold, and often risky, character choices, in the hopes of inviting her fellow actors to try new things in rehearsal. In the case of the actor playing Paul, bold choices could not be made until he was extremely comfortable with his lines. Unfortunately, this was fairly late in the process.

Two more challenges emerged with the actor after his lines were memorized: (1) problems in developing character physicality and (2) an abundance of actor notes from

both the director and observing faculty directors that stifled the actor's creativity. Paul's physicality, found during the movement workshop, was very rigid and straight. The mannerisms alluded to a gentleman and scholar, but it caused the actor to become extremely stiff and to read too serious on stage. Paul's quick wit and sex appeal was lost beneath his solemn exterior. One very small adjustment, the addition of an easy smile, made Paul seem likeable and appear more approachable on stage. The actor found a picture of a chimpanzee smiling in a magazine, and this became Paul's signature smirk. This simple change to the character's physicality exposed Paul's charm. In addition to Paul's smile, he needed to relax his stance in the second act. His rigid posture restricted his movement and restrained his passion when he was instructing Billie. The relaxed stance and the original physicality combined to depict a gentleman whose movements were natural rather than forced.

One evening a faculty mentor joined the cast for a *Born Yesterday* rehearsal. I look at this rehearsal as a turning point in the production for two different reasons. It was helpful because the rehearsal encouraged me to re-visit each scene's structure and identify the major themes. The rehearsal was detrimental because it generated skepticism on the part of the actors concerning my directorial process. I welcomed this faculty member's presence because I was having difficulties with some staging moments in the play and felt that the actors could benefit from a second perspective. I allowed the faculty director to help shape some of the scenes, particularly the end of Act One and the beginning of Act Two. The professor worked hands-on with Brock and Devery on a short scene, then with the actors playing Paul and Billie during the scene when Paul instructs Billie on democratic values. The moment has the danger of becoming merely a

soapbox for philosophical and political ideas. The professor helped give a stronger focus to the scene by pointing out subtext between the two characters that I had not seen.

During the analysis process, I had divided *Born Yesterday* into units and given each a heading based on the action of the scene and the concept of revolution. However, the headings were focused more on the idea of revolution than the action of the scenes, and I struggled to use them as a guide when working with actors. After feedback from the faculty mentor, new titles identifying the main objective of each unit were created. The new headings did not neglect the concept of revolution, but they focused mainly on a line in the play that described the scene's primary objective. For instance, the first scene in Act Two was then entitled "The Happy Peasant" and Paul's main action became fighting for Billie to choose the way of life of "The Happy Peasant." According to the subtext, Paul asks her to choose between him, "The Happy Peasant," and Brock, a man with a "brain of gold." The conflict between the two made the scene much more interesting and set a foundation for their relationship at the end of the play. The new sense of direction was fantastic, but it came at a price.

The active participation of the faculty director in a rehearsal had the unintended consequence of encouraging doubt among two of the principal actors in my leadership. The actor playing Brock had second-guessed my choices and notes earlier, but it became much more prevalent after this rehearsal. The actor also seemed to be made anxious by the visits of any other faculty mentor even if all he or she did was sit and take notes or speak with me privately. Paul's skepticism did not manifest itself until just prior to dress rehearsal, in which the same faculty mentor who had helped work Act Two viewed a run-through. After rehearsal, the director commented to Paul that his main objective was to

get the girl, which was a substantial and valid observation. However, the next night, after I gave the actor a separate note, Paul expressed frustration about how to incorporate my note with the note from the faculty member. After explaining that any faculty mentor's comments were subject to censorship based on the needs of the play, the actors continued to ask if any other faculty observers had acting suggestions for them. Eventually, they began to seek private consultation with the faculty. It is possible that allowing another director to take over a rehearsal may have not been the best choice. Perhaps I should have asked outside mentors to filter their information through me so that actors could receive notes from a single source.

Brock

Directorial challenges and communication breakdown with the actor playing Brock began during the movement workshop. Brock's character demands a large, boisterous presence. The actor portraying Brock has these qualities offstage but he often reads as weak or ineffectual onstage because of his lack of physical awareness. This issue was identified before casting, but I did not realize how big a problem it would actually become. The actor playing Brock is an intelligent actor which means that his character analysis is strong and his actor choices are engaging; however, they do not always read clearly to an audience. The movement workshop was designed to encourage all actors, but mainly Brock, to enlarge their physical characteristics and readability onstage. The movement work did not seem to excite or engage the actor and the next week of rehearsal was spent reminding Brock to incorporate what he had discovered in the movement exercises. It is possible Brock had too much to think about while acting; on top of his physicality, I asked him to portray three sides of Brock's character: 1) a

friendly, obnoxious personality 2) the whiny monarch and 3) the raging brute. My belief that strong physical choices would enhance his creation of the three sides of the character may not have taken into account his personal stage of development as an actor.

Brock's character benefited greatly from the work he did with the faculty mentor who did hands-on work in the pivotal rehearsal discussed above. He had worked with Brock in a previous production and had experience helping Brock to enlarge his stage presence. We discovered Brock needed less to think about on stage so that he might focus more on specific actions and business. The actor extended his arm gestures in large movements to retain some of the apelike qualities discovered in the movement workshop, but the "winey monarch" side of Brock was eliminated and the rest of his apelike structure relaxed. This allowed the actor to command the stage and take ownership of his hotel room. The actor began to enjoy his work on stage, which made his performance more interesting to watch.

Besides physicality, there were two additional problems that emerged while working with the actor playing Brock: 1.) his growing doubt in my directorial abilities and 2.) his dependence on psychological realism. Brock's training in realism sometimes manifested itself in small character choices as if he were acting for film rather than the stage. As an actor in Baylor University's improvisational comedy group, The Guerilla Troupe, the actor was accustomed to making uninhibited acting choices, but when he played Brock, he wanted to approach the role realistically. The result was uninteresting and did not allow for comic exaggeration that the play's style requires. Furthermore, the actor was not used to working on a thrust stage and was often unaware of the audience in relation to his own position. He could not seem to fill the space. When he was asked to

compensate for the distance between actor and audience through vocal and physical projection, the actor stated, “It doesn’t make sense to me to be so far away from people if I am trying to sell them something.” The phrase, “it doesn’t make sense,” became his way of expressing disagreement with direction for the remainder of the rehearsal process.

The actor playing Brock often expressed misgivings on staging and character choices. For example, when Brock first requests that Paul tutor Billie, the actor playing Paul questioned blocking that required him to leave abruptly. He did not understand why his otherwise polite character would suddenly stand and leave. It was decided that Paul’s motivation was his need to get back to work and consequently we emphasized his line, “No, I’m sorry, I don’t think I could do that,” to pardon the character from the conversation. The actor playing Paul was then asked to begin to exit and turn around only after Brock says, “I’ll pay ya \$200 dollars a week.” The actor playing Brock suggested that the staging made Paul look overly greedy, which is a valid point. However, the script dictates Paul changes his mind because of money; I used this evidence to explain why the staging was appropriate but he did not seem to accept the choice. Although we had some differences of opinion about staging and physicality, the actor worked very hard and created a memorable performance. It is regrettable that we did not find better ways to communicate collaboratively and thereby avoid moments of mistrust and scrutiny.

Devery

An early conversation with the actor revealed he was unaware of Devery’s emotional depth and complexity and how difficult the role would be to develop. The actor was given different characteristics—self-loathing, dry wit, romantic feelings for

Billie, and alcoholism to explore during rehearsals. I suggested he begin with exploring Devery's alcoholism, but he wanted to start with the other qualities. The actor mentioned he thought it was easier to understand a role after he found the character's physicality and fortunately we had already planned the movement workshop. Devery chose the image of the scale to symbolize his connection to the law and corruption of that law. The actor used the image to generate movements that were wobbly and unsteady, which complimented Devery's drunkenness. Once he had established his physical characterization, the actor began to explore personal aspects of the character, most specifically his relationship with Brock. The actor spent some rehearsals highlighting Devery's disdain for Brock, but this led to a performance that lacked humor as it overemphasized the character's bitterness. He then experimented with Devery's drunkenness as a means of covering his self-loathing, resulting in a man who was overly friendly and boisterous. In the end, all of these discoveries converged and Devery had his cynical moments, his scolding moments, and even his light-hearted drunken moments. His character holds Act Three together, grounding the play when needed and adding comedic relief during a barrage of moral speeches. The actor playing Devery set personal goals for himself in rehearsal, experimented, made bold choices, and listened to director feedback. He, like the actress playing Billie, provided an excellent model of the actor's work in the rehearsal process.

Senator and Mrs. Hedges

I originally envisioned Senator Hedges as a weak man, incapable of standing up to anybody, including his wife. However, as rehearsals progressed, we noticed that this made the character one dimensional and uninteresting. The actor was using physical

characteristics based on his object (a chameleon) from the movement workshop; however he did not portray a clear sense of action. Then one night, while rehearsing the scene in Act Two, in which Brock berates the Senator for his inability to influence laws, the actor was asked to physically stand up to Brock before bending to his will. This action emphasized Senator Hedge's political ambition, but just how powerful Brock's influence was over the Senator. In the scene, Brock overpowers Hedges and then Billie questions his integrity in the next scene, prompting Hedges to make a swift exit when he cannot deflect Billie's interrogation. Working closely on the action of this scene helped the actor to clarify the motivations of the Senator and to develop an authentic character.

We decided early on that Mrs. Hedges is clearly the head of the Hedges household. She is supportive of her husband in the play, but would probably be the Senator herself if she lived in today's society. The actress playing Mrs. Hedges had originally envisioned her role as a sweet Senator's wife who encourages and even idolizes her husband and wants to entertain Billie. However, the character needed to encompass more than a cheery disposition, so we experimented with the action of her judging everyone. The actress was afraid that this shift would make Mrs. Hedges too hostile. However, after the actress explored ways to modify her idea of Mrs. Hedges, she found a very believable though comic and interesting characterization.

Eddie

Eddie Brock's main goal is to imitate Harry Brock, so for the movement workshop the actor playing Eddie brought in a picture of the actor playing Brock as his inspiration. The actor had a good understanding that Eddie is comical, always striving to be intimidating but never quite achieving the result, so he also took inspiration from an

image of Elmer Fudd. The actor tried to combine Brock's characteristics with the movements of a cartoon. Eddie has very few lines but is onstage often, so it was important that he be interesting while on stage without drawing focus from the main action of the play. Most of the time the character is ordered around, asked to get drinks for people, and forced to serve Brock. The actor's main challenge was exploring whether Eddie was truly intimidating or just imitating Brock. Billie tells Paul in Act Three that Brock has had people killed before. Did Eddie actually commit murder or was it another one of Brock's lackeys? In conversation, we decided that Eddie may have to do Brock's dirty work at times, but he does not always approve of the act. This choice led the actor to portray Eddie as a man feigning violence, rather than engaging in it.

The Minions

The group of characters who represent hotel staff was dubbed, "the minions," early in the rehearsal process. Their main purpose is to serve Brock as he sees fit. "Anybody works in this room just tell 'im to do it good and do it quick and nobody'll get hurt," Brock demands (11). The actress playing Helen, the maid, had been a top contender for the role of Billie and I expected her to bring a sassy, vibrant performance that would establish the comic mood and energy during the opening moments of the show. Instead, the actress was surprisingly quiet and reserved as Helen and exhibited very little energy during our first rehearsals. However, the movement workshop helped her tremendously. Once the actress began to physicalize her character and create comic business with a feather duster, she created an appropriate and inspired opening for the play. Her energy set the scene for the fireworks to come.

The rest of the hotel staff (barber, bootblack, manicurist, assistant manager, and bellhops) found their main characteristics through the movement workshop as well. Like the principal actors discussed above, each minion chose an object or image to imitate during the movement workshop. Unlike many of the other actors, however, most of the minions did not need to be reminded of their physicality. The only actor from this particular group who had any trouble with movements or character creation was the barber. He had found a menacing barber characterization in our first movement rehearsal, but could not re-create it subsequently. Rather than seek to imitate that first choice unsuccessfully, the actor playing the barber eventually created an over-eager young man who was new to the job. The actor's choice clarified his role and made him unique among the minions. I wanted to utilize these characters more than the few times they mentioned in the script, but defining and developing additional moments was difficult and I ultimately did not carry through with my initial idea. I did, however, use them to create a 'dumb show' during intermission as a means of setting the stage for Act Two.

A Dumb Show

Two months pass in the world of the play between the end of Act One and the beginning of Act Two. Chapter Three discussed how scenic, lighting, and costume designs all were used to illustrate the movement from a cold, pristine world fit for a king to a chaotic room that becomes a battleground, a place where political corruption confronts moral education and cultural revolution. As part of this conflict, I wanted the set to be dressed at intermission with books, magazines, newspapers, paintings, and anything else that might help signify Billie's transformation.

The intermission became the stage for the minions' own revolution while they changed the props and set dressings for the next act. Each character invented a different story and created relationships with other minions; what they each brought onstage symbolized their differing degrees of transformation. At first, the dumb show was slow and drawn out, but a faculty advisor suggested the intermission should be performed with a quick pace. The dumb show worked well and helped to emphasize the thematic concerns of the play while at the same time becoming a creative means to change props and scenery.

Working with a Fight Choreographer

Violence onstage must be carefully controlled and choreographed because actors sometimes get hurt from excessive enthusiasm. Therefore any violence onstage needs to be choreographed by an individual trained in stage combat. *Born Yesterday* calls for two moments of violence. The first is a slap Harry gives Billie after she refuses to sign a set of legal documents. The second act of violence occurs when Harry attacks Paul. While I may have been able to choreograph these scenes myself, I decided to ask the fight choreographer who works as a technical director and stage combat instructor at Baylor University to assist me. His expertise would create a better looking fight in the thrust space. Communication with a fight choreographer is as important as collaboration with designers. The choreographer and I met a week before he needed to rehearse with the actors to decide what I was looking for in the scene. He was given a four hour rehearsal period for the two small scenes. He worked with Brock, Billie, Paul, and Eddie, teaching them simple hand-to-hand, un-armed combat. The choreographer also worked individually with the actors to build fights they could sustain each night.

The rehearsal schedule included a fight call every afternoon before rehearsals in order for the actors to practice slowly and build muscle memory. Actors often skipped the slower run-through, performing the fight at a much quicker pace than needed, and they would often put less effort into the practice than the “real-fight,” causing believability issues when the physical action was combined with the spoken lines. The actor playing Brock executed the slap fairly well until the opening of the play drew near. Then, he suddenly became afraid of hitting Billie and could not perform the action as choreographed. I tried to work with him and to assure him that he was capable of carrying out the act in a believable way, but I am not sure he trusted me. Unfortunately, I did not bring in the choreographer to solve the problem early enough and because of miscommunication between the Stage Manager, fight choreographer, and I, the actor was unable to repeat the action as believably as he had during the earlier rehearsals. By the time the show opened, it was too late to fix the problem.

Conclusion

Born Yesterday was chosen as my thesis production because of the opportunity to focus on character development and communication with actors in rehearsal. The play offered the right set of circumstances to incorporate physical styles of acting, like Viewpoints, into a twentieth-century comedy rooted in realism. Each struggle or staging difficulty encountered enhanced the learning process, encouraged positive and open communication, and pushed actors and director alike to create a vibrant production of *Born Yesterday*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Post-Mortem

Baylor University Theatre's production of *Born Yesterday* opened on February 12, 2013 and was well-received overall. The look of the production and the performances of the actors were all praised. Our production team faced several challenges, such as creating a set in the Mabey theatre that would not hinder sight lines, ensuring that properties and furniture used were appropriate to furnish a hotel room in 1946, blocking the action in interesting and believable ways, and finding the right combination of insight and stupidity in Billie. The use of a critical analysis led to a concept that assisted directorial decisions in design, blocking, and character development, helping the production team to overcome those obstacles and mount a cohesive, unified play.

Considering the play's age, it was gratifying to see the university audiences becoming attached to the characters and story. Audiences were engaged and left the theatre smiling. Some audience members were so involved with the characters that they spoke back to actors on stage, for example a woman yelled, "yes!" when Paul asked Billie to marry him. Others gasped when Paul kissed Billie for the first time or when Brock hit her. Numerous patrons praised the set design claiming the interior of Suite 67D was beautiful. Many more hailed the actors for extraordinary performances, especially the actor playing Billie and Devery. We had anticipated chuckles from the audience rather than loud laughs, and I was a bit concerned that many people would think the production was merely cute. While audience responded well to *Born Yesterday*, there are

always aspects of producing a play that could have been different or worked better. In particular, comedic moments would have been tighter, the set dressing could have been more accurate to the time period, and the democratic ideals could have been emphasized more.

One of the major strengths of the production was the *Born Yesterday* set, which received many praises. I believe audiences were most impressed with the set's grandeur placed in such an intimate theatre. One of the acting professors at Baylor University was impressed by the number of playing spaces and the production team's ability to insert an imposing set into the Mabree theatre. The director, designers, and technical director worked collaboratively to create an environment that was indicative of a ritzy 1940s hotel room but was also functional. The director's urge during initial design meetings to make sure the set would look polished, that sight lines were not hindered, and there was plenty of actable playing space helped to mold a pristine atmosphere for the room and assist in the set's success. The combination of high walls, crisp cream paint, a large open window and, above all, the attention to detail in creating the federalist architecture and Washington, D.C. backdrop made the room feel extravagant and clean. The addition of the chandelier added to the lavishness, but also capped the space to make it feel more personal.

Weaknesses

In any production process, there are always many specific details that would have been fixed if time had allowed it. For example, I would have loved to clean up some of the comedic moments in *Born Yesterday*, making the action sharper and crisper. The timing when the bellhops enter and exit in the midst of Billie and Brock fighting in Act

Three could have been worked in rehearsal more so it would not be as clumsy. The reactions of actors during the Hedges scene could have been larger and had better comedic timing. Scenic and properties would have more detailed set dressings; we struggled with the ink pen leaking and with the anachronistic look of both the pen and the blue folders. Rather than list each detail that needed attention to make the production better as a whole, the following discussion will focus on larger issues.

A director's job is to tell a story through stage pictures. The design elements and blocking work together to create moments that depict a specific story to the audience, as determined through the director's analysis and with special attention to the thematic elements the director decides to highlight. Productions of *Born Yesterday* could emphasize the upheaval of big business and corruption or focus on women's educational rights in the 1940s. However, based on my analysis of *Born Yesterday*, I wanted to focus not only on Billie's education but how her education is merely supporting cultural standards of the time period rather than making any real progressive strides in women's rights. Within that context, I also wanted to emphasize the idealist view of democracy as a way to show Billie's transferred allegiance from tyranny, represented by Brock, to democracy, represented by Paul.

The set, costumes, light, and blocking choices were all meant to enhance and support democratic ideals. The set included federalist architectural to highlight the importance of the American government and democratic ideals Paul represents. The set was infused with books, globes, and paintings during intermission to signify Billie's shift from uneducated woman to an intelligent patriot longing for a better, simpler life found in democracy. The sound design depicted Billie's transformation through her choice of

music. She listened to popular music until her she was indoctrinated to “like what’s better to like.” While each of these choices were meant to indicate Billie’s shift in character and support the idealistic views of democracy found in the play, they may not have been enough for the audience to read it that way. The production certainly established Brock as a fascist monarch whose rule needed to end, however, the transference of allegiance from one government to another may have been muddled. Instead, Paul’s democratic ideals were somewhat lost and Billie’s education seemed to lead to true independence. I attribute this to casting, staging, and character development during the rehearsal process.

Casting *Born Yesterday* revealed the necessity to have a Paul and Brock who had equal amounts of stage presence. However, in order to have a revolution in which another government, i.e. democracy, triumphs, the two forces need to be equal until the new faction conquers the other. Early in the process, there were questions regarding whether or not Paul was too menacing on stage and might overpower the actor playing Brock. However, the actor who played Brock found a way to be extremely dynamic; he was loud, boisterous and took control of his surroundings until Billie forced him into submission during her final speech in the third act. This may have overly emphasized the theme of business in the play. At the same time, the mannerisms the actor playing Paul adopted combined with his costumes to diminish Paul’s on-stage power. The actor’s gentle mannerisms and soft voice during the majority of the play may have hindered our connection with his idealistic views because they were lost under a guise of complacency.

Staging choices and character development may have also contributed the problem in thematic communication. Act One requires reservation from the actor playing

Paul. He must be in a supporting role to establish Brock's place in the society, however as the play progresses, the script—and my analysis of the text—identifies Paul as a subversive rebel capable of overthrowing Brock's empire. The audience should have a sense of danger and excitement when they realize Paul will be vying for Billie's mind and attention. However, the actor and director allowed Paul's controlled manners and serious demeanor to minimize his passion and downplay his intentions. For example, staging at the end of Act One emphasized Paul's reluctance to accept Billie's offer for some "action." Furthermore, Paul's performance in Act Two should have been larger and full of passion when he spoke of the democratic model and even more so during his "happy peasant" speech. Unfortunately, the reserved tone we created in both scenes left the audience with the impression Paul was intelligent, but not necessarily a new "ruler" or signifier of another way of life, especially not a government. He appeared to be the instigation for Billie's education, a helpmate in her journey towards emancipation, when he needed to be understood by the audience as her new ruler.

A key part of my analysis of *Born Yesterday* is the idea that the play not as progressive about women's empowerment through education as it seems. The only moments in the play to indicate Billie will now be a domestic woman dependent on her husband, Paul, are in the very last act when Billie agrees to marry him. After many times restaging this scene to make sure the decision to marry was clear, we settled on a central location for both characters, with Billie raised on the higher level, and an added beat for extra emphasis (See Figures 18 and 19). However, the idea that Billie's acceptance of Paul's marriage proposal indicates her impending domestic responsibilities is undermined by her initiative to dictate to Brock what is required of him if he wants to gain his

property back. This appeared to be her own plan, not something Paul suggested to her offstage. In our staging choice, Billie moved downstage and sat Brock down, leaving Billie in the most prominent and important part of the room. She is the center of all of the action and commands attention, which displays a strong sense of independence. The production tried to utilize a few glances at Paul to convey Billie's need for support, but it was not enough compared to more potent moments of individuality. At the end of the play, Billie moves to the front door, yells at Eddie to "do what I'm telling ya," and proceeds to leave. Paul follows her lead and exits behind her.

These blocking choices make it difficult to see Billie as anything except a woman who has taken control of her own life, even if she has accepted the assistance of a man. Our production of the play therefore suggests that she has chosen Paul not because she needs him or is surrendering herself to his rule, but because she loves him. In hindsight, I wish that I had staged some of these moments differently and tried to overtly indicate the change in power over Billie from Brock to Paul. Similarly, Billie's costume could have transitioned again in the third act to reinforce this analysis of the play. Instead of her last costume consisting of the pantsuit, it could have been fashioned to resemble the dress she wore at the beginning of the performance, which made her look like a doll and a plaything.

However, although these changes may have conveyed my understanding of Billie's transfer of allegiance more fully I wonder if they would have made the production stronger. The choices maybe have resulted in a loss of Garson Kanin's humor. My critical analysis of *Born Yesterday*, while beneficial in the directorial process, may have investigated something Kanin had not originally intended and made

staging the results of the analysis difficult. Whether the critical analysis promotes the initial intentions of the playwright or interprets the play from a contemporary perspective identifying new possibilities, as mind did, the analysis is detrimental in creating a unified and cohesive production. Keeping in mind that *Born Yesterday* was seemingly progressive and signified a revolution made making quick, specific decisions easier with design elements, staging, and character development. I only had to ask myself, “How does this situation fit into the analysis?” and could then make a decision without worrying that the play would lose cohesion. Fortunately, the analysis led to the concept, “revolution,” and the success of said concept did not depend on the analysis. For example, the idea of revolution maintained unity in the production whether or not Billie’s education read as progressive or seemingly so.

Director and Actor Collaboration

Chapter Four discussed a major concern regarding the relationship between the director and two of the actors. The rehearsal process explored the shift in authority and possible doubt in the director’s abilities after rehearsals in which a faculty advisor helped with the production. The rehearsal chapter identified a specific rehearsal with the faculty advisor as a starting point for communication issues with the actors playing Brock and Paul. However, it is difficult to pin point the specific cause of the dynamic between the actor and director with so many variables at play. I believe the actor’s lack of confidence and consequent inappropriate behavior was the result of a combination of factors. The director’s gender, age, status as graduate student, the actor’s past experience with the director, the style of directing, and the actor’s inappropriate behavior contributed to the breakdown in an ideal actor/director relationship.

The following qualities do not need to be the sole basis for investigating actor doubt, but are worth mentioning in a discussion centered on an actor's inability to trust in directorial authority. I am a twenty seven year old female directing candidate, which may have lead, or at least contributed to, the actor playing Brock's lack of confidence in my directorial abilities. He may not have been comfortable with a female director or the fact that I am young and not a faculty member. The faculty advisor who was able to communicate with him was an older male in a tenure track position at Baylor University with whom the actor had worked with before. I had also previously worked with the actor playing Brock in a short scene from Lucy Prebble's *Enron* for a postmodern directing class. This prior experience may have had more of an affect on the actor's behavior than the other factors listed. Like other graduate students at Baylor University, I was encouraged to make bold choices that risked failure for this classroom assignment. Two weeks of rehearsal proved to be less time than needed for my grand ideas and I focused more on the big picture than the actor's character. Unfortunately, *Enron* floundered during the departmental performance and the actor may have had difficulty trusting my directorial capabilities afterwards.

