

BEYOND BLONDE: CREATING A NON-STEREOTYPICAL AUDREY
IN KEN LUDWIG'S *LEADING LADIES*

by

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ABSTRACT

BEYOND BLONDE: CREATING A NON-STEREOTYPICAL AUDREY IN KEN LUDWIG'S *LEADING LADIES*

To fulfill the MFA thesis requirements, I have the opportunity to play Audrey in Ken Ludwig's *Leading Ladies* as part of the 2008 UCF SummerStage season. *Leading Ladies* is a two act farce dealing with the shenanigans of two men, Jack and Leo, who impersonate Florence Snider's long lost nieces in order to gain her fortune. Audrey knows Florence and unwittingly provides Jack and Leo with the information they need to succeed in their scam. During the course of the play, Audrey and Jack fall in love and by the end of the evening, they are engaged. Ken Ludwig describes Audrey: "*She's about 20, extremely well-built, and extremely sweet and good natured. She's a knockout*" (20). Although this description focuses mainly on Audrey's appearance, her personality is also important. While Audrey possesses a certain kind of intelligence, she definitely has a unique view of the world that could be construed as naïve, innocent, or silly. Because of this lack of sophistication and the emphasis on her physical appearance, the phrase "dumb blonde" could be attributed to her as the blonde hair color carries specific connotations in contemporary culture.

American society possesses strong, if not basic, stereotypes for each color: the "dumb" blonde, the "intelligent" or "serious" brunette, and the "spitfire" redhead. In contemporary entertainment culture, blonde women have achieved unique status beyond the stereotypes

accorded to their brunette and redheaded counterparts. Revered and reviled simultaneously, these women cannot be ignored or dismissed. The convention of the “dumb blonde” is at the

heart of this issue. When scrutinized, it is possible to discern at least four distinctions of this stereotype: the perceived truly dumb, or innocent, blonde (Johanna in *Sweeney Todd*); the bombshell blonde (Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Mae West in *Dumb Blonde*); the dumb-but-actually-intelligent blonde (Elle Woods in *Legally Blonde*, Galinda in *Wicked*); and the comedic blonde (Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*,). These characters presumably share more than their hair color and sex. By researching these blonde stereotypes, commonalities will be discovered and assessed for their applicability in character research.

As this thesis explores the creation of Audrey in Ken Ludwig’s *Leading Ladies*, a methodology for creating this type of character will be created. Through research and analysis of the various blonde stereotypes, an in-depth character and script analysis, and a journal of the creation process, it is my intention to reveal how a non-superficial portrayal of this character is possible and can be duplicated. Audrey’s “blonde” traits will also be explored as they relate to the character’s function within the play, emphasizing the ways her specified bloneness serves the play’s needs. Analysis of the blonde stereotypes, script and character analyses, and the rehearsal journal will not only create a system for creating this type of character, but also will illuminate why this character type is important to comedic theatrical literature.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER TWO: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BLONDE	5
CHAPTER THREE: BLONDE STEREOTYPES IN THE UNITED STATES PRE- AND POST 1950.....	9
CHAPTER FOUR: BLONDE STEREOTYPES IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE 1950'S.....	16
A Woman's Place in the 1950's.....	22
Musical Theatre Blondes from 1950-2005.....	25
CHAPTER FIVE: SCRIPT ANALYSIS	33
Act One	33
Scene 1 (exposition and complication).....	33
Scene 2 (exposition)	34
Scene 3 (exposition and complication).....	34
Scene 4 (exposition and complication).....	35
Scene 5 (rising action and complication)	36
Act Two.....	37
Scene One (rising action)	37
Scene Two (rising action).....	38
Scene Three (rising action, climax, falling action, denouement)	40
CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTER ANALYSIS.....	45
CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTION AND DISCOVERIES	51
Vocal Production.....	51
Creating a Non-Stereotypical Character	52
Script Inconsistencies	54
Imitating Brando	55
Acting on Wheels	56
A New Scene.....	58
Three Shows at Once.....	58
Quick Changes	59
Kiss Me, Kate.....	61
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION	62
APPENDIX: AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY AND PRODUCTION HISTORY.....	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	68

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Is there something to the plethora of stereotypes concerning women's hair color? Does it signify to those around her what to expect from her as a person? Do these stereotypes provide a strong point of identification for an audience so a playwright would specifically notate the hair color of a character? American society possesses strong, if basic, stereotypes for each color: the "dumb" blonde, the "intelligent" or "serious" brunette, and the "spitfire" redhead. In contemporary entertainment culture, blonde women have achieved unique status beyond the stereotypes accorded to their brunette and redheaded counterparts. Revered and reviled simultaneously, these women cannot be ignored or dismissed. The convention of the "dumb blonde" is at the heart of this issue. Through research, it is possible to discern three distinctions of this stereotype prevalent in the 1950's: the ethereal blonde (Grace Kelly, Ingrid Bergman); the bombshell blonde who could also often be considered "dumb" (Marilyn Monroe, Rita Marlowe); and the girl next door (Debbie Reynolds, Doris Day). These characters presumably share more than their hair color and sex. By researching these, and other, blonde stereotypes, commonalities will be discovered and assessed for their applicability in character research.

With several blonde types available, how is an actress to decide which portrayal is appropriate for her character when faced with a role that calls specifically for a blonde, or a character possessed of traditionally ascribed "blonde" traits? During the summer of 2008, I was cast in Ken Ludwig's *Leading Ladies* as Audrey, the roller skating waitress. Through my character analysis prior to rehearsal, I discovered that the original actress, Lacey Kohl, was a blonde. My portraying the role as a stereotypically "dumb blonde" would be an undemanding and effortless choice. After consideration, I chose to use the role of Audrey for my MFA thesis

because of the questions raised in exploring how to portray the character onstage. Audrey's character in *Leading Ladies* does not fit into just one of the stereotypes; while she could be perceived as a "dumb blonde," she has her own unique intelligence. Her character description as a "knock-out" intimates her appearance may be used to manipulate men, both consciously and unconsciously. In addition, Ken Ludwig introduces her to the audience as a roller-skating waitress, an image suggestive of physical comedy in which she may engage. A full character analysis of Audrey will ascertain which aspects of the stereotypes might be included in her character and whether they are necessary.

How can the actress create a character who will appear three-dimensional and appeal to audiences instead of relying on stereotypes? Because of the prevalence of these stereotypical perceptions, an actor could choose to portray this character as one-dimensional. I propose there is an inherent depth to these characters. As stated, Audrey does not fall into just one of the blonde categories. She is created in the same vein as many well-known blonde characters. For example, in *Legally Blonde*, the character of Elle Woods uses other people's perception of her as a "dumb blonde" to hide her intelligence. By allowing others to underestimate her, she ultimately wins. Likewise, the bombshell blonde, such as Lorelei Lee played by Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, relies on her sex appeal to manipulate those around her into doing what she wants. On the surface, these portrayals appear so facile that the audience does not explore the depictions deeply; instead they accept the character completely. A subtle depiction of the stereotypes creates an exciting, believable performance, whereas an inexperienced actress, through reliance on the stereotypes, fails to comprehend the complexity of the character and will instead give a superficial performance failing to achieve the depth that can be found in the character. As a virtuoso musician can make the most difficult music appear easy

to perform, a strong actress can create depth for the blonde character that the audience does not question, allowing them to appreciate the character at a deeper level without realizing it. The actress portraying the character manipulates the audience in the same way the various blonde stereotypes manipulate the people around them. Through reliance on the audience's basic assumptions, the smart actress can create a realistic character with depth that the audience enjoys. A methodology for creating Audrey's character is explored in this thesis through a journal discussing the process of developing the character of Audrey from audition to final performance.

Finally, what aspects of the stereotypes must be included in the character and why? As stated earlier, Audrey is an amalgam of the various blonde stereotypes. Discovering how the various stereotypes impact the audience's understanding of a character will assist in creating a character with depth instead of merely portraying a one-dimensional stereotype onstage. Through an analysis of the script, it is possible to ascertain why specific aspects of the stereotypes must be included in Audrey's character and how they function within the structure of the play. Additionally, the character analysis and process journal assist in demonstrating how the stereotypes are implemented in the character portrayal.

As this thesis explores the creation of Audrey in Ken Ludwig's *Leading Ladies*, a methodology for creating this type of character will be created. Through research and analysis of the various blonde stereotypes, in-depth script and character analyses, and a journal of the creation process, it is my intention to reveal how an in-depth portrayal of this character is possible and can be recreated. Analysis of the blonde stereotypes, script and character analyses, and the rehearsal/performance journal will not only create a system for creating this type of

character, but also will illuminate why this character type is important to comedic theatrical literature.

As my MFA degree is in Musical Theatre Performance, I have included analyses of traditionally blonde characters in musical theatre: Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*, Sandy in *Grease*, Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Amber in *Hairspray*, and Clara in *The Light in the Piazza*. This will provide an in-depth look at the use of blonde stereotypes in the genre, specifically musicals portraying blondes in the 1950's, and how the perception of the blonde in the 1950's has changed through the decades. This analysis explores the question concerning whether these characters are stereotypical, and if they are, how the stereotype can be overcome.

CHAPTER TWO: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BLONDE

The iconic image of the blonde has been part of Western culture since ancient Greece. Immortalized in sculpture by Praxiteles around 360 BC, “Aphrodite of Knidos. . . was the first universal blonde, the world’s original model of sexual fantasy and power” (Pitman 9). In *On Blondes*, Johanna Pitman traces the Western world’s fascination with blonde hair, as well as its implications on society. The dichotomy of the blonde, simultaneously sought-after and reviled as superficial, is not an aspect of contemporary society only. Even in ancient Greece, blonde hair was both fascinating and disgusting, desired and detested, as seen in Menander’s tirade against blonde hair:

What can we women do wise or brilliant, who sit with hair dyed yellow, outraging the character of gentlewomen, causing the overthrow of houses, the ruin of nuptials, and accusations on the part of children? (Pitman 11)

This commentary on bloneness reveals the impact of hair color in ancient Greece, a state of being which has continued into the present day. Joanna Frueh, in *Monster/Beauty*, also comments on Aphrodite’s hair color as problematic: “Aphrodite’s hair represented her radiance, a quality we today so desire and misread that many women dye their hair blonde or wear a blonde wig in an attempt to be radiant” (267). Blonde hair was established as a hallmark of beauty and sexual attractiveness, as it was attributed to the goddess of love, and therefore became a signifier of these states.

When Roman civilization overtook Greece, the fascination with blonde hair continued as the Greek Aphrodite became the Roman Venus. However, as the Romans conquered more and more of Europe, women of wealth no longer had to rely on vile concoctions to dye their tresses.

Ovid's poetry rails against the use of dyes and supports the Roman system of kidnapping blondes to provide wigs:

I told you to stop using rinses—and now just look at
you!
No hair worth mentioning left to dye. . . .
Still, after our German conquests a wig is easily come
by—
A captive Madchen's tresses will see you through. (Pitman 25-26)

Perhaps the idea of the dumb blonde originated with the lengths women went to in order to achieve lighter hair. Even though the dyes used at this time clearly had a negative impact on hair health, as women experienced problems ranging from hair breakage to total baldness, but the need to be considered beautiful and sexually attractive outweighed the problems inherent in hair dye of the day.

Like the Grecian ladies before them, Roman women also attempted to feed the masculine desire for a Venus-like lover. As Pitman states, "Any shade of blonde, from ash to amber, would do, as long as it put [men] in mind of Venus and fed their fantasies" (31). In fact, certain shades of blonde became identified with certain occupations and social statuses:

The colour known as 'carrot yellow', for example, was said to be favored by high-ranking courtesans and was probably achieved using saffron. . . . Meanwhile, those described as having a 'white head', meaning heavily bleached blonde, marked themselves as women of 'not very serious intentions'. Could these have been the world's first recorded blonde bimbos? (31-32)

In this way, blonde hair, while still coveted, began to generate a negative connotation that would remain through the present day. During the Middle Ages, bloneness held the connotations of evil, as associated with Eve, and prostitution, Mary Magdelene. Several centuries later in Europe, the negative connotation brought on by blonde hair was firmly entrenched. For example, in 1775, Dr. John Cook offered a way to hide blonde hair in *The Lady's Magazine*:

Time was when golden locks were looked upon as very beautiful, and even the lass of golden hair was, for that very reason, the more eligible, and preferred before those of the sex who bore any different colour; but now the case has changed. . . . I freely proffer them the following short prescription. . . whereby they may privately offer. . . the disagreeable yellow hue of their hair into an agreeable black. . . (129)

Pitman notes blonde hair's association with shame, but further states that it soon became associated with stupidity as well (129). In the same year as Dr. Cook's ad, a courtesan named "Rosalie Duthe acquired the dubious honour of becoming the first officially recorded dumb blonde" (129). She came by this reputation by adopting the habit of pausing for extended periods of time before speaking. From this beginning, the stereotype was perfected almost two hundred years later. In this way, the blonde has moved from representing Aphrodite, beauty, and sexuality, to a creature encoded not only with these ancient ideals, but also with contemporary societal connotations such as stupidity, child-like qualities, and lax sexuality.

From the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century, difficulties in hair dyeing still prevailed. Ovid's ancient reproach to women who dyed their hair still applied. As stated by Rose Weitz in *Rapunzel's Daughters*: "Until the twentieth century, hair dyeing was difficult, unpredictable, short-lasting, and dangerous, often requiring women to use skin-burning lye and poisonous lead" (19). In 1868, however, with the arrival of Lydia Thompson and her British Blondes, blonde hair became popularized through the American burlesque theatre. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was an influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. According to Weitz:

As these immigrants congregated in the ghettos and factories of America's cities, native-born Americans, whose families had emigrated primarily from northern and western Europe, began regarding the newcomers as member of a dangerous, 'dark,' and

‘Mediterranean’ race. . . (20)

Lighter hair became prized as a symbol of a proper pedigree. However, dyeing one’s hair was still dangerous and considered risqué:

The obviously dyed blondes of the 1930’s movies—Jean Harlow, Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, Ginger Rogers, Joan Blondell—were usually depicted as brassy, brash, working-class, and openly sexual. . . (20)

At the same time, another blonde stereotype was being created: women whose hair seemed naturally blonde and who behaved in a manner reminiscent of a higher social class than Mae West and Jean Harlow. Grace Kelly, an American woman who fulfilled fairy tale stereotypes and married a prince, was an example of this second type of blonde. By this time, hair dyes had also become safer, resulting in a rise in the number of women coloring their hair blonde. The dyeing trend has continued to the present day, and blonde hair has become a topic in women’s studies, as seen in Natalia Ilyin’s book, *Blonde Like Me*.

From Aphrodite to today’s blonde stereotypes, the blonde inhabits a significant place in society. The state of being blonde conflates many images and issues that appear to be opposites: sexuality and innocence, stupidity and knowing, all-American and dangerous. For one hair color to contain so many dichotomies creates a mystique that must be investigated if one is to understand the implications of being blonde in American society.

CHAPTER THREE: BLONDE STEREOTYPES IN THE UNITED STATES PRE- AND POST 1950

Blonde representations in film prior to the 1950's experienced various permutations before the specific stereotypes found in that decade. In the decades prior to the 1950's: there were innocent blondes who were victimized by society and men, spunky, comedic blondes who were out to prove the adage "blondes have more fun," and gold-digging blondes who knew what they desired and used their appearance to achieve their aims.

In the 1920's, Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford were the first film stars to fall into these categories. According to Rose Weitz in *Rapunzel's Daughters*:

The first two great women stars were Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford. Although Pickford typically portrayed spunky and rebellious girls and Gish portrayed sweet girls, both always portrayed sexually innocent girls. To do so, both kept their hair in long, usually blonde, curls for years after other fashionable women switched to bobs. (14)

While Gish and Pickford exemplified an innocent blonde beauty, in the late 1920's, a new kind of blonde film star was introduced. The comic blonde was first epitomized in Mack Sennett's use of Carole Lombard in his "... late '20s bathing-beauty/college-athlete comedies" (Tremper 119). At the same time, Jean Harlow appeared in *Double Whoopee* in 1929 in a role traditionally "reserved for the obese and the unattractive, like Marie Dressler" (119).

Another blonde representation during the 1920's appeared on Broadway in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, a stage adaptation of Anita Loos's novel. June Walker starred as Lorelei Lee. Two years later, Marie Skinner played Phyllis Haver in D.W. Griffith's *The Battle of the Sexes* (131). The gold-digger of the 1920's combines traits of the ethereal blonde and the bombshell blonde; she is a blonde who appears sexually inviting, yet has a hidden agenda. The blonde

bombshell is best typified by Marilyn Monroe or Pamela Anderson; this blonde is beautiful and often perceived as “dumb.” The ethereal blonde was popularized by Alfred Hitchcock and is also referred to as a Moon Blonde by Natalia Ilyin in *Blonde Like Me*. Ethereal blondes are dangerous, and not always as they seem to be. Both types will be further discussed in the following chapter.

One of the best examples of a gold-digger, aside from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, is found in Roxie Hart, the murderess in the 1926 play *Chicago*, and the musical of the same name. Martin O’Brien, Rodanthi Tzanelli, and Majid Yar, in “Kill-n-tell (& all that jazz): The seductions of crime in *Chicago*,” deconstruct Roxie Hart’s bloneness and the danger inherent in her appearance. They trace her evolution, noting that “[t]he blonde Roxie (Renee Zellweger) that the film introduces in the opening scenes appears to be very different from the dark Velma” (255). Comparing Roxie’s naiveté to Velma Kelly’s (another alleged murderess) smooth, self-assured state of being establishes Roxie as an initial “dumb” blonde.

In fact, when Roxie is sent to prison for killing her lover, her lack of knowledge about prison life establishes her in this context which “is by tradition natural, untouched by the rationality of the world, devoid of knowledge about sexuality” (255). Although this does not appear to be the same dumb blonde portrayed by Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot, and Diana Dors, and instead bears more in common with the teenage girl-next-door blonde, O’Brien et al continue their comparison of Roxie to Monroe, stating:

. . . Roxie is glamorized to such an extent that she ends up looking (and acting like the sexual symbol *par excellence*: Marilyn Monroe. *Again* this reference is not coincidental because in the 1950's and 1960's Monroe signified the dumb blonde who, unlike the femme fatale of film *noir*, could not threaten male domination. (256)

What, then, could Roxie possibly have in common with Hitchcock's heroines? O'Brien et al fail to take into account the fact that Roxie is acquitted of murder and goes free, presumably capable of murdering another man. Similar to Alfred Hitchcock's ethereal blonde, Roxie is dangerous underneath; she is capable of subverting society because her sensuality does not remain repressed below the surface. Therefore, Roxie, for all her initial innocence in the jail, has more in common with the ethereal blonde, as her rich inner life bubbles to the surface and becomes her reality. Roxie is capable of substituting her desires in place of the male's, showing that once again, it is possible for a woman to upend the stereotype and subvert it to her needs.

After the stock market crash, the American film industry created a new type of blonde typified by Mae West. "By 1933, [she] was the largest box-office attraction in the industry (136). West, with her slow drawl, went against the clipped speech typified by movies of this period, and her "very ample hourglass figure" was also different from other actresses of the time (137). Tremper also reveals another difference between West and other film personalities of the day:

. . . she was also distinctive in another way, testing the limits of what might be said before the camera, making the representation of sexual desire, especially of feminine sexual desire, possible. (137)

West was the opposite of the ethereal blonde, and yet not the epitome of the bombshell.

Beautiful, earthy, and overtly sexual, West's blonde had no hidden agenda and made her desires

clearly and explicitly known. Jean Harlow was another blonde temptress of this period, first cast at age eighteen in the 1930's film, *Hell's Angels* (148). According to Tremper, Harlow was the first blonde actress to incorporate her blondeness into her acting (148). Harlow and West both, while playing sexual characters, portrayed “. . . another version of the sex goddess, but. . . one that. . . had no fatal consequences for the men who [come] under [their] spell” (148).

In this way, the decades leading up to the 1950's were primarily typified by blonde actresses who were “. . . [willing] to be both comic and sexual,” a distinguishing characteristic of actresses during this period (148). While there are certainly exceptions to this statement, and several blonde actresses not mentioