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Villains, Heroes, Fools and Lovers: Stage Managers in Western Drama

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Drama

by

Gabrielle Koizumi

Thesis Committee:
Donald Hill, Committee Chair
Joel Veenstra, Associate Head of Stage Management
Jane Page, Head of Directing

2016

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family
for their ongoing support and enthusiasm.

For Mom, Dad, and Caeli

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Villains, Heroes, Fools and Lovers: Stage Managers in Western Drama

By

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Master of Fine Arts in Drama

University of California, Irvine, 2016

Professor Don Hill, Chair

Numerous plays and musical in Western Drama utilize the character of the stage manager. Authors rely on the stage manager as a character to solve problems that would otherwise remain unresolved. The characterization of the stage manager within theatrical literature serves as a lens to examine how stage managers are viewed in the industry. The portrayal of the stage manager character transcends the page and bleeds over into rehearsal rooms.

Using a cross sectional script analysis of plays and musicals, my research seeks to illuminate how the stage manager character reflects the perception of the stage manager as a person. Many plays use the stage manager character, spanning over 50 years, providing the opportunity to analyze how the role of the stage manager has changed through a concrete and textual medium.

My research draws upon the connections between literature, history and theatrical perception to analyze the function and form of stage managers. Stage managers often fulfill the role of facilitator or supporter and their artistry is neglected or overlooked. Conducting a script analysis of a wide range of plays that feature a stage manager character creates a diverse pool of drama to draw upon.

INTRODUCTION

Playwrights thrust stage managers onto the page during the 20th century providing a new way to view the profession. In placing the stage manager character onstage, playwrights, actors and directors make creative interpretations about the role and function that inevitably affect how stage managers are viewed. Audience members rarely witness the function of stage managers; therefore, through examining how other theatre artists portray stage managers, a picture begins to form. Unlike the work of actors, playwrights, directors or even or designers, the art of stage management cannot be easily quantified and observed by the general public. Stage management is difficult to quantify as the stage manager's role shifts depending on the needs of the production. Through the reflective eyes of peers, stage managers have a chance to receive feedback and insight. An analysis of texts can chart how the role of the stage manager has changed and perhaps where it is headed. In the latter half of the 20th century, characterizations of stage managers become more detailed with the inclusion of women stage managers, and romantic relationships. Stage manager characters provide an excellent lens to study how theatre artists' view stage managers and how perceptions can inform stage managers' place in the artistic process.

This thesis focuses on the written text rather than any one singular production or film adaptation of a given play. Placing the attention on the text allows for more concrete discussions rather than veering off into realms of director's concept and interpretation. With the exception of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of An Author*, all of the texts discussed are originally written in English reducing the likelihood of nuances being lost in translation. While not an exhaustive analysis of all plays including a stage

manager character, numerous works in the Western theatrical tradition have been included ranging from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* to Michael Frayn's *Noise Off* and most recently Anne Washburn's *10 out of 12* (Appendix A & B). Comparisons and critiques about stage manager's functions will be based on the American style and approach to stage management. At their core, stage managers organize and facilitate the production process. There is a wide variety of interpretations to the function of stage managers; however, they share the common trait of organization. This thesis tracks the themes that arose through script analysis of many plays that feature stage manager characters.

CHAPTER ONE

STAGE MANAGEMENT HISTORY

Research into the history of stage managers remains scarce and confusing at best. A cursory search in well-respected Drama encyclopedias demonstrates the lack of research on the history of stage management. An extensive amount of documentation and commentary exist regarding the financial managers and producers in pre-20th century theatre; however, it remains remarkably silent on the presence of stage managers. Looking through widely referenced texts and noting the absence of stage managers reiterates the need for scholarly work and investigation into stage managers and their history.

Encyclopedias published under the Oxford Press make brief comments on stage management, but highlight a stage manager's responsibilities rather than provide any history or details into the profession's evolution. In *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre* under the STAGE DIRECTIONS heading the author describes,

The Prompt Corner...is a desk against the inner side of the proscenium wall where the prompter installs his Prompt Book (a copy of the play, generally interleaved, and carrying the full directions and warnings necessary to the management of the production), and where a board of switches for signals, communicating to various parts of the theatre, is generally located" (Hartnoll).

This brief mention of the prompter focuses on the physical description of the corner and happens to include that an individual runs the prompt corner. The in depth details regarding the prompt book and the explanation of the board of switches shows how Hartnoll considers the function of a prompter more relevant than the individual. The absence or brief mention of stage management in Drama encyclopedias demonstrates the lack of understanding and respect given to the profession of stage management. While the

general public has a limited grasp on stage management, the larger academic theatrical communities also remain silent on the subject of stage management history in academic and scholarly publications.

Stage Management Handbooks

Similar to the larger encyclopedias, stage management texts, practical guides, and handbooks seldom discuss the history of stage management. Peter MacCoy briefly mentions in his *The Essentials of Stage Management*, “Evidence exists for prompters being used in medieval pageant theatre...Contemporary accounts suggest that somebody ‘kept a book’ for Shakespeare’s company” (MacCoy 11). MacCoy does not cite the evidence regarding the existence of stage managers in pageant theatre; therefore, implying that it may be more of a hypothesis rather than a fully developed research topic. He also asserts that the keeping of the book in Shakespeare’s company may indicate the presence of the stage manager, but fails to elaborate any deeper on how this affects or influences modern stage managers.

Other authors continue to rely on gut feelings and anecdotes to justify their knowledge of stage management history. In his *Stage Manager: The Professional Experience*, Larry Fazio muses about the presence of stage managers before the 20th century. He writes,

In my heart and in the wilds of my imagination, I know SMs existed long before the 1600s. I am convinced that SMs existed at least as far back as the days of the caveman. There is no documentation to substantiate this, but I am certain that during the time when humans sat around camp fires to reenact the thrill of the hunt and to tell of the glory of the kill, there was someone in the group who built the fire, cleared the ground for seating, and during the even handed out at the most dramatic moment, the spear or rock that killed the beast (5 Fazio).

Like MacCoy, Fazio cites the accepted presence of stage managers in the 1600s, but does not elaborate more on the subject. Fazio relies on the assumption that performers need someone to organize them; hence the presence of a stage manager. The Drama encyclopedias and stage management handbooks highlight concrete tangible attributes of a stage manager as an organizer and note-taker. Modern stage management texts examine additional aspects of the stage manager's job, yet still rely on paperwork to characterize the profession. Limited research exists on how other theatre practitioners view stage managers in any other form than through anecdotes and personal experiences.

Most stage management handbooks dive directly into the process, qualities and duties of stage managing. One of the most widely used stage management texts written by Laurence Stern focuses primarily on understanding the job of stage manager. Stern outlines in the Introduction of his 6th edition, "I will describe and give examples of many more methods for stage management than should be applied to any one production and you will need to use your judgment to determine which will be most effective for you" (1). Stern points out the infinite approaches one can take to stage management making the profession more complicated to quantify and discuss. In his 8th edition, Stern cleaves to the practical nature of stage management. He brings the reader's focus to the work of the stage manager. Stern's texts are based on the emotional and experiential aspect of stage management, but presents the information in a clinical form.

Many other stage management texts support Stern's practical approach to describing stage management. Texts walk the reader through the production process from the stage manager's perspective. Kevin Eld introduces Gail Pailin's *Stage Management: The Essential Handbook* that is "written by a stage manager for stage managers" (Pailin

1). Eld's emphasis on stage managers talking about stage managers fails to address how other artists perceive the profession.

In addition to the prevalence of practical manuals, they are often geared towards the novice stage manager. The more widely read stage management texts seek to explain the role to the reader and tend not to delve into specific advanced topics. Schneider writes in the *Art and Craft of Stage Management*, "We wanted this experience to be as close to that of professional theatre as practical, considering the limited experience and knowledge of most first-time stage managers" (vii). The text aims to serve as a gateway for young stage managers to prevent or alleviate common mistakes. The focus on the young stage manager implies that seasoned stage managers do not solely learn about their profession through texts, but through experience and relationships. Using both text and experience to teach stage management provides a larger breadth of knowledge for the student to draw upon.

Numerous texts seek to define and distill the responsibilities of the stage manager. As the broader public has limited theatrical knowledge, text rely on analogies to describe the role. Published in 1936, Peter Bax's *Stage Management* asserts, "The position of stage manager is analogous to that of the chief engineer on board a ship" (Bax 1). Bax uses an analogy demonstrate the type of skill and leadership that a stage manager must possess. In *Stage Management and Theatre Administration*, the authors assert

The stage management team is the channel of communication between all the people and departments contributing to a production... They must be calm in crisis, patient with frayed tempers and infinitely understanding of everyone's problems (Menear 1).

Menear's assessment of stage managers seeks to define them in terms of their relationship with others. Menear's broad strokes emphasizes the management aspect of

the profession, and moves away from the art. Additionally, Copley and Killner's *Stage Management: A Practical Guide* points out the confusion that non-theatre practitioners have regarding the stage manager's job description. She writes,

If they [stage managers] are not responsible for the lighting, sound, direction, costumes, acting, make-up, box office or choreography, what could there possibly be left for them to do?' the answer to this quest is, in fact, 'a great deal' (Copley 6).

Stage managers' jobs cannot be easily distilled and thus must be defined through their relationships with others. In order to make their texts accessible, each of these authors strive to define stage management in terms that the novice theatre practitioner is familiar with.

In an attempt to explain stage management, texts create a very daunting list of tasks. The list typically includes copious forms, tracking sheets and reports, paperwork that is used by most managers on and off the stage. These handbooks tend to gloss over the art and passion of stage management. The art of stage management comes from relationship building and creating balance. Some authors also include anecdotes of plays gone awry as cautionary tales. The lists coupled with horror stories create the appearance of a thankless, almost undesirable, position that deals with a multitude of changing personalities. While these handbooks make a valiant attempt to describe stage management, the author's reliance on paperwork and anecdotes only tells a small portion of the story.

Charles Cressal Ellis

A biography on a Victorian stage manager serves as a case study on the challenges of in depth historical research about stage managers. In 1968, *Theatre Notebook* published a short biography on Charles Cressal Ellis that illustrated the

difficulties of capturing the essence of a stage manager. Ellis, by all accounts, was a well-known British stage manager, yet he left behind no personal documents, only his production paperwork. For example, the author writes.

Ellis was so modest and self-effacing a man that it is frustrating to attempt to sketch him. His life was his work, and his promptbooks are his only monument. He published nothing; he left no diaries or memoirs; the few of his letters that I have seen, though neatly phrased and elegantly penned, are for the most part sparse, correct, impersonal business notes (Shattuck 103).

The emphasis on Ellis' work rather than his personality is reflected in the biography. The author sums up the plight of stage managers that once the production has completed all that remains is the sterile and succinct notes. All of the personality and creativity that occurs in stage management is fleeting, experienced only by the company members. The simplicity and grace of Ellis' work is indicative of how stage managers truly function. Stage managers leave almost no physical evidence of their personality. Their art imprints on the individuals they work with. Portrayals of stage managers face unique obstacles without the presence of documented observations by outsiders such as audience members or critics to influence perspectives.

As theatre artists capable of creating lush, imagined worlds, relying on nameless faceless stage managers in guides to be the only recognized stage management literature is a disservice to young stage managers. Plays have the amazing ability to show us about what it actually means to be a stage manager, rather than the task based descriptions of a fictitious stage manager in a handbook.

CHAPTER TWO

CREATING A WORLD

Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of An Author* is the first contemporary piece of Western drama to utilize the play-within-a-play conceit. Unlike Shakespeare, Pirandello makes the play within a play the focus of the work rather than the comedic interlude. Pirandello's work is the first to explicitly list the stage manager. Pirandello's work opened a revolutionary way to discuss theatre by examining layers of reality.

Gaspare Giudice's biography on Pirandello goes into greater detail of the shock experienced by audience members. He writes,

All this [lack of scenery and appearance of the characters] was enough to infuriate anyone who had gone to the theatre to spend a pleasant evening. The first catcalls were followed by shouts of disapproval, and, when the opponents of the play realized that they were in the majority, they started to shout in chorus, 'ma-ni-co-mio' ('madhouse') or 'bu-ffo-ne' ('buffoon'). (Kirkus)

The audience members' reaction demonstrates the upheaval of tradition that Pirandello embraced. His separation from the traditional theatrical model illustrates his desire to push the limits of reality.

Opening Lines

Pirandello first uses the stage manager to create a world, a conceit that numerous other playwrights will later employ. The stage manager indicates to the audience that multiple layers of reality exist. Using the stage manager to open the play allows for the playwright to quickly inform the audience of the play's framework.

Before any dialogue, the audience (and reader) becomes aware that there is something different about Pirandello's stage. Pirandello writes in his stage directions, "On the stage itself, the prompter's dome has been removed, and is standing just to one

side of the prompt box” (Pirandello 1). The prompter’s dome hides the prompter from view. The presence of stage management materials demonstrates a break from the traditional proscenium style production. Pirandello partly uses the stage manager for shock value, but also as a practical and efficient approach to establishing a world.

Thornton Wilder utilizes a stage manager character in two of his plays. In both pieces, Wilder’s stage managers open the show, once again, establishing the world for the audience. Historians argue that Wilder’s earlier work, *A Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*, serves as a sort of trial run for his more well-known *Our Town*. One can assume the opening with a stage manager served Wilder’s themes for both his plays as he utilized it more than once.

Wilder not only uses the opening moments to establish the theatrical conceit, but to introduce aspects of the stage manager’s character. The stage manager in *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* and *Our Town* begins the show with a pipe in hand. The similar descriptions of the stage managers further solidify that the two characters are various iterations of the same individual. In *Our Town*, the stage manager blatantly states that the audience is watching a play. He describes the names of the actors, playwright, producer and director. Wilder’s stage managers create the world of the play and welcomes the audience into it.

Musicals featuring stage managers also use the stage manager to welcome the audience. Charlie, the manager of the Wild West Show in *Annie Get Your Gun*, opens the production. He and his sister, Dolly introduce the crowd to the Wild West Show. Charlie describes the acts, the sharp shooters, the trick riders, the Sioux braves hurling the audience into the flurry of the show (Fields). His opening remarks give a brief outline

of the show and characters. Fierstein's *La Cage aux Folles* also begins with Francis, the stage manager, barking orders at the Cagelles after the Opening Number. Francis' presence indicates that the drama unfolds both on and offstage. His confrontational and melodramatic interaction with the Cagelles sets the tone for the production. Francis and Charlie's first appearances inform about the play-within-a-play conceit as well as the style of performance.

The initial description of the stage manager in *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told* highlights her character traits. Rudnick provides, perhaps, the clearest picture of a stage manager. He writes about a

Sleek, incredibly capable woman, dressed in a black turtleneck and close-fitting pants. She wears her microphone on a headset, leaving her hands free. She speaks in a low authoritative, sexy voice, like a very smart flight attendant with an agenda. She is the ultimate professional confident aloof, slightly swaggering. She knows what she's doing. (Rudnick 3)

His detailed description of the stage manager demonstrates the importance her personality plays in the course of the action. Rudnick sculpts a fully fleshed out character increasing the relevance of the stage manager. The audience encounters her first which allows them to see her as the gateway to the world. In contrast to Wilder's pipe smoking stage manager, Rudnick opens with a smart controlling woman, marking her personality through the way she carried herself. Opening with a distinct stage manager character creates a strong image of how the stage manager will interact with the text.

Rick Abbot's *Play On!* along with Billy Van Zandt and Jane Milmore's *Drop Dead* starts with a picture of stage management embedded in the stage direction. Abbot's stage directions about Aggie Manville, the stage manager highlight his view. He writes, "At curtain-rise, AGGIE MANVILLE is Onstage, watching the curtain open, warily, as a

stage manager should” (Abbott 5). The inclusion of the word “warily” demonstrates Abbot’s opinion on what traits a *good* stage manager must possess. Opening with a concerned stage manager sets the tone for inevitable disaster. Also, her presence onstage informs the audience that a rehearsal is in progress. In *Drop Dead*, Van Zandt and Milmore quickly characterize Phillip, the stage manager as “quietly performing the work of thirty crew members: setting props, sweeping, touch-up, painting, hemming costumes, ironing, bracing a flat, adjusting a light, etc” (Van Zandt 7). The authors immediately establish a harried and overworked stage manager, which foreshadows Phillip’s scurrying about in Act 2. The stage directions in *Play On!* and *Drop Dead* provide insight for actors and act as omens for the audience that allude to future events.

Similar to *Drop Dead* and *Play On!*, *The Habit of Art* uses a stage manager’s presence to foreshadow obstacles that arise. George, the assistant stage manager, is seen checking props at the top of the show, when an actor interrupts him to run lines (Bennett 3). Throughout the play, actors constantly forget their lines. The playwright quickly establishes the assistant stage manager’s function as well as sets up a conflict. The assistant stage manager is used as a comparison to the actors.

10 out of 12 and *The Play that Goes Wrong*, both published in 2015, also begin with the stage manager setting the stage. The more modern stage managers comment less about themselves and focus more on creating a world. Anne Washburn’s *10 out of 12* begins with the assistant stage manager vacuuming and speaking on headset, presumably to the stage manager. The initial efficiency and calm that Jamie, the assistant stage manager, exudes in the first few moments, characterizes the stage management team throughout the process. In contrast, Annie in *The Play that Goes Wrong* demonstrates a

complete lack of skill while attempting to hang a mantelpiece and in the process endangers an audience member (Lewis). Annie's incompetence continues throughout the production making her first actions indicative of later events. Stage managers' actions in the first moments of a process often determine how smooth or disjointed the production will be.

Setting the Stage

Many playwrights use the stage manager to set up the physical world, eliminating the need to employ theatrical mechanics or the presence of the *invisible* stage crew. Stage managers change scenes and add props to craft the physical world, much like stage managers do in the rehearsal room. Playwrights also use the stage managers facilitating set changes to parallel how the characters are going through emotional transformations.

The set changes that the stage managers in *Six Characters in Search of An Author* and *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* echo the emotional transformation of the characters. The stage manager in *Six Characters in Search of An Author* must recreate the world that the *characters* describe. Pirandello uses the stage manager to transform the stage without hiding behind any theatrical tricks or sleight of hand. Wilder's stage manager in *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* also assists the characters in moving through their journey. The stage manager moves set pieces to create the illusion that the scenery changes as the family's journey progresses. Stage managers move physical objects to illustrate the journey without feeling the need to conceal the mechanisms of setting the stage.

The Will Roger's Follies links the function of the stage manager character to the duties and mechanics of working stage managers. The character of the stage manager in

The Will Roger's Follies is not actually a character at all, but played by the production's stage manager. *The Will Roger's Follies* stage manager does not have a scripted backstory, but rather the actual weight and responsibility of managing the production. Using an *actual* stage manager sets *The Will Roger's Follies* apart from the other works examined in this paper. However, many actual stage managers make brief appearances in many other texts such as *Trojan Women 2.0* and *The Complete History of America (abridged)*. The use of actual stage managers typically is out of function not form; serving as solutions to otherwise tricky scene shifts or tempo changes.

The Will Roger's Follies' stage manager assists in adding glitz to the play and marking the passage of time. The stage manager, Peter, arrives to help solve one of Mr. Ziegfeld's problems. Mr. Ziegfeld calls for the stage manager when he is disappointed with the location for one of Will's scenes. The stage direction reads, "The actual STAGE MANAGER, wearing his headset, enters from the wings" (Stone 26). The stage manager then suggests that they use the Fiji Island set to make the railroad station more interesting. However, Mr. Ziegfeld decides upon the moon as the perfect setting and Peter goes to prep the set. Peter's participation demonstrates the reach and value of a stage manager, as Mr. Ziegfeld considers his opinion. The playwright attempts to solve a transition issue by inserting the stage manager. On and off stage managers are often called upon to resolve complex artistic problems with simplicity and grace.

Stage Managers as Fools

In contrast, many plays that include a stage manager character expose the chaos that lurks just offstage. A trend arose in the 1970s with *Noises Off*, a play that presents more human and decidedly flawed stage management characters. Tim, *Noises Off's* stage

manager, and Poppy, the assistant stage manager, cause to the turmoil by losing sight of the overarching goal. During Act 2 and 3, Tim repeatedly runs errands that are completely unrelated to the production such as purchasing flowers for the Director's lover (Frayn). Poppy also allows her emotions to run rampant, deliberately inciting conflict with Brooke, an actress (Frayn). Both Poppy and Tim lack focus and illustrate the pitfalls of disorganized and emotion-driven stage managers.

Similar to Poppy, Aggie in *Play On!* ignites conflict with multiple characters. She constantly blames the stage hand, Louise for mistakes that occur backstage. After a loud clanging emanates from backstage, Aggie quickly accuses Louise who readily blames Aggie (Abbot). The dynamic between Louise and Aggie illuminates the issues that occur when stage management does not have a trusting relationship with crew members.

Aggie continues to express her mounting frustration with the antics of the playwright who interferes with the rehearsal process. She pits actors against the playwright. She asserts, "Polly keeps inviting Phyllis to dinner and getting her part fattened. It's almost as big as *she* is, now!" (Abbott 18). Aggie participates in the cattiness of the actors and in doing so makes a toxic creative environment. Stage managers have the ability to set the tone for rehearsal, and Aggie repeatedly adds to the tension.

Furthermore, Aggie readily points out her colleagues' shortcomings, but her own imperfections bring the play to its knees. She is the prime example of what occurs when a stage manager does not focus on the task at hand. She claims to have written all of her cues down at dress rehearsal, but continually misses them during the performance. For example, she misses the sound cue of the Police Siren so she improvises it making the

sound of an “rrrrrr” (Abbot 69). Rather than allowing the actors to construct a solution, she compounds the problem by inserting herself farther into the play. She buckles under the pressure; unable to put her trust in her fellow artists.

However, Aggie’s disjointed and almost hostile relationship with the actors allows Abbot to illustrate how important a stage manager’s attitude and approach is to the overall success of the production. Abbot’s use of a tactless stage manager adds to the hilarity of his play illustrating how a stage manager influences a stressful situation. As *Play On!* is a comedy, Aggie contributes to the issues of the production making it more entertaining.

Like *Play On!*, *Drop Dead* is another fast paced play, where the mishaps add to the hilarity and ridiculousness add to the suspense of the production. Initially attributed to poor workmanship, technical elements fail and malfunction. When a sandbag falls onstage, Phillip freaks out and claims that his “wits are frazzled” (Van Zandt 38). His lack of composure characterizes him as different from the typical calm stage manager we saw in Pirandello and Wilder’s works. Playwrights use incompetent stage managers to add to the hilarity of their play-within-a-plays.

Charles Morey’s *Laughing Stock* showcases a sassy stage manager who also becomes entangled in the personalities of the company. Once rehearsals begin, Sarah, the stage manager, engages in fruitless discussions with the actors such as how one morphs from bat into wolf into human” (Morey 25). Allowing herself to be drawn in minor details, she stalls the production. During the performance of *Dracul, the Undead*, the light cues are out of place, actors enter thinking it is *Charley’s Aunt*, the fog malfunctions, and the bat prop becomes tangled onstage, while Sarah attempts to move

forward with the performance; failing to acknowledge the disaster that is unfolding before her (Morey). Sarah lacks a full field of vision. Morey uses a flawed stage manager to add to the comedy; however, in the rehearsal room stage managers like Sarah slow down the process.

Another example of the stage manager barreling through the problems comes in *Inspecting Carol*. A lighting instrument tangles up Jacob Marley's chains and he drags it onstage. MJ, the stage manager, attempts to remove the lighting instrument with a hacksaw, which disrupts the scene (Sullivan 84). MJ becomes so focused on solving the minor problem that she neglects to consider how her actions will affect the whole performance. Stage managers with tunnel vision can make a tricky situation even more complicated.

Annie in *The Play that Goes Wrong* also has difficulty seeing how her actions affect the whole play. She becomes hell bent on fixing a minor mistake and does not realize she is causing major catastrophe. For example, Annie mistakenly pre-sets an empty bottle on a liquor cart, when the actors have specific lines about the full bottle on the drink cart. She decides to switch the empty bottle for a bottle of flammable liquid, the only thing she has on hand, in full view of the audience allowing them to wonder what disaster lies ahead. Annie's poor judgement cements her role as a hapless stage manager. Her insistence on being a part of every problem hints that she may not have a passion for stage management, but merely wants to be in on the action.

In the USA Network television show, *Psych*, the musical episode features a stage manager who focuses on the play and fails to notice the chaos around him. *Psych* features a fake psychic who solves crimes using his photographic memory. The stage

manager, Charlos desperately attempts to keep the play running while Shawn, the show's lead character, pursues a murderer backstage. Charlos' appearance in a play within a TV show reiterates the trend of American audiences growing fascination with plays that go awry and the comedic effects of an unobservant stage manager.

Plays that go awry share a common trait, a subpar stage manager. Stage managers who are overly involved in the emotional drama of the cast or focus on the minor mishaps end up damaging the production. Stage managers' energy has a lasting effect on the outcome of the piece. Playwrights poke fun at stage managers, but by only characterizing them as incompetent or disorganized teaches through opposition. As a teaching tool, these stage managers are examples of what not to do.

Stage Manager as Narrator

Marking Time

In a more practical function, playwrights use stage managers to affect the audience and characters' perception of time. The stage managers in *Six Characters in Search of An Author*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, *Our Town*, *The Will Roger's Follies* and *Curtains* keep the play progressing. Using stage managers as time keepers can be compared to how professional stage managers manage the breaks and schedule during the rehearsal process. Using the stage manager character to notate time changes solves the ever present problem of conveying the passage of time.

The stage manager in *Six Characters in Search of An Author* decides the work schedule. The foreman and stage manager argue about the needs of the production in relationship to the schedule (Pirandello). The stage manager sees the larger production's

schedule rather than the individual priorities of company members. The stage manager must be able to balance everyone's work needs and time limitations.

La Cage aux Folles' stage manager, Francis also keeps time during the run. He serves as a reminder for the actors and the audience about the time constraints of the production. He calls out "Five minutes to top of show. No one listens or moves. FRANCIS throws his hands up in frustration" (Fierstein 41). The ignoring of Francis shows how the performers are more concerned with themselves than the production. Performers become completely reliant on stage management to remind them of time and do not take responsibility for their own schedule. Stage managers keep the performers schedule and time which allows them to focus on the art.

Our Town's stage manager manages time on a broader scale. The stage manager informs the audience of the passage of time in the characters' lives. He says, "Three years have gone by...Some babies that weren't even born before have begun talking regular sentences already" (*Our Town* 44). The play seamlessly jumps forward in time thanks to the stage manager's brief explanation. The stage manager bears witness to the families' events and thus navigates the passing of time with ease. Wilder's stage manager acts as a chronologist and time keeper fulfilling the obligation of stage manager to document and preserve art.

The production stage manager in *The Will Roger's Follies* also works as a chronologist. Peter appears in Act 4, when Mr. Ziegfeld complains that by the stage being shut down. Peter explains that there has been "a general economic collapse" and the Follies closed (Stone). In this scene, the stage manager grounds the play in the time period. Peter acts as a narrator and help to explain the current situation. Stage managers

often spend the most time with a production which allows them to be a landmark for the passage of time.

Remembering the Past

Stage managers also establish the framework of the plays by providing character histories and given circumstances. The stage manager in *Our Town* takes a vested interest and care in characters' lives. He has distinct opinions about the characters and the course of their lives. For example, he writes of Joe Crowell, "Joe was awful bright--...Going to be a great engineer, Joe was. But the war broke out and he died in France --All that education for nothing" (*Our Town* 7). The stage manager's reaction to Joe's death illustrates his sadness for the loss of potential, the destruction of dreams. The stage manager is a part of every aspect of Grover's Corners. Stage manager characters straddle multiple layers of reality.

Laughing Stock's stage manager, Sarah, is the unofficial historian for the Playhouse. For example, she recalls the antics of a particular actress stating, "The one [actress] who cried all the time because she thought she was pregnant by the Troll King" (Morey 42). Sarah has a light hearted irreverence when it comes to the quirks of actors. She humorously dismisses actors' delusions. She also remarks on the Playhouse's traditions, "Because everybody has gotten up on stage and everybody has sung that stupid song [Auld Lang Syne] every closing night of every season for sixty-seven years since the theatre started" (Morey 66). Sarah's grudging recollection speaks to her obligation as morale and camaraderie. Stage managers that have a working knowledge of their actors' personality quirks and background tend to have more success in sculpting solid relationships.

Guiding the Characters

Wilder's stage manager in *Our Town*, not only keeps time and maintains the characters' history, but guides the characters through their world. The stage manager pulls the audience into the emotions of the characters. He implores, "And particularly the days when you were first in love when you were like a person sleepwalking...Will you remember that, please? (*Our Town* 58). The stage manager's function allows the audience to have a vested interest in the characters, to experience the play rather than merely observe it.

He bridges the realm of the living and the dead. In Act 3, the stage manager acts as Emily's guide, when she has a chance to observe the land of the living. Wilder's stage direction reads, "She looks questionably at the STAGE MANAGER, saying or suggesting: Can I go in? He nods briefly" (*Our Town* 96). Emily asks for permission to step into her old home. This interchange demonstrates how the stage manager is the gatekeeper. Wilder places the stage manager character at the center of the play.

CHAPTER THREE

STAGE MANAGERS AND THEIR HUMANITY

In *Our Town* and *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told*, the characters move to the forefront. *Our Town*'s stage manager acts as narrator and witness, whereas *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told*'s stage manager becomes the puppeteer. Both stage managers exist apart from the other characters, but are reliant on the characters to define their role. Stage managers as principal characters have distinct functions that make them the center of the play.

Our Town's stage manager has been portrayed by stars such as Henry Fonda, Spalding Gray, Orson Welles, Frank Sinatra, and Hal Holbrook (*Our Town: A History*). Wilder originally wrote the role for a man, but in 1976 at Williamstown Theatre Festival, Geraldine Fitzgerald became the first woman to play the role, with many to follow afterwards. (*History of Our Town*). Intriguingly, Wilder also played the role of the stage manager for two weeks on Broadway and in summer stock productions (*Our Town: A History*). The star power behind this role illuminates the depth of the character. Making the stage manager a primary character allows for greater examination and understanding of the profession.

Rudnick portrays his stage manager in *The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told* as a God-like being. He crafts a parody of the creation story to deepen the divine aspect of the stage management persona. The stage manager says "Monday, go. Light, go. I love this" (Rudnick 3). Throughout the play, the stage manager continues to prompt the action. The stage manager facilitates the end of the biblical flood. She dictates, "Dove, go" (Rudnick 52). Rudnick juxtaposes key moments in the Bible with the syntax of how stage managers call cues. The style of cue calling in the United States invokes a sense of calm,

precision and is often times emotionless. Rudnick's use of this sentence structure in major moments in Christianity adds to his assertion of a disengaged God.

In addition to controlling the overarching action of the play, the stage manager also dictates the emotional and physical states of the characters. In Act 1, she manages the characters' reactions and relationships to each other. She dictates, "First simultaneous orgasm ever, go." (Rudnick 10). She crafts the world, determining how the characters react to one another. She regulates the characters' physical bodies and emotional states. Her power is over exaggerated, but holds some truth as stage managers must be aware of actor's mental health. The stage manager's matter-of-fact approach demonstrates the detachment that often comes with stage managers who overvalue their authority. Her clinical approach contrasts with the emotional state of the characters.

Finally, Rudnick allows for an interaction to occur between the stage manager and the characters that creates an open dialogue rather than simple dictation. Adam asks if the stage manager is God. She responds with, "Well I think I am" (Rudnick). Individuals' perceptions of themselves can dictate their actions. At the conclusion of the play, the stage manager leaves; requiring the characters to make their own decisions, unprompted. Rudnick's stage manager focuses on others' lives rather than forging her own relationships. She has pawns, not friends. The stage manager as a principal role allows her to have stronger and more distinct motivations.

Naming the Character

Noises Off marks a shift in stage managers becoming more central to the action of the play. Earlier texts such as *Six Characters in Search of An Author* and *Our Town* portray stage managers without names. The stage managers are simply listed as "stage

manager”. The early nameless stage manager characters also lack distinct personality flaws. Once stage manager characters have names, their shortcomings become readily apparent.

Michael Frayn’s characters have distinct personalities and relationships with the other actors. Both Tim and Poppy participate in subplots and entanglements whereas Pirandello and Wilder kept their stage managers away from the pettiness of the company. Frayn creates a stage manager *character*, rather than using the stage manager to fulfill the narrator functions.

In modern texts, stage manager characters work within the world as another character. In *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* character list the stage manager is not given a name. However, at the end of the play, one of the actors asks “who the heck is Celia?” to which the stage manager replies “That would be me” (Rayfield 21). Introducing her name later in the play exhibits the emphasis on her profession rather than personality. It is a running joke in the play that none of the students recognize the stage manager’s worth and she feels slighted. Names have distinct importance in defining who we are and how others treat our name is a clear mark of respect.

Conversely, Theresa Rebeck’s play *The Understudy* does not draw attention to Roxanne’s status as a stage manager, she is only listed as “Roxanne”. The playwright introduces her as a stage manager as the play progresses. Rebeck downplays the stage manager aspect of her character implying that Roxanne does not necessarily want to be a stage manager, but merely took the job out of necessity. Her ambivalence towards stage management shows her overall unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

The listing of the stage management team in *10 out of 12* is puzzling. In the character descriptions, the assistant stage manager, is listed by name, Jamie, whereas the Stage Manager is nameless (Washburn 1). However, we learn later in the production that the stage manager's name is Molly. Jamie has a more fleshed out presence onstage and is seen by the audience. Molly, the stage manager is only heard over a microphone or seen crossing briefly onstage. Washburn's listing choice draws a line between Jamie who functions more as a character with relationships and motivations and Molly who is a tool, a means to an end. Stage managers classified by their job detract from their worth as an individual; however, those that are given names are typically flawed and fail to perform the duties of stage manager. Portrayals of stage managers are either devoid of personality or disastrously flawed. Well balanced stage managers have yet to grace the page, while many actually do exist.

Ages of the Character

Another aspect of creating more realistic stage managers is listing their age. Characters with specific ages allow the playwright to comment on a particular type of stage manager. For example, Sarah in *Laughing Stock* is listed in her mid-40s. She is a career stage manager that is burnt out and is frustrated with the actors she works with. MJ, the *Inspecting Carol* stage manager, is described as "In her 40s. A realist. She long ago realized that the company hit bottom. She looks on now as a bemused observer" (Sullivan 3). The initial description of MJ sets the tone for the remainder of the play. Her age demonstrates the age of the theater as well. Other career stage managers include Johnny in *Curtains*, Kay in *The Habit of Art* and Francis in *La Cage aux Folles* that have

a similar brusque attitude with the actors. Middle aged stage manager in plays are world weary and dejected which illuminates how mid-career stage managers are perceived.

Younger stage managers have a single minded focus that prevents them from successfully executing their job. *The Shakespeare Bug* features a stage manager, Marybeth in her mid-30s. She is in between careers and takes a job at a start-up. She states, “Stage management is kind of my passion...Do you have health insurance?” (Slattery 9). Marybeth illuminates a relevant problem American stage managers have pursuing their art while still needing to make a living. Rayfield’s description of the student stage manager in *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* speaks to the experience and maturity level of the stage manager in this piece. Brandy asks the stage manager for the use of her cell phone and she refuses saying, “Mine is just for emergencies. My father said not to let anyone—“ (Rayfield 6). Her age and parental restrictions makes it challenging for her to successfully do her job. Debbie, the assistant stage manager, in *Buffalo Gal* also is incredibly naïve; however, the playwright uses her innocence as a tool to explain points to the audience. For example, she asks many questions about the given circumstance which allows the audience to receive background information.

The age of stage manager extenuates their personality quirks and informs their specific goals for stage managing. More details about the stage manager character make them realistic and approachable.

Women Stage Managers

The inclusion of women stage manager characters marks a change in how the stage managers are depicted (Appendix C). Adding women stage managers coincides with stage managers become more human and flawed. Wilder and Pirandello do not

specifically dictate that their stage managers are men; however, in the stage directions they both use the masculine pronoun to refer to the stage manager. Women stage manager characters have more defined relationships with other characters as well as possess more distinct character traits. In American society, women are characterized as being emotional and relationship driven. The playwrights consciously or unconsciously adhere to these stereotypes. The shift in women entering the stage management profession is mirrored by the inclusion of women stage manager characters. According to the 2015 Stage Manager's Survey, there has been a rise in women entering the profession. However, with the growing prevalence of women stage managers the primary tasks have shifted to being more caretaking rather authoritative.

Gender Bending

While early productions of *Our Town* had the role of the stage manager as a man, the text has enough flexibility for a woman to also play the role. Therefore, many women have been cast as the stage manager in *Our Town*. Wilder's choice to cast a man as the stage manager may be more a product of the time, rather than a conscious commentary on gender roles and stage management.

In contrast, Poppy's role as the assistant stage manager speaks to the perception of women in technical theatre. Poppy is listed as the "assistant stage manager", but performs more of the stage manager roles than Tim, who is the denoted stage manager. The choice to list Poppy as an assistant even though she clearly has more responsibility illustrates the historic and current gender bias that exists within the theatre. Furthermore, Poppy becomes overly emotional in Act 2 when she is unable to move past her personal feelings

and perform her job. Poppy's emotions detract from her ability to stage manager furthering the misogyny that perpetuates in tech theatre.

Women in Power

Stage managers have a position of authority in the rehearsal room; however, historically women are not viewed as leaders. The women stage managers struggle with asserting their authority and often feel the need to over compensate. For example, women stage manager characters have a sense of insecurity when defending their position and authority to other characters.

Abbot's Aggie is another stereotype; the conflict driven shrew. The mounting pressure of the unfinished script is evident in Aggie's short temper with the actors. Her inability to manage her stress is a common challenge for stage managers. She has a take-no-prisoners attitude that the actors rely on. For example, the intern Smitty exclaims, "Aggie may have to *push* me on-stage!" to which Aggie replies "And don't think I won't. I used to be a sergeant in the Paratroops. Everybody jumped--whether they wanted to or not." (Abbot 71). Aggie draws a parallel to a drill sergeant to validate her authority. Aggie's mention of her military experience serves to legitimize her authority.

The Habit of Art also portrays a stage manager who is driven by progress. Kay urges the play onward regardless of what problem has arisen. She values efficiency rather than artistic development. Portraying a somewhat pushy, single-minded stage manager shows yet another trope of women in power.

The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told stage manager also has a distinct, power hungry personality. Rudnick's stage manager immediately takes over the process to the

detriment of others. The playwright's satirical approach damages how women in authority are viewed. His portrayal of a woman stage manager reaffirms the misogynistic notion that women in power cannot be trusted. Once again, stereotypes about women are used to create a humorous situation. However, portraying women stage managers as caricatures colors how professional women stage managers are viewed. Although progress has seen many changes in the treatment of women, many still face severe gender bias and struggle to be viewed as fair and level headed.

Women in Emotion

The stage manager in *Habit of Art* attempts to strike a balance between nurturing and managing. Kay continually urges the play onward; whatever the issue she says that they will solve the problem tomorrow. With the director being absent, Kay feels the pressure to have accomplished something. Kay allows efficiency to dominate her perspective rather than listen to needs of the production. She must juggle the pressure of how to manage versus how to nurture.

In addition, the stage manager in *Inspecting Carol* leans towards the more maternal aspect of stage management. MJ brings chocolate kisses to rehearsal which she claims is her theatre tradition (Sullivan 11). Bringing food, specifically sweets, is a nurturing gesture and creates a homey feel to rehearsal. MJ embraces her femininity and

uses it to her advantage rather than attempt to distance herself from it. Women stage managers struggle with navigating through gender expectations and leadership roles.

10 out of 12, published in 2015, is the only play that portrays competent and skilled women stage managers. Molly, the stage manager immediately falls into the caretaking role when she asks the Lighting Designer, “Do you want an apple? I have apples” (Washburn 10). As the tech process is often grueling, Molly attempts to maintain some kind of positive energy flowing through the space. While she embraces the traditional nurturing aspect of womanhood, she uses it appropriately and to the benefit of the cast. The director inquires if it would be possible to remove the exit light, and Molly steadfastly refuses to allow safety to be thrown aside in favor of an artistic look. Molly balances her caretaking roles and safety responsibilities. Molly’s characterization marks a change in the perception of women stage managers. While Molly falls into the trope of a dull facilitator stage manager, her presence is a cause for hope that women may finally be written as equals.

Stage Managers as Lovers

With the rise of women stage managers, romantic relationships began to appear on the page. Regardless of the stage manager’s gender, the romantic relationship is with a man. The absence of lesbian stage management relationships highlights the patriarchy present in the theater. Stage managers are associated with authority and thus their male lovers strengthen their position.

Men loving Men

In *La Cage aux Folles* and *Drop Dead*, the stage managers have a romantic relationship with another man in the company. Francis in *La Cage aux Folles* engages in

a sadomasochistic relationship with Hanna, a drag queen. Phillip, *Drop Dead's* stage manager has a deep and twisted obsession with Victor, the director that drives him to murder multiple characters. In both instances, the men stage managers are the passive or submissive member of the relationship which undermines their role as stage manager. The pseudo-sexual violence inflicted upon them is an effort at heightened masculinity in contrast with the typical view of effeminate gay men. The abuse, albeit pleasurable, demonstrates the conformity to traditional gender roles. Playwrights make heteronormative generalization by scripting gay stage managers as weak or insane.

Francis' sado-masochistic relationship with Hanna is yet another source of comedy in the musical. Hanna has sado-masochist tendencies that manifest in Francis' many injuries. Like Poppy, Francis work is peppered and distorted by his affections for a performer. For example, Fierstein describes their relationship dynamic, "HANNA cracks her whip and points offstage and FRANCIS rushes off". (Fierstein 42). Although Francis exudes his authority with La Cagelles, he melts in the hands of his lover. Francis' lack of professionalism regarding his affair with a performer influences how other Cagelles perceive him. Actor-stage manager relationships have the potential to create an uncomfortable dynamic for all of the performers.

Drop Dead becomes more and more outrageous as does Phillip's interactions with Victor. Phillip is called upon when the director needs someone to demonstrate the proper stage slap. The author writes, "Mr. Le Pewe 'slaps Phillip with such force his script and clipboard fly into the audience'" (Van Zandt 42). Van Zandt continues on that Phillip enjoyed the severe pain of the slap. "Victor and Phillip inhale and exhale together, in lust" (Van Zandt 43). This brief moment between Phillip and Victor speaks to a deeper

connection between them. Similar to Hanna and Francis, there is a sado-masochist element to Victor and Phillip's relationship that both seem to enjoy. The submissive aspect of Victor and Phillip in their romantic interludes detracts from the stage managers' authority.

Women loving Men

Similar to their male counterparts, the romantic relationships with women stage managers affect their job performance and establish key plot points. *Noises Off* and *The Understudy* each feature a stage manager in a relationship that adds to the chaos of the play. Their tumultuous liaisons add further insight into their objectives and moral codes. In *Laughing Stock*, Sarah's divorce reveals her strong connection to the Playhouse. Her failed marriage contributes to her complicated feelings about summer stock. The stage managers in *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* and *The Shakespeare Bug* are driven almost entirely by their romantic desires, shirking responsibility in favor of romance. The women stage managers' amorous intentions reveal a deeper part of their emotional personality.

Poppy in *Noises Off* and Roxanne in *The Understudy* both allow the stirrings of their heart to affect their job performance. As the play progresses, Poppy quickly becomes sucked into the chaos of the backstage world. Poppy's heartbreak at Lloyd's rejection and new relationship with Brooke, an actress greatly affects her work. She is unable to hide her intense resentment for Brooke and creates more disunity backstage. Her anguish transforms her into a cliché jilted woman, no longer concerned with her professional obligations. Similarly, Roxanne loses her composure when forced to relive she felt when Harry left her, she screams "I'm telling you I can't even finish my

sentences that's how mad I still am about it" (Rebeck 33). Roxanne's rage forces her to leave the room and neglect the rehearsal. Both Poppy and Roxanne experience heartache and allow it to consume them. The portrayals of these women allude to the stereotype that women are incapable of keeping their personal feelings out of the professional sphere.

In *Laughing Stock*, Sarah's romantic relationship illustrates her close ties with the Playhouse. Sarah and Gordon have a close friendship and in the final scenes reveal that they were once married. The revelation so late in the text allows her to form her own identity before being associated with a lover. Her marriage to Gordon establishes how tight knit the company is at the Playhouse. Despite potential awkwardness between them, both return to the Playhouse to work together. Their marriage is almost an after-thought, making it insight into given circumstances rather than a pivotal moment.

In contrast, the romantic relationships in *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* and *The Shakespeare Bug* highlight the characters' motivations. Celia, in *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* becomes embroiled in the drama when she asks about Trey's love life. She perpetuates the rumors regarding who is dating whom, in order to facilitate her own romantic aspirations. Celia neglects her obligations in pursuit of romance. Marybeth, in *The Shakespeare Bug*, is infatuated with Leonard, the married director, and once the Shakespeare Bug infects her she professes her love. Marybeth quickly morphs into the villain in this production when her love consumes. She morphs from stage manager to villain demonstrating that stage manager are not viewed as lovers and stage manager simultaneously.

The emotions of women stage managers move to the forefront when discussing their romantic relationships. Men in relationships are characterized by pseudo-sexual

violence, whereas emotion, hysterics and sentimentality drive women. Stage managers' romantic relationships detract from the professionalism of the stage manager, regardless of gender. Although the stage managers have romantic aspirations, they cease to act like stage manager once they reveal their desires making them almost two separate characters.

In the romantic relationships portrayed onstage, men are always a participant. However, the plays examined in this thesis fail to include the presence of lesbian stage managers. Television shows like *Orange is the New Black*, a dark comedy about women's prisons, makes mention of lesbian stage managers. *Orange is the New Black's* characters, Pennsatucky and Big Boo have a conversation about homosexuality in theatre. Pennsatucky asserts "That's [making musical references] like the gayest thing on the planet, and even I know that" to which Big Boo responds "That is an ugly stereotype about gay men. Everybody knows my people [lesbians] are stage managers, not performers" (Makris). In her crass way, Big Boo highlights that many stage managers are lesbians; however, no playwright has yet to explicitly explore a lesbian relationship with a stage manager. The 2015 SM Survey notes that 24% of the women who answered their survey identify as within the LGBTQ community (SM Survey). The lack of representation does a disservice as the literary presence of stage managers marginalized a vital group. The mention of lesbian stage managers in popular culture is a positive step towards inclusivity. The playwrights desire to align stage manager with historical positions of dominance subconsciously dictates the exclusion of lesbian relationships.

Relationship with Director/Producer

Stage managers' professional relationships with the director or producer provides insight on a power dynamic. The stage manager in *Six Characters in Search of An Author*

looks to the Producer for guidance and direction. Tim's relationship with Lloyd, the director, in *Noises Off* is fraught with discontent and sarcasm. The director and MJ in *Inspecting Carol* have a solid working relationship. In a rehearsal room, the stage manager's relationship with the director/producer is key to a successful process.

The stage manager in *Six Characters in Search of An Author* acts almost like an assistant to the Producer, affirming and deferential. From the moment that the Producer enters the space, the stage manager is close at hand. Every request the Producer makes is met with a bright "Right you are!" from the stage manager (Pirandello). The requests vary from adding more light, changing scene or taking notes. Pirandello has crafted the essence of a stage manager, albeit a bit devoid of personality. This stage manager could be considered an ideal stage manager, but lacks the humanity to draw the audience in. An appealing stage manager is beneficial in the real world, but forgettable onstage.

Both Poppy and Tim have a strained relationship with Lloyd, the director. Lloyd's interactions with stage management highlight the pitfalls of a stage manager-director relationship. Lloyd has a dry sense of humor that gives an edge to the interchanges with stage management. For example, Lloyd espouses, "And God said, 'Poppy!' ... And there was Poppy and God said, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fetch Tim to fix the doors'" (Frayn 24). Lloyd likens himself to God demonstrating his perceived superiority over the stage management team. His lack of respect toward stage management also occurs in real world situations. How a director interacts with stage management influences actor's perceptions; therefore, Lloyd's belittling affects the production immensely. Frayn's characterization of the director-stage management relationship shows how this dynamic can have a lasting effect on the production.

In contrast to *Noises Off*, the director in *Inspecting Carol* recognizes the importance of the director-stage manager relationship. The director claims, “It is your [the stage manager’s] job to push me” (Sullivan 17). She relies on MJ to help push the play forward. In true partnership, directors and stage managers build a solid foundation in the rehearsal room.

Director as Stage Manager

The play within a play conceit exists throughout the course of Western Drama. For example, Quince in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* takes on the role of a director-stage manager hybrid. Often times, Quince is thought of as the director of the players; however, he completes tasks that fall under a stage manager’s purview. Quince hands out parts, sets rehearsal schedules and also highlights technical difficulties such as the need for moonlight and a wall (Shakespeare). Quince may not be readily thought of as a stage manager, but is in word and deed. Shakespeare uses Quince to push the action forward and set up the parameters. Quince is the forbearer to stage managers as devices for audience clarity. Unlike the modern stage manager, Quince is cast in the play. Quince shows the evolution of stage managers, as an actor who steps up to organize.

In *Stage Kiss*, there is a distinct absence of the stage manager; however, the director often functions in the stage manager’s capacity. The director calls breaks, prompts the actors and runs the technical rehearsals. Although the director acts as a stage manager, he acknowledges there is not a stage manager present. He hollers, “We need to spike the furniture. Take ten! Duct tape! Where is the duct tape?! Where is the stage manager?!” (Ruhl 26). The director’s mention of the stage manager seems strange as the stage manager is not present in the subsequent rehearsals or tech. The absence of the

stage manager demonstrates an incomplete construction of the world of the play. A contemporary play within a play missing a stage manager can be perceived as a lack of attention to detail and inconsistent development of character.

Despite the absence of the stage manager, the tasks and responsibilities of the position still need to be performed thus the director steps into the role. Oftentimes in smaller budget productions, the director must act as the stage manager. Therefore, an analysis of how a director acts as a stage manager is equally important as it demonstrates the challenge of balancing practicality with artistic intention. *Stage Kiss* provides a lens to examine how directors' and stage managers' functions are interlaced. In the rehearsal room, directors have been known to call breaks, ask for spikes, and many other tasks that typically fall under the stage manager's realm of responsibility.

Stage Managers as a Group

In addition to a director acting as a stage manager, numerous plays include prompters, assistant stage managers and even a Supreme Stage Manager. *Six Characters in Search of an Author* has both a stage manager and prompter whereas in *Play On!* Aggie serves as stage manager and prompter. The prompter's primary responsibility is to be on book to prompt the actors with their lines and stage directions. Currently, prompting frequently becomes delegated to the assistant stage manager like in *The Habit of Art* and *Buffalo Gal*. *Noises Off* and *10 out of 12* feature stage management teams, a stage manager and an assistant stage manager. Finally, *The Shakespeare Bug* has both a stage manager and a Supreme Stage Manager, a mythical god-like being. Plays with multiple stage manager characters allow the audience and readers to see how stage managers interact with each other. Each stage manager has a different approach to the job

therefore having multiple stage managers allows the playwright to compare and contrast styles.

Prompters

The prompter in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* creates clarity of location for the team. Pirandello first describes the Prompter in the stage directions as, “...carrying the prompt copy rolled up under his arm...waiting for the PRODUCER to come and start rehearsal” (Pirandello 2). The Prompter is more of observer in rehearsals rather than an active participant like the stage manager. Similar to the stage manager, the prompter helps to set the tone of the scene. He reads, “The house of Leone Gala. A strange room, half-dining room, half study” (Pirandello 4). The reading of the stage directions for *Rules of the Game* is vital to clue the audience in to what is being imagined onstage. The presence of a prompter gives us a historical record of how stage management has changed. In *Six Characters in Search of An Author* the stage manager and prompter rarely interact, almost as if they are part of two different departments. Pirandello’s characterization of the prompter and stage manager provides more details into stage management history. While the practice of prompting still remains strong in the rehearsal room, the duties of Prompter fall on a member of the stage management team.

Abbot in *Play On!* lists Aggie Manville as both the stage manager and prompter marking a change. However, the listing of both titles indicates that the playwright views them as separate responsibilities. As the prompter, she maintains the changes to the script. She interrupts rehearsal to ask about changes stalling an already glacially paced rehearsal process. Adding the duties of prompter onto a harried stage manager leads to an

inefficient process. In the tightening of theatre budgets, the stage manager ends up compensating for eliminated positions.

In both *The Habit of Art* and *Buffalo Gal*, the assistant stage manager serves as the prompter. George in *The Habit of Art* practically feeds all of the lines of the actor (Bennett 3). He is unable to engage in any other tasks because of how heavily the actors rely on him. Similarly, Debbie must continually give the lines to Amanda in *Buffalo Gal* as she insists on quoting from the script. The assistant stage managers as prompters are not able to perform any other duties because the actors choose to use them as crutches.

Assistant Stage Managers

Noises Off introduces the assistant stage manager. She is arguably more effective than Tim the stage manager. Throughout Act 1, she fetches props, informs actors of changes, and prompts them with lines. She often times appears more capable than Tim at managing the rehearsal. In Act 2, Poppy calls most of the cues taking on the role of a calling stage manager. The reversal of roles adds to the confusion backstage. Assistant stage managers, at times, can be more in tune with the needs of cast as he or she is backstage and able to gauge the energy.

While Poppy completes her tasks with ease, she and Tim are unable to work together as a team. Throughout Act 2, Poppy and Tim making various inaccurate announcements to the audience which demonstrates their lack of communication with one another. Lloyd frustrated, yells "... I can't sit out there and listen to 'two minutes...three minutes...one minute...two minutes'!" (Frayn 86). The disorganization of the team adds unnecessary tension backstage. At the top of Act 3, while Tim is making the live hold-please announcement, Poppy proceeds to make one over the P.A. The public

shortcomings of the stage management team make it all the more apparent how stage management can set the tone for the production.

The Habit of Art stage management team also struggles with disunity. Kay treats George as an underling, rather than a colleague. She lashes out at George for correcting an actor's line in an attempt to mask her own mistake of inadvertently insulting an actor (37). Having a fractured stage management leads to an uneasiness and negative energy in the rehearsal room.

In contrast, *10 out of 12*'s stage management team works well together to the benefit of the production. Jamie takes care of any issues that arise backstage, but also properly reports the necessary information to Molly (Washburn). Jamie and Molly's relationship is strictly professional, devoid of any of the hijinks that Poppy and Tim, making it considerably less interesting. However, capturing the camaraderie and friendship of a stage management team is exceedingly challenging for playwrights. An amalgamation of Frayn's more human stage managers and Washburn's strong team would be a closer example of what happens in rehearsal rooms.

The stage management team for *Buffalo Gal* illustrates a gap in experience which is often common in regional theatre. Roy, the stage manager, has worked on numerous shows even turning down a lucrative touring production to work in Buffalo whereas Debbie, the assistant stage manager, is an intern from the local university (Sullivan). Roy obviously does not trust Debbie as it constantly checks her work and reprimands her. They operate less as a team and more as a mentor-apprentice relationship.

Supreme Stage Manager

The Shakespeare Bug has two stage managers that have a mentor-student dynamic. The Supreme Stage Manager is a mythical stage manager who appears to Marybeth when she is at her lowest. Slattery describes the Supreme Stage Manager, “She wears a headset, and has a belt full of keys. She’s barely audible as she talks into her headset (lights change as she does so)” (Slattery 59). Slattery playfully mocks the image of stage managers. The author uses classic depictions of stage managers to quickly indicate profession to the audience. She further embraces the stereotype when stating, “Come to our next ORG-SM meeting, Marybeth. I’ll forward the agenda. Watch for my friendly reminder email” (Slattery 60). The mention of the friendly reminder pokes fun at how stage managers take care of their colleagues. The appearance of the Supreme Stage Manager is a turning point for Marybeth. Having a stage management mentor to emulate is key to the nurturing of young stage managers.

Stage Managers as Villains

Three of the plays examined in this thesis are murder mysteries establishing the possibility of a trend. In *Drop Dead* and *Curtains* company members are killed, whereas *The Play that Goes Wrong* is about a murder mystery play. *Drop Dead* features a killer stage manager and *Curtains* has a stage manager who provides the final clue after his untimely death. Anne in *The Play that Goes Wrong* fills in for the ingénue who has been rendered unconscious. Murder mystery plays utilize a stage manager as someone who is able to move behind the scenes. Stage managers step into murder mystery stereotypes; the killer, victim and ingénue. They play dual roles adding to the hilarity and intricacy of the piece. Also, the stage managers in murder mysteries have strong exterior motivations making them move beyond their job function.

Stage managers are often tasked with delivering bad news. In *Annie Get Your Gun* and *La Cage aux Folles*, the stage manager drives the play by introducing the next obstacle. Roxanne in *The Understudy* also acts as the mouthpiece of the producers and delivers the news that show is closing. How each of these stage managers handles informing others of disappointment addresses a necessary diplomatic skill for budding stage managers.

In *Annie Get Your Gun*, Charlie introduces obstacles that make the musical more dynamic. Charlie hires Annie after seeing her sharpshooting skills, kick starting the central storyline. He informs Annie of the financial ruin of the Wild West Show and Pawnee Bill's lack of funds. Charlie introduces every key obstacle in the production making him the engine of the musical. Stage managers often must push the play onward and make unpopular decisions for the greater good. Charlie's focus on the show rather than the individuals illuminates an approach to problem solving.

Like Charlie, Francis frequently sets up the problem at hand. For example, he brings in the telegram to Georges from Jean-Michel which sets up the central conflict. Francis introduces the latest obstacle allows him to further the play and prevent it from becoming stuck on the same problem for too long. Francis acts as a messenger rather than an active participant demonstrating another approach to problem solving.

Roxanne in *The Understudy* informs the actors of upsetting news and assists in finding a positive solution. The actors immediately clash with each other and demand that Roxanne call the producer to justify their selection of the understudies. She answers the actors' questions and mitigates the tension. Like many other stage managers, Roxanne balances the desires of producer and actor. She attempts to put a positive spin on the

situation. Furthermore, Roxanne receives a call from the Producer that the play will be closing. The two actors decide that they would like to run the show one last time. Roxanne quickly agrees and the play ends on a positive note. *The Understudy* depicts a stage manager who is forced to be the mouthpiece of the producers with no real authority of her own. Roxanne faces the brunt of frustration and has to move past it. Stage managers are sometimes seen as villains or the enemy even though it is not their role.

In *Drop Dead* and *The Shakespeare Bug*, the stage managers are literal antagonists. One of the primary functions of the stage manager is to melt into the background. Therefore, it provides a twist at the end of *Drop Dead* when the cast discovers Phillip's murderous deeds. Phillip uses his position as stage manager to gain access to his unsuspecting victims. In contrast, Marybeth is established early on as one of the antagonists. Once Marybeth becomes the villain, she no longer performs any of her stage management duties. She becomes absorbed into the corruption of Tricklebop Corporation. Stage managers as villains are distortions of power. Stage managers may perceive they have power, yet it is not power they wield, but rather the faith and trust that their colleagues instill in them. If a stage manager become entranced by power, they walk the fine line of becoming a villain.

Phillip quickly manipulates his stage management responsibilities as he sinks deeper into his delusion. Phillip binds and gags Alabama Miller, the disgruntled playwright, who attempts to enter the stage and disrupt the action. Phillip relies on his position as stage manager to justify his actions. The actors' relationship with Phillip allows him ease of access to every aspect of the production giving him the prime opportunity to discretely kill offending members of the company. The trust that stage

manager possesses sets up for the potential for abuse. Using Phillip as the villain, Van Zandt and Milmore demonstrate the reach of stage managers.

Marybeth separates herself from the stage manager role when she morphs into the villain. When the company becomes infected with the Shakespeare bug, Marybeth quickly becomes obsessed with city domination. Marybeth's obsession with the Witch App that is poised to infect the city illustrates how she has lost sight of her goals. She functions as the villain in her quest for power, yet after being visited by the Supreme Stage Manager she chooses to be a stage manager and saves the day. Slaterry crafts two separate motivations for her which prevents the creation of a murderous stage manager character.

Stage managers are frequently characterized as incompetent rather than malicious. To create a believable villain stage manager, playwrights ventured toward the extreme. Villain stage managers are a paradox, setting out to destroy what they are charged to preserve. In pursuit of the dearest desires, Phillip and Marybeth resort to violence. Stage managers that cannot control their visceral reactions become villains, albeit on a smaller scale.

Stage Managers as Actors

A few plays feature moments when stage managers function as actors to strengthen the plot. Wilder utilizes the stage manager in both of his works to play minor characters. The stage managers in *Noises Off*, *Inspecting Carol*, *Habit of Art* and *The Play that Goes Wrong* step in to save a show that has derailed. Stage managers as actors keep the action moving forward.

The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden stage manager maintains his stage management persona when he reads for other characters. He approaches the roles as simple tasks rather than being drawn into the world. Wilder's initial description of the stage manager illuminates his view of the stage manager's function. He writes,

He reads from a typescript the lines of all the minor characters, but with little attempt at characterization, scarcely troubling himself to alter his voice, even when he responds in the person of a child or a woman (*Happy Journey* 1).

His lack of enthusiasm demonstrates his practicality. Stage managers who choose not the play with actors distance themselves. *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*'s stage manager approaches most his acting roles as an obligation rather than engagement.

The neighbors that the stage manager portrays are women who provide details about Ma Kirby's life. Mrs. Schwartz and Mrs. Hobmeyer, two minor characters, inquire about Ma's family and her daughter. Their presence sets up the given circumstances. The stage manager also reads for Caroline's friends and Mrs. Adler who wish the family "safe travels". These characters set up the importance of the trip. Wilder uses the stage manager as minor character to keep focus on the family. Much like a stage manager reading at an audition, *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*'s stage manager provides an opportunity for the audience to see more interactions between the central characters and smaller roles. The stage manager's detachment in his portrayal of these characters affirm that they are more like props rather than fully defined characters.

The stage manager fully embraces his role as garage attendant emphasizing this character's importance. With a play centering on women's issues, having the only fully embraced character as a man shows the gender roles more clearly. The garage attendant flirts with Ma as he tells her his background. This interchange allows another side of Ma

to emerge. However, it is a man's presence that provides emotional insight rather than the women who merely state given circumstances. Wilder's choice to have the stage manager play multiple characters rather than casting more actors brings the focus to the family. Keeping the stage manager as the only "outsider" allows the audience's to be tuned in to the Kirbys rather than becoming distracted with other actors.

The stage manager in *Our Town* also steps into the characters' lives. Like *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden's* stage manager, he plays minor characters not covered by ensemble members. He first plays Mrs. Forrest, an older woman who tells a young man to stop playing baseball in the street. This seemingly inconsequential interaction demonstrates that the stage manager can directly enter the play. The stage manager also steps into the role of Mr. Morgan, the soda fountain proprietor. Wilder describes, "The STAGE MANAGER wearing spectacles and assuming the role of Mr. Morgan, enters abruptly from the right and stands between the audience and the counter of his soda fountain. (*Our Town* 62). As Mr. Morgan, the stage manager oversees a pivotal interchange between Emily and George. Doubling Mr. Morgan and the wedding minister allows the stage manager to witness the young lovers' important moments. Wilder's stage manager continually watches over the characters illuminating his strength and influence. Stage managers have the privilege of witnessing the creation of art. Wilder illuminates this ability by putting the stage manager at the heart of the central romance. He simplifies the stage manager's role by making it relatable.

The stage management team in *Noises Off* enters the world of the play in an attempt to alleviate the problems. In addition to playing stage hand and gopher, Tim acts as an understudy for whichever actor has gone missing. During the dress rehearsal, Tim

goes on as the Burglar when the actor cannot be located. Poppy also receives a Burglar costume in case she needs to go on. In this instance, the stage management team is called upon to solve any and all problems. In the final pages of the play, Tim goes on as both Philip and the Burglar. The actors playing Philip and the Burglar eventually arrive and chaos ensues with Tim and the actors attempting to play the role. Despite the disastrous result, Tim's attempt to play the Burglar highlights the nature of stage manager to keep the show going.

The stage manager in *Inspecting Carol* also plays some of the minor characters due to budget cuts. She is forced to play the "female population of London" (Sullivan 1). The theater has undergone extreme monetary crises resulting in the founding members taking on many other roles. Despite her stepping in as an actress, MJ continues to function primarily as a stage manager insisting on wearing her headset even while onstage and in costume (Sullivan 64). She also dissolves into hysterical laughter while onstage demonstrating that she is ill equipped to be a performer (Sullivan 93). The playwright emphasizes how MJ's primary role is still as a stage manager.

Both the stage manager and assistant stage manager in *The Habit of Art* perform acting roles during the rehearsal period. Actors are absent from rehearsal and the stage management team must read in for them (Bennett 5). Stage managers oftentimes fill in the gaps in the production. The roles that *The Habit of Art* team plays are abstract characters such as "music", "lyrics" or some sort of furniture. The stage management team becomes part of the set decoration and ensemble rather than actual human beings. Bennett's stage management team is used to solve his problems of introducing yet another set of actors.

Annie, the stage manager for *The Play that Goes Wrong*, becomes too entrenched in being an actress and neglects her stage management duties. Annie goes on for Florence after she has been knocked unconscious and she reads the script verbatim without emotion or regard to acting style. Much like Wilder's stage managers, Annie is unable to transition between actor and stage manager. Despite her lackluster performance, she continues to attempt to play the role of Florence, even after the actress regains consciousness. Annie resorts to physical violence in to continue performing. Stage managers as actors is a strange situation in which the observers now become active participants. With the growing trend of holistic theatre practitioners, the ability to move effortlessly between disciplines becomes more important.

Most recently in the opening of the *Gypsy of the Year* 2015, the stage manager becomes a part of the dance. The number features Walk the Moon's *Shut Up and Dance* where the stage manager is forced to perform because an actress has dropped out at the last minute. (Broadway Cares). The performance highlights that without actors why is there a need for stage managers. Stage managers at the core are there in service of art, and will do just about anything to keep the show afloat. This most recent example shows how the stage manager can play hero and will inevitable save the day.

Stage Managers as Heroes

Stage managers read for characters in order to solve a problem for either playwright or play, yet only two plays utilize the stage manager as the solution to the central conflict. In the murder mystery, *Curtains*, Johnny, posthumously reveals the killer bringing a resolution to the play. In *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone*, Celia finally recalls where the cell phone is and once again solves the problem. Stage manager solve

many problems through productions; however, the best solutions are collaborative efforts. Therefore, the stage manager characters as part of the whole story is indicative of reality.

Curtains' stage manager plays a key role in the plot of the play. Johnny gives the final clue in discovering the murderer. Lt. Cioffi reports,

Johnny knew his killer, he only had seconds to live, couldn't write, couldn't speak. His bloodstains on the stage tell us he dragged himself to get his call book, and ripped out this one page on which he'd written the words 'Drop in Planet Earth' (Holmes 88).

Johnny even in his final moments attempts to serve and aid the production. The enigmatic nature of the clue adds to the dramatic tension. Johnny gives the characters the tools they need for success like stage manager often do. His untimely death forced the actors to forge on rather than look to him for answers. Stage managers strike a balance between supporting actors and trusting in their ability.

Celia in *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* also solves the problem in the final moments of the play. She discovers the missing phone in the valuables box implying she had it in her possession the entire time. In contrast to Johnny, Celia's forgetfulness causes the central conflict. *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* plot revolves around a single object making the resolution clear. Celia's role in the loss of the cell phone depicts an incompetent stage manager. Celia follows common stage management protocols, but does not fully grasp her job. Her preoccupation with the actors' actions inhibits her ability to see her own. Non-stage managers only see the results of stage manager actions and not the motivation behind them which creates a limited understanding of the profession.

Actors as Stage Managers

Actors who have played stage manager characters look to the characters' motivations to inform their work. Actors in *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*, *Our Town*, *Noises Off*, *La Cage Aux Folles* and *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* shared their experiences with playing the stage manager character. The actors delved into the character objectives as well as function within the world of the play. Listening to actors' insights and observations provides yet another lens to look at how stage managers are perceived.

Gillian Kelleher performed the role of the stage manager in Wilder's *Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* at UC Irvine and graciously agreed to share her process. She delved into the prevalence of women stage managers of the period, as the original role was written for a man. She also commented on the uniqueness of the rehearsal room in which as the stage manager character she watches the play unfold, and she as the actress was watching the production's stage manager watch her, a strange dichotomy of observation (Kelleher). The observing the observed is something actors rarely have the opportunity to experience. Her observations demonstrate the importance of character and time period.

In speaking with an acquaintance, Sarah West, who portrayed the role of the Stage Manager in *Our Town* at a university in the Mid-West, she illuminated the function of this role. She discussed walking the bridge between the two worlds, she as the Stage Manager was the connection point between the audience and the world of plays (West). She was directed to give visible cues to the actors as well as communicate with the production's stage manager. She saw her stage manager character as the glue that brought

all the worlds together. Her experience highlights the emphasis of relationship building in stage management.

Actors who played Tim in *Noises Off* focused on his function. Bryan Knewton who played Tim adeptly described his character as “He was the guy trying to desperately to fix everyone’s problems, but just continuously failed” (Knewton). His portrayal of Tim focused heavily on Tim’s caring nature. Another actor highlighted how Tim is the polar opposite of most stage managers, the gopher or the lowest man on the totem pole, performing many of the menial tasks. However, this actor also noted how desperately Tim tried to make everything work. Hearing two different approaches to Tim shows the core of the character: his work ethic.

Sarah West also portrayed Poppy at her university in the Mid-West. Her experience with the production illuminated how Poppy functioned in the world of the play. She spoke of how in prepping for her character she drew inspiration from TV, film, plays, books and even a real life stage manager. She saw the character as a comedian rather than a harried stage manager. Her analysis of Poppy shows how actors draw upon many sources to craft a realistic character. Thus a believable stage manager character ought to have both flaws and strengths.

Authenticity of character is at the heart of an actor’s analysis. Michael Seltzer who played Frances in *La Cage aux Folles* during summer stock in Northern California illuminated Frances’ physical movements including shoulder tension, direct language and grimaces (Seltzer). He also noted that the use of props such as a clipboard and headset helped to solidify the character for him. Stage managers’ body posture carry themselves speaks volumes about their mental state.

Kelli Van Rensselaer who portrayed the stage manager in *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* also relied on movement to drive her character. She crafted a “stereotypical, flustered, busy, and upset” stage manager without a range of emotions (Van Rensselaer). She recalls that she had a set range of gestures which she could utilize which included tapping her feet, placing her hands on her hips and checking her watch. In having a limited amount of movements, she became aware of how stage managers have level heads and light hearted personalities. Limiting a character to a stereotype highlights the breadth of emotion that stage managers experience.

Finally, I had the opportunity to speak with Becca Schneider who played Roxanne in New York City. She and her director choose not to focus on Roxanne’s role as a stage manager. She noted that in the rehearsal room they discussed that stage management was not Roxanne’s first career choice and that she “fell into it” as a way to get consistent paid work (Schneider). The choice to detach from stage management shows that the team was more concerned with her as a person. Her response illuminates the idea of stage management as people.

The actors who played stage manager focused on them as people rather than their job function. The emphasis on back story, physical movement and behavior of the stage managers highlight the humanity of the character. The attention to the person first, then the profession is a very different approach than how stage manager is traditionally taught.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEFINING THEMSELVES

Stage managers' job descriptions are rarely consistent. The functions and obligations of a stage manager shift from production to production. Therefore, how stage managers define themselves also influences how they perform their jobs. Few plays explicitly describe the function of stage managers; however, the ones that mention it are very astute. For example, *Play On!* and *Drop Dead* describe the job duties of stage managers. *Curtains*, *The Understudy* and *The Shakespeare Bug* illustrate the emotional characteristics. *Habit of Art* illuminates an emotional aspect of acting. Lastly, Sarah in *Laughing Stock* and Roy in *Buffalo Gal* comment on the essence of theatre. These characters delve deeper into the motivations behind stage management.

In *Play On!* and *Drop Dead*, other characters inform the stage manager of what his or her responsibilities entail. For example, in *Play On!* Gerry yells at Aggie, "As stage manager, you're supposed to make certain everyone has all their props!" (Abbott 51). Gerry's remark directly outlines exactly what other theatre-artists expect of stage managers. Stage managers must compensate for other shortcomings. Furthermore, the characters in *Drop Dead* assert that stage managers must be aware of every situation. Victor bellows at Philip, "Stage managers don't say 'I don't know'" (Van Zandt 50). The subtext of Victor's frustrated outburst is that Phillip is no longer acting like a stage manager. According to their colleagues, stage managers must be accountable and responsible when others flounder. The comments of other characters outline expectations writing a better job description than any listing.

In *Curtains*, Holmes makes clear statements of what he views stage management to be. For example, Johnny's proclamation of his job description, "A stage manager is

equal parts psychiatrist, Mother Hen and Father Confessor” (Holmes 74). Johnny embraces the stereotypes of what a stage manager is and how the cast sees him. Stage managers often need to be all things to all people. Holmes sees stage managers as responsible for the mental and psychological state of the cast.

Rebeck in *The Understudy* also claims that stage managers need to be dependable and resourceful. For example, Harry describes,

Stage managers are not usually that high-strung. Normally, in fact, the stage manager is the one person in the theatre you’re supposed to be able to count on to keep her head. That’s the job description: To always have six kinds of duct tape, a pencil sharpener, Band-Aids, and a cool head (Rebeck 21).

The stage manager must be a jack of all trades who can solve any problem with simple household objects. Roxanne, however, is anything but those things. Rebeck illuminates that the image of a stage manager only shows one small facet of the whole person.

Defining stage managers by their opposites shows the danger of expectation vs. reality.

Slattery’s *The Shakespeare Bug* also exhibits a one dimensional stage manager character. The playwright incorporates a humorous description of stage managers. The Supreme Stage Manager says, “The Organization of Stage Managers... We’ve been managing plays since the days of Greek tragedy. We don’t crave the limelight; so it’s not accident you haven’t heard of us, aside from the occasional whisper in the dark of night” (Slattery 60). Stage managers are rarely seen by the audience and sometimes overlooked by their colleagues. Slattery continues on to say that stage managers are the unsung heroes. At the conclusion of the play, Marybeth cries out “When everything goes to hell, it’s the Stage Manager’s job to save the day!” (Slattery 65). Slattery asserts the stage manager holds the production together even in the darkest situations. The stage manager’s primary job is to ensure a successful theatrical experience.

In order to ensure a successful production, stage manager must accurately assess actors. Kay in *The Habit of Art* asserts, “Actors are like soldiers. The soldiers fear the enemy. The actors fear the audience. Fear of failing. Fear of forgetting. Fear of art” (Bennett 67). Observing and understanding one’s coworkers’ motivations creates a stronger relationship. Bennett’s analysis of actors speaks to the function of stage managers as shrewd observers.

Sarah, the stage manager in *Laughing Stock*, brilliantly comments on why so many people flock to the theatre. Sarah is pragmatic and understands how theatre fits into the world. She also speaks regarding the profession of stage management when she states, “Efficiency in the service of art is my watchword” (Morey 66). She sums up what stage management means to her and Morey in a single sentence. Finally, she cleverly puts into words, what so many of us feel in the theatre, “But it’s not the same. And you’ll learn that—when you find yourself at another theatre, trying to make plays and you really make is another little temporary family, which is, after all, what brought you into the business to begin with” (Morey 72). Sarah has adept observations about her profession and art that she is able to comment on theatre while doing theatre.

In contrast, Roy addresses why he specifically came to the theatre. He claims, “I love the stage because we have this reverence for language” (Gurney 75). For a stage manager, it can be difficult to articulate why one is drawn to the theater, there is not a tangible thing that we can hold onto, rather a feeling or a passion. Stage managers who can articulate why they love theatre often have a better sense of self and potentially lower burnout rate.

CONCLUSION

Playwrights have portrayed stage managers as villains, heroes, fools and lovers. The flawed qualities of the stage manager characters make them accessible and tangible. Stage managers are more than just paperwork and efficiency. The flawed illuminate the humanness of the stage managers. Allowing the flaws to be part of the story showcases the whole artist. Experiencing stage manager characters allows the profession to gain more attention and thus become more developed. Regardless of the many mistakes the stage manager characters make, their roles in the world of the plays show their relevance. Stage managers in the real world can look at these characters and find a portion of themselves in each of them.

Appendix A

Title	Author	Publication Date
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	William Shakespeare	1605
<i>Six Characters in Search of An Author</i>	Luigi Pirandello	1921
<i>Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden</i>	Thornton Wilder	1931
<i>Our Town</i>	Thornton Wilder	1938
<i>Annie Get Your Gun</i>	Herbert & Dorothy Fields	1946
<i>Play On!</i>	Rick Abbott	1980
<i>Noises Off</i>	Michael Frayn	1982
<i>La Cage aux Folles</i>	Harvey Fierstein	1983
<i>The Will Roger's Follies</i>	Peter Stone	1991
<i>Inspecting Carol</i>	Daniel Sullivan	1991
<i>Drop Dead</i>	Milmore & Zandt	1994
<i>The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told</i>	Paul Rudnick	1998
<i>Curtains</i>	Rupert Holmes	2006
<i>Laughing Stock</i>	Charles Morey	2006
<i>Ten Actors in Search of A Cell Phone</i>	James Rayfield	2007
<i>The Understudy</i>	Theresa Rebeck	2008
<i>Buffalo Gal</i>	A.R. Gurney	2008
<i>The Habit of Art</i>	Alan Bennett	2009
<i>The Shakespeare Bug</i>	Ken Slattery	2013
<i>Stage Kiss</i>	Sarah Ruhl	2014
<i>The Play that Goes Wrong</i>	Henry Lewis	2014
<i>10 out of 12</i>	Anne Washburn	2015

Appendix B: Plot Summaries & Production History

***A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1605) by William Shakespeare**

William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opens in Athens, where Hermia who is in love with Lysander is being forced by her father to marry Demetrius. Helena, Hermia's friend, loves Demetrius, who in turn pursues Hermia. The lovers Hermia and Lysander determined to be together, flee into the forest, where they encounter fairies and sprites. Also in the forest, Peter Quince and his band of players are rehearsing *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

Helena smitten with Demetrius learns of Hermia and Lysander's escape and reveals the plot to Demetrius. Demetrius, pursued by Helena, enters the forest vowing to kill Lysander.

While in the forest, Hermia and Lysander unknowingly become embroiled in a dispute between Oberon and Titania, rulers of the Fairies. Oberon insists that Titania give him a changeling child and she refuses. An enraged Oberon orders Puck to administer a love potion to Titania making her fall in love with the first person she sees. Oberon witnesses Demetrius rebuke Helena and commands Puck to give Demetrius the love potion as well.

Night falls and the four lovers slumber, Puck mistakenly gives Lysander the love potion instead of Demetrius causing Lysander to fall in love with Helena. Attempting to fix his error, Puck gives Demetrius the love potion too and he also pursues Helena. Driven by their enchanted love, Lysander and Demetrius challenge each other to the duel, but Puck intervenes and removes the effects of the potion from Lysander.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's brief history of the origins of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* demonstrates the reliance on audience imagination. For example,

In its original performances, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was presented in daylight on the simple thrust stage of an Elizabethan playhouse...No scenery and a minimum of props allowed the action to move swiftly and the audience to focus on the richly evocative language of the play. (Royal Shakespeare Company)

A Midsummer Night's Dream invokes a sense of play and light-heartedness in its themes and plot.

***Six Characters in Search of An Author* (1921) by Luigi Pirandello**

Six Characters in Search of an Author opened in 1921 at the Teatro Valle in Rome. The play catalogs the events surrounding a rehearsal of *Rules of the Game* that is interrupted by six characters insisting that they tell their story. The company actors initially ridicule and reject the characters, but soon become enthralled with their story. The characters, a Mother, Father, Son, Stepdaughter, Child (sometimes called Little Girl) and Boy are a family plagued by secrets and deception. The Father begins to tell the Director his tale. He and the Mother were lovers, but the Mother left him for another man whom she had three children with. The Stepdaughter, an angry, wounded young woman, reveals that the Father tried to solicit sex from her while she was in Madame Pace's hat shop.

After a brief break (read: Intermission), the characters continue to tell their story. The Father summons Madame Pace to the stage. She and the Stepdaughter act out the terrible scene that culminates with the young woman being forced into prostitution. The Director continues to grow more intrigued as more details are revealed. The story concludes with a tragic scene in the family garden. The Little girl drowns in the fountain, the Son shoots himself and the Stepdaughter flees the theatre. The remaining characters mysteriously vanish leaving the Director to wonder if it was real or not.

The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden (1931) by Thornton Wilder

The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden tells the story of a family taking a road trip from Newark, NJ to visit their eldest daughter Beulah in Trenton. The play opens with Ma putting the house in order for their trip while her two younger children, Arthur and Caroline come home from school. Ma's neighbors, played by the stage manager, inquire about Beulah's health.

Pa soon returns from the garage and the family climbs into the car. Along the way, the family comes upon a funeral procession and we learn that their eldest son died in The Great War. The family also encounters a garage attendant, eats hot dogs and picks flowers along the way.

The audience learns that Beulah has had a miscarriage and the family wants to go see her. Finally, they arrive at Beulah's home and the men head off to the Y while Caroline goes to play with the puppies. Ma and Beulah share a tender moment as Ma sings her daughter a hymn. This brief tale chronicles the joys and sorrows of this family.

According to Samuel French publishing house "*Happy Journey* was first produced November 25, 1931, at the Yale University theater in New Haven, Connecticut, by the Yale Dramatic Association and the Vassar College Philalethis, with *The Long Christmas Dinner*, *Love and How to Cure It*, and *Such Things Only Happen in Books*" (Samuel French).

Our Town (1938) by Thornton Wilder

Premiering in 1938, *Our Town* was an overall success for Wilder. Immensely popular on Broadway, *Our Town* won Wilder his second Pulitzer Prize. *Our Town* earned the Tony Award for Best Revival in 1988 and was nominated in 2003 (Bettman). It is also one of the most widely produced plays in high school and university theatre. *Our*

Town has also been translated into 30 languages, according to data compiled in 2000 (History of Our Town). *Our Town* is the most internationally known play that is examined in this thesis making the presence of the stage manager all the more intriguing.

The play begins with the stage manager introducing the audience to the town of Grover's Corners and its inhabitants. The plot focuses on the daily life of the Webb and Gibbs families. The characters pantomime the objects they use to prepare for their day. Act 1 concludes with Emily Webb and George Gibbs going off to school.

Act 2 opens with George and Emily preparing for their wedding. The residents of Grover's Corners eagerly share their opinion about the wedding. The stage manager jumps back in time to when Emily and George are in high school. The young lovers argue about George's growing pride and its effect on their relationship. Despite their nerves, the couple head down the aisle.

In the final act, the stage manager draws the audience attention to the cemetery and the characters that have passed away since the start of the play. The residents of Grover's Corners as well as out-of-town visitors attend Emily's funeral. She appears onstage and the stage manager gives her the chance to relive one memory. She selects her 12th birthday. The stage manager and Emily have a deep conversation about the preciousness of life. In the final scene, Emily looks on as her husband George weeps at her grave.

***Annie Get Your Gun* (1946) by Herbert and Dorothy Fields**

Herbert and Dorothy Fields' *Annie Get Your Gun* opened in May of 1946 and ran for over 1000 performances. Written by a brother and sister team, *Annie Get Your Gun* follows the story of Annie Oakley and Frank Butler. The musical begins with Frank and

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show arriving in Annie's hometown. In order to placate disgruntled townsfolk, Charlie, the show's manager, offers up a challenge for a local sharpshooter to compete against Frank Butler. The General Store proprietor hires Annie to compete for the small fee of \$5 and she easily outshoots Frank. Due to her skill, Charlie offers her a position with the Wild West show, much to the chagrin of Dolly, Frank's current assistant.

As the Wild West show travels the country, a stilted romance begins between Frank and Annie. However, when Annie performs a new, thrilling trick to draw crowds from the competing Pawnee Bill's Wild West show, Frank's ego is severely bruised and he leaves Buffalo Bill and Annie.

At the top of Act 2, the audience finds Annie in Europe having successfully received medals from various dignitaries across the continent. Despite drawing large audiences, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show has run out of money. Charlie suggests a merger with Pawnee Bill operating under the assumption that Pawnee Bill's has money, but no prestige.

Frank and Annie having spent time apart now, miss each other and hope to rekindle their love. Upon realizing that neither Wild West show has any money, Annie offers up her winnings to facilitate the merger. She and Frank share a romantic moment which is quickly ruined by Frank's realization that she has won more medals than him. In a fit of rage, they challenge each other to a shoot-out and stake her winnings as the prize.

The night before the shoot-out, Buffalo Bill and Charlie catch Dolly tampering with Annie's guns. However, the pair chooses not to repair the guns in the hope that Annie's loss the next day will reunite the lovers. Annie uses her tampered guns and loses

handedly. Despite the revelation that her guns are faulty, she chooses to continue to shoot with them and concedes the contest to Frank. Frank and Annie are reunited and the shows are joined together.

***Play On!* (1980) by Rick Abbott**

Rick Abbott's 1980 *Play On!* opened in mid-winter in California. Rick Abbott is a pen name of Jack Sharkey who wrote numerous plays under four different nom de plumes. On the surface, *Play On!* possesses many similar traits to *Noises Off*, Janice Arkatov adeptly points out, "What sets this 10-character comedy apart from Michael Frayn's "Noises Off," she adds, is that in the other play, the theatergoer has a backstage view; in "Play On," the show is performed *to* the audience". In *Play On!*, the audience does not see the backstage, but rather sees and hears the results of the backstage hijinks.

Play On! follows the hijinks and pitfalls of putting on a new work. Similar to the style of *Noises Off*, the audience sees the production in various stages of completion. Act 1 is a rehearsal, the playwright has been making changes and the actors are unable to keep up. The director promises that the playwright will not be at this rehearsal, but halfway through the playwright arrives with more revisions. The actors mounting frustrations add to the confusion of producing a new work.

Act 2 is a dress rehearsal where more revisions have been made leading to an even more exasperated cast. The deck hands and stage manager spin in circles trying to adapt to the rapidly changing process.

In Act 3, the audience sees the performance of the play. The playwright continues to interfere, sitting back stage with the stage manager, and insisting on holding a key

prop. The playwright interrupts the curtain call to give her personal view on theatre, the entire production is left in shambles.

***Noises Off* (1982) by Michael Frayn**

Frayn's *Noises Off* first began to take shape with a one act, *Exits* in 1977 (Rogers). The playwright's inspiration for *Exits* and later *Noises Off* came from his reaction to a "slightly chaotic performance of Chinamen...noted that the play was 'funnier from behind than in front'" (Rogers). *Noises Off* premiered in 1982 and has had numerous revivals and remounts along with a film adaptation with Carol Burnett and Michael Caine (Rogers).

A play-within-a play, Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* chronicles the tech rehearsal and performance of *Nothing On*. Each act shows a different point in the rehearsal process. Act 1 is the dress rehearsal where it quickly becomes apparent that the cast is underprepared. Dropped lines, missed cues, misplaced props and unclear motivations pepper the rehearsal while an undercurrent of tension fills the room.

Act 2 jumps forward a month and the audience now sees a matinee of *Nothing On*. This Act takes the audience backstage where the play rapidly declines. The actors have now learned the majority of their lines, but their personal relationships take an enormous toll on the production. Love triangles, missing actors, and overinflated egos run rampant.

By some miracle, the play is still running and in Act 3, the audience sees the final performance. With the actors now completely embroiled in petty grievances and allow their emotions to dictate the production. In a futile attempt to continue with the play, a few actors try to ad lib through the remainder of the play. When the curtain falls, it is

almost a relief that the actors are no longer struggling through the play. This play focuses on the backstage relationships and the affect they have on the overall production.

***La Cage Aux Folles* (1983) by Harvey Fierstein**

La Cage Aux Folles is based on a 1973 French play by Jean Poiret that opened in Paris at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal (History of *La Cage*). *La Cage Aux Folles* graced the silver screen with Robin Williams and Nathan Lane as the central couple. The musical version of *La Cage aux Folles* by Harvey Fierstein.

Fierstein is one of “America’s first few openly gay major celebrities,” (PBS.org). According to a PBS review, Fierstein, wrote, “the amusing book of the sumptuous, popular Broadway musical adaptation, ‘La Cage aux Folles,’ earning a third Tony in the process”. Fierstein’s comedic timing and unabashed approach leaves the audience and reader laughing throughout the production. Fierstein’s stage manager is no exception.

La Cage Aux Folles is a meet-the-parents tale that goes drastically wrong. Jean-Michel, the son of Georges and Albin who own a gay night club in Paris, brings his new fiancée and her parents to meet his family. Jean-Michel’s fiancée, Anne has conservative parents who would not approve of Georges and Albin’s gay relationship.

The musical opens with a performance at Georges’ nightclub and true to form, Albin refuses to go on and must be cajoled onstage. Jean-Michel informs his father of his engagement, but asks that Georges ask Sybil, Jean-Michel’s biological mother to be present, rather than Albin, the man who raised him. Georges hesitates and fears the emotional injury that Jean-Michel’s request will cause Albin, but reluctantly agrees.

A reticent Georges tells Albin of Jean-Michel’s request and foolishly suggests that Albin attend the dinner as the masculine “Uncle Al”. Hilarity ensues as Georges and

Albin's friends attempt to teach Albin how to appear manlier. Ever the unreliable woman, Sybil telegrams Georges and informs him that she will be unable to attend. Albin dresses up as Jean-Michel's "mother" to try and salvage the evening. While at dinner, Albin forgets himself and reveals his true identity much to the shock of Anne's parents. Anne refuses to be swayed by her parents and expresses her desire to marry Jean-Michel.

The press becomes aware of the Dindons', Anne's parents, association with Georges and Albin which could prove ruinous for their political career. Georges offers to help them escape unseen in exchange for their acceptance and approval of the marriage. Set against the backdrop of the Parisian gay nightclubs, *La Cage Aux Folles* tackles issues of acceptance, understanding and family.

***The Will Roger's Follies* (1991) by Peter Stone**

The Will Roger's Follies opened at the Palace Theatre in 1991 and ran for over 900 hundred performances. The brain child of Broadway power houses, Peter Stone, Cy Coleman, Betty Comden and Adolph Green. *The Will Roger's Follies* captures the well-known and celebrated aspects of Will Roger's life with many direct addresses to the audience.

The musical opens with Will telling jokes and setting up the premise. The chorus girls from the Ziegfeld Follies take the audience through key moments in Will's life. The first event is Will's birth surrounded by his "six single sisters" and father, Clem. Will grows up and leaves home to be a roper in Argentina. At the train station, which Mr. Ziegfeld promptly changes to the moon, Will meets his wife, Betty Blake. Will continues to perform putting his relationship with Betty on hold, until she confronts him in Texas

and they marry. However, married life does not settle Will. He, Betty and their four children tour the country.

Betty becomes fed up with her husband's performing ambitions and yearns to return to Oklahoma. Just as Will agrees to return to the ranch, he receives a telegram from Mr. Ziegfeld inviting him to join the Follies. Will accepts and uproots his family once again. He becomes well-known having performed across the globe for many notable dignitaries. He even attempts to run for office in the 1928 presidential election in which he loses handedly. Will receives film roles and is constantly on the road at the expense of his marriage and children. The musical concludes with the reports of his death in a plane crash in Alaska with his friend, Wiley. Will comes out one last time and wishes the audience a fond farewell.

Inspecting Carol (1991) by Daniel Sullivan

Premiering at the Seattle Repertory Theatre in December 1991, *Inspecting Carol* opens with a lost actor wandering on to the stage of the rehearsal of *A Christmas Carol*. The stage manager, M.J. dispatches him quickly and the actors begin to arrive for rehearsal. Almost immediately, things begin to go awry. Tiny Tim is an overweight, ill-behaved eleven-year-old that Bob Cratchit does not feel he can carry around anymore. Phil playing Bob Cratchit, then attempts to leverage his one-night stand with the Director, Zorah to gain more artistic input.

The rehearsal is interrupted by the arrival of the business manager who informs Zorah that the theater has lost their grant and is out of money. The National Endowment for the Arts is sending out one last evaluator to determine if the company will receive the funds. The actor playing Scrooge continues to make ludicrous suggestions that derail the

production such as the play ends before the audience sees Scrooge's redemption. In a fit of rage, the business manager reveals to the cast and crew that the theater is bankrupt and the founding members will be responsible for all of the debts.

The lost actor, Wayne, reappears and Zorah believes that he may be the NEA evaluator in disguise. In her confusion, Zorah begins to take Wayne's advice on directorial and artistic choices. Zorah then decides to hire Wayne as a member of the company and allow him carte blanche to make all the changes he sees fit. Wayne continues to seize more control of the theater; however, just before dress rehearsal, the real NEA inspector arrives.

The NEA inspector observes the players disastrous opening night. The Ghost of Christmas Past is costumed as a Mexican baby and Scrooge insists on speaking to him only in Spanish. The night continues to go from bad to worse, when the performance culminates with the actors accidentally spilling punch all over the inspector who promptly faints. Surprisingly, when the Inspector comes to, she loves the show and will be increasing the funds for the next year.

Drop Dead (1994) by Billy Van Zandt and Jane Millmore

Drop Dead opened in Los Angeles in the early Spring of 1994. Todd Everett, special to the *LA Times*, writes a strong criticism of the actors in the premiere. He asserts, "A problem with this production of 'Drop Dead' is that several of the actor's performances don't vary enough between playing bad actors and regular characters" (Everett). Written by the award winning comedic duo, Billy Van Zandt and Jane Milmore, *Drop Dead* is a fast paced farce.

Billy Van Zandt and Jane Millmore's murder mystery opens with the final dress rehearsal of the play *Drop Dead*. Hal Holst one of the actors has been murdered. The cast seems remarkably unfazed by the death of Hal and continues along with their disastrous rehearsal. The rehearsal suffers from missed entrances, dropped lines and malfunctioning equipment. At the end of Act 1, Sol the producer catches his buxom mistress, Candy Apples in a compromising position with another actor, Chaz. Before he can confront them, he is murdered and the cast begins to panic.

In Act 2, it is now opening night and Alabama Miller, the playwright, insists on being present onstage and interjecting his opinion over the character's lines. Phillip, the stage manager, efficiently binds and gags Alabama and unceremoniously removes him from the stage. Phillip feeds Miss Crawford's lines to her through a headset. While onstage, Miss Crawford acts out Phillip's death as it happens backstage. Mourning the death of the stage manager, the actors continue with the play. After the death of Alabama Miller and Miss Crawford, the play stops and the actors fear for their lives. Phillip is revealed to have faked his death and is the true killer, murdering anyone who he perceived as ruining Victor, the director's vision.

The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told (1998) by Paul Rudnick

Originally published in 1998, Paul Rudnick's *The Most Fabulous Story* begins at the beginning with Adam and Steve in the Garden of Eden. The characters' actions are controlled by the stage manager, a woman who thinks she is God. The stage manager in the Off-Broadway premiere is played by Amy Sedaris. Sedaris describes her portrayal of the stage manager as, "I dug no deeper than thinking of her as a stage manager who thinks she's God, as all stage managers do" (Sedaris qtd in Cashill). He quickly dispels

the notion that the stage manager is God, and more pointedly states that stage managers only *think* they are God.

Adam and Steve meet a lesbian couple Mabel and Jane as they face many Old Testament obstacles. They encounter a flood, a pharaoh as well as the baby Jesus and a heterosexual couple. At the end of Act 1, Adam and Steve break up.

Act 2 begins in present day New York City. Adam and Steve have reunited. On Christmas Eve, Jane and Mabel come to visit them in their apartment. Jane is about to give birth, and Mabel having miscarried her child struggles with her lover's pregnancy. Nevertheless, Jane and Mabel wish to marry and a rabbi is brought in to perform the ceremony. Jane gives birth mid-ceremony and Adam, who is HIV positive, reveals that his medication is not working. The characters reject the stage manager, forcing her to leave and the men move forward on their own at last.

***Curtains* (2006) by Rupert Holmes**

Curtains, book by Peter Stone and Rupert Holmes, opened in 2006 in Los Angeles. Stone wrote the original book and concept; however, he passed away before he could complete the project and John Kander and Rupert Holmes completed the work. A murder mystery similar to *Drop Dead*, *Curtains* follows a production plagued by ill fortune. The play begins with the actors performing the finale of a new musical *Robbin' Hood* where the star, Jessica Cranshaw, an extremely untalented actress, is murdered as the curtain falls. Lt. Cioffi arrives at the theater to investigate the murder of Jessica Cranshaw.

After the death of Jessica Cranshaw, the company hopes that the production will close, but the producer forces them to move forward with finding a replacement for

Jessica. Lt. Cioffi determines that the murderer must be someone in the production and the entire company is put under theater arrest. As the investigation progress, Cioffi falls in love with Niki, an understudy and hidden romances are revealed. While the cast re-stages a large production number, Cioffi bursts in and announces that Sidney, the producer, has been blackmailing the company into working on this production. However, before Cioffi can confront Sidney, Sidney is found dead.

With the death of another cast member, the company begins to suspect each other. Lt. Cioffi becomes more confused when many cast members reveal secrets giving each having a motive for murder. The stage manager, Johnny claims to know all the secrets, but is shot before Lt. Cioffi can ask him any more questions. Johnny leaves behind a perplexing clue. After deciphering Johnny's final message Cioffi announces that the murderer is Daryl Grady from the Boston Globe. Grady is in love with Nikki and did not want the show to move to Broadway. A chase ensues and Grady takes Niki hostage, but is quickly disarmed by Lt. Cioffi. The production continues and re-opens with a new finale of the show.

***Laughing Stock* (2006) by Charles Morey**

Laughing Stock has been produced in over a 100 amateur productions across the United States and Europe. Local newspapers write excellent reviews of this slapstick comedy, praising Charles Morey as a playwright and director. *Laughing Stock* is a quick comedy that highlights stereotypes present in Summer Stock Theater.

Charles Morey tells the story of a summer repertory theatre putting on productions of *Dracula*, *Charley's Aunt* and *Hamlet*. The play opens with the Gordon, the director showing off the performance space, read: Barn, to a lawyer turned actor. One of

their most influential and wealthy backers has demanded that her skull must be used as Yorick's in *Hamlet*.

The play skips forward to auditions where the actors' overinflated egos almost derail the entire process. At first company meeting, it becomes apparent that the season is set for disaster. The director casts himself in all of the lead roles, the overworked apprentices bumble about the stage. The stage manager is insubordinate and the actors forget what play they are performing. The Opening Nights are disastrous filled with missed cues, jumbled entrances. However, the play ends with the company nostalgically sings 'Auld Lang Syne' and look forward to the next summer at the theatre.

Ten Actors in Search of A Cell Phone (2007) by James Rayfield

Written for high school and community theatres, Rayfield's *Ten Actors in Search of a Cell Phone* follows the trials and tribulations of the lead actress, Brandy who has misplaced her cell phone. Brandy refuses to continue with the play until she finds it. Assisted by the stage manager, Brandy retraces her last steps. In the re-enactment of her last use of the cell phone, Brandy reveals that she started a rumor about her fellow cast mates and the majority of the company resents her. Celia, the stage manager, discovers that she collected Brandy's cell phone for safe keeping and has had it the entire time. With Brandy's phone crisis resolved, the actors take their places for the top of the show.

Rayfield's piece focuses on gossip and rumor mongering and how information is morphed when it travels through the grapevine. After hurt feelings and broken hearts, the play concludes with Brandy vowing to abandon gossip, only to have her now-found cell phone ring, and she continue to spread the rumor. Rayfield's writing encapsulates the

drama of high school and crafts a brief comedic look into the desperation and emotional state of teens.

***The Understudy* (2008) by Theresa Rebeck**

Playing predominantly in Off- Broadway and regional theatres, *The Understudy* encapsulates the romantic tensions and professional difficulties of an understudy rehearsal for an Off-Broadway Kafka production. Roxanne is surprised to discover that the understudy she is waiting for is Harry, her ex-fiancée, who has since changed his name. Jake is uncomfortable with the selection of Harry and immediately demands an explanation. Harry, in turn, ridicules Jake who is primarily an action film star. A gun prop goes missing, and the automation/lighting technician repeatedly misses her cues adding to Roxanne's stress.

As the rehearsal continues, more obstacles appear. Harry demands to have creative input in the role, even though the production has already opened. Jake and Harry consume the banana props while Roxanne searches for the missing gun prop. Laura continually brings in the wrong set pieces or sound cues forcing Roxanne to change her rehearsal schedule. As her frustration mounts, she reveals her heartbreak when Harry backed out of their wedding, two weeks before the big day. Jake comes to her defense as Harry continues to berate her.

The entire rehearsal comes to a disastrous climax when Bruce, the leading actor, accepts a role on a big action film and the producers elect to close the production. The producers to make more money if they close the show and Bruce buys out his contract, than if they replace him and continue the run. In light of the recent events, Roxanne calls

the rehearsal to a close, but Jake and Harry ask if they could run the show, just once, seeing as it is closing soon and Harry will not have a chance to perform it.

Buffalo Gal (2008) by A.R. Gurney

Premiering in 2008, Gurney's *Buffalo Gal* chronicles the return of Amanda to her hometown in Buffalo, NY. Marilyn Stasio writes of *Buffalo Gal*,

Set in a struggling regional theater, backstage dramedy blows a kiss to Chekhov with its plot about a fading TV star overcome with nostalgia when she returns to her hometown to play Madame Ranevskaya in "The Cherry Orchard". (Stasio)

The local theater is thrilled to have Amanda performing with them in hopes that she will help boost ticket sales. Upon her arrival Amanda demonstrates that she is widely out of touch how to work in the theater. She is overly emotional and insecure. In Act 1, Amanda learns that her grandmother's home is for sale and ponders purchasing it. Her old flame, Dan interrupts their rehearsal to profess his love for her and plays Amanda a song he wrote for her in high school. Torn between Buffalo and Hollywood, Amanda receives a phone call inviting her to audition for an upcoming television show. She leaves Buffalo to attend the audition, but promises to return.

Habit of Art (2009) by Alan Bennett

Premiering in London at the Royal National Theatre, *The Habit of Art* follows four actors through a rehearsal of *Caliban's Day*. *Caliban's Day* focuses on key fictionalized moments in the life of W.H. Auden. The stage manager, Kay, runs the rehearsal in place of the Director who is away. The playwright arrives as rehearsal begins causing significant tension in the rehearsal room.

Throughout the rehearsal, the actors break character to discuss the portrayal of Auden as well as the themes within the text. Fitz, having forgotten most of his lines,

becomes agitated and frustrated, lashing out at the playwright. Kay constantly attempts to smooth things over and quietly provides commentary about actors' experience in the theatre.

The Shakespeare Bug (2013) by Ken Slattery

Ken Slattery's *The Shakespeare Bug*, produced by Killing My Lobster in San Francisco, follows the turbulent journey of Hamlet, the son of a Shakespearan actor and director, through San Francisco as he those around him are consumed by the "Shakespeare Bug". At the start of the play, Hamlet has recently been fired from working for his uncle, Claud (read Claudius from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) who runs Tricklebop, a fictionalized company set on world domination. His girlfriend, Tiffany dumped him and found love in the arms of Hamlet's closest friend.

Hamlet watches as everyone around him slowly transforms into characters from some of Shakespeare's most well-known plays. His mother and uncle step into the pages of *Hamlet*, Marybeth the stage manager is greeted by Three Muni passengers (read Three Witches) and transforms into Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Tiffany and Larry play the star crossed lovers with a touch of mistaken identity and magic thrown into the mix.

As the evening progresses, Hamlet soon realizes that the Shakespeare bug will eventually be fatal to those around him. Larry dies in a duel with Hamlet while Marybeth in her quest for power has unleashed a "Witch App" that allows people to cast spells on each other. The Supreme Stage Manager, a mythical being, intervenes and reminds Marybeth of her true calling as a stage manager. Marybeth recalls that they are in a play and she can simply re-set the evening. She restores for the top of the production putting the world to rights again, with Hamlet being a bit wiser because of what he saw.

***The Play that Goes Wrong* (2014) by Henry Lewis**

Premiering in London's West End, *The Play that Goes Wrong* is a murder mystery play-within-a-play. The play opens with the stage manager, Annie setting the stage. The director comes over the PA system to announce the beginning of the production and alludes to the less-than-successful past productions

The company performs *Murder at Haversham Manor*. After the fictional murder is discovered, the actors are unable to carry the 'body' offstage due to a prop malfunction. The actor, playing the body chooses to walk offstage in full view of the audience. Annie continues to misplace or switch out props adding to the actor's confusion. The set slowly begins to fall apart, doors become stuck, pictures tumble off the walls and the second story of the set has started to collapse.

The leading actress, Sandra, is accidentally struck in the face with a door rendering her unconscious. The actors unsuccessfully try to carry her offstage. Annie, the stage manager, attempts to play the leading lady, Florence and does so with little talent. Inevitably, Annie is also hit in the head with a door and Trevor the sound board operator begins to read for Florence. Eventually, Annie and Sandra regain consciousness and are hell bent on playing the role of Florence inflicting physical harm on one another. The big reveal of the killer is upstaged by the antics of Annie and Sandra as well as the crumbling set.

***Stage Kiss* (2014) by Sarah Ruhl**

Stage Kiss written by Sarah Ruhl opened Off-Broadway in Spring 2014. *Stage Kiss* features a play-within-a-play and the romantic tension that builds when actors share a stage kiss. SHE is cast in a 1930s melodrama as the leading lady whose dying wish is to see her lover one more time. HE, playing the lover, is SHE's former lover still has

feelings for her. SHE and HE rekindle their romance while onstage abandoning their subsequent partners for each other. After their play closes, they move on to another play about a prostitute and member of the IRA. Their relationship quickly devolves as they remember old-hurts. SHE's husband and daughter arrive to see her performance and SHE reconciles with her husband recalling the steadfast nature of their marriage.

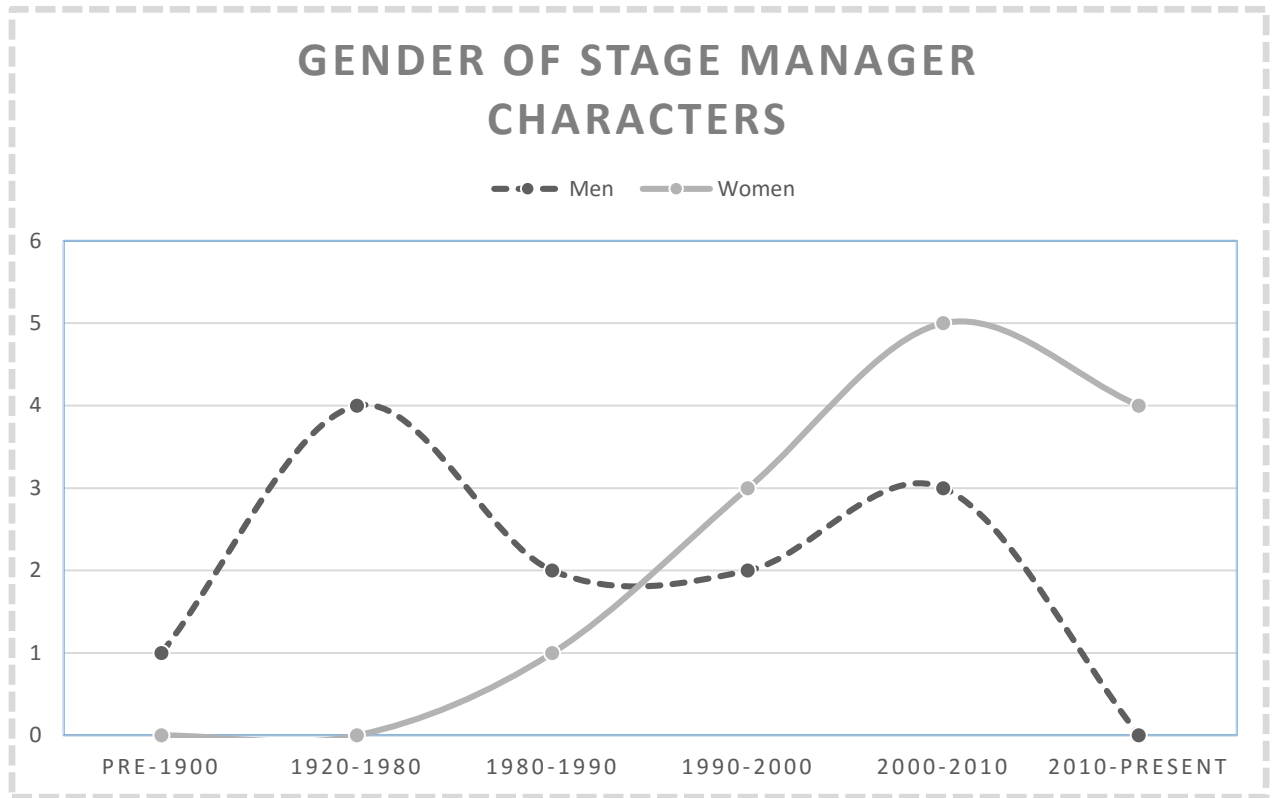
10 out of 12 (2015) by Anne Washburn

Opening in 2015, Anne Washburn's *10 out of 12* chronicles one day in the tech process. *10 out of 12* opens with the assistant stage manager, Jamie vacuuming and talking to various technicians on headset. We, the audience, quickly learn that we can hear what is happening onstage, and backstage via headset feed as well as for a brief moment: actors' thoughts.

Molly, the stage manager, prompts the room and the audience by explaining the goals of the day and how the rehearsal will be run. Actors repeatedly disappear, conflicts arise about wardrobe choices, the placement of cues, and the needs of each design area. As the day progresses, the problems continue to mount. The cast is worn down, the director is consumed by his vision, and the tech team is overworked. The day culminates with the E2 [Electrician] cutting himself with his exacto knife and refusing to go to the ER.

Washburn has adeptly captured the tech process with the many issues and obstacles that arise. She provides a unique window into a process that most audience members are unfamiliar with and her writing style accurately captures the antics of the tech process.

Appendix C



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