Whatever the cause of actor doubt, there was a definite communication breakdown which led to frustration for both actor and director. This experience has exposed areas of concern that I can try and avoid for future productions. I may not be able to change my gender or even my age, but I can communicate more clearly and try and identify actor misgivings before they become a larger issue. The director may have to give the actor extra space and creative freedom, provide a more specific path for the direction of the production, or possibly generate camaraderie outside of the rehearsal

space to encourage communication. I have realized through *Born yesterday* that communication with actors will change, but awareness of actor's needs will always be a necessity.

Conclusion

In the end, the production had a few small shortcomings as well as some larger issues related to the realization of my directorial interpretation. However, the process helped to strengthen my directing by teaching me how to shape a scene that builds to a climax and focuses on the character through-line rather than merely presenting pretty stage pictures. The production also encouraged me to demand excellence rather than accepting what could work even if it is not the best choice. In the final analysis, I am proud of the production, the experience, and the people I was able to work with to create an experience of *Born Yesterday* enjoyable for audiences of all ages.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Garson Kanin: Stage Plays, Screenplays, Novels and Non-Fiction

Garson Kanin 1912-1999

Stage Plays

Born Yesterday- 1946

Come on Strong- 1962

Happy Ending- 1988

Pecadillo- 1985

The Live Wire- 1950

The Smile of the World- 1950

The Rat Race- 1949

Screenplays

A Double Life- 1947; Co-written with Ruth Gordon

Adam's Rib- 1949; Co-written with Ruth Gordon

Born Yesterday- 1956 (television)

Hardhat & Legs- 1980 (television)

High Time- 1960

It Should Happen to You- 1954

The Marrying Kind- 1952; Co-written with Ruth Gordon

Pat and Mike- 1952; Co-written with Ruth Gordon

The Rat Race- 1960

The Right Approach- 1960

Some Kind of Nut- 1969

Novels

A Thousand Summers- 1973

Blow up a Storm- 1959

Cast of Characters- 1969

Cordelia?- 1982

Moviola- 1979

One Hell of an Actor- 1977

The Rat Race- 1960 (Novelization of Kanin's stage-play)

Smash- 1980

Where It's At- 1969

Non-Fiction

Hollywood: Stars and Starlets, Tycoons and Flesh-Peddlers, Moviemakers and Moneymakers, Frauds and Geniuses, Hopefuls and Has-Beens, Great Lovers and Sex Symbols- 1974

It Takes a Long Time to Become Young- 1978

Remembering Mr. Maugham- 1969

Together Again! Hollywood's Great Movie Teams- 1981

Tracy & Hepburn: An Intimate Memoir- 1971

Set Design

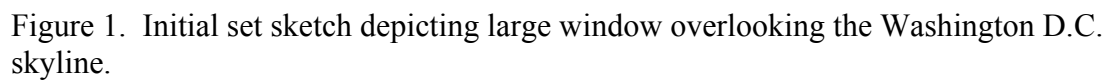




Figure 4. View from the extreme audience seats of the Mabey Theatre.



Figure 5. Suite 67D at the beginning of Act One with pre-show lighting.



Figure 6. Act One: Brock's entrance.



Figure 7. Act Two after the intermission transition.

Costume Design



Figure 8. Rendering of Billie's traveling dress.



Figure 9. Final construction of Billie's traveling dress.



Figure 10. Rendering of Billie's dress to meet the Hedges.



Figure 11. Final construction of Billie's dress to meet the Hedges.



Figure 12. Rendering of Billie's negligee.



Figure 13. Billie's negligee at final dress rehearsal.

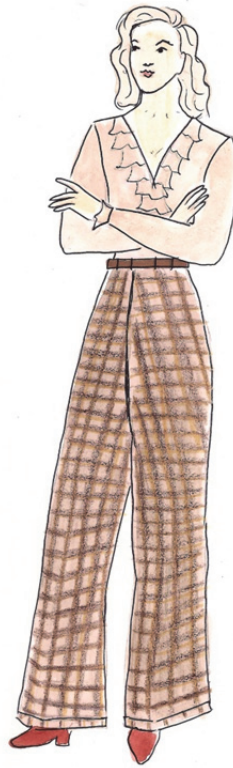


Figure 14. Rendering of Billie's pant-suit.



Figure 15. Final construction of Billie's pant-suit.

Staging Photographs



Figure 16. Billie meets the Hedges.



Figure 17. Billie files her nails to show ignorance of social situations.



Figure 18. Paul asks Billie to marry him a second time.



Figure 19. Billie informs Brock that she and Paul will “stop him.”

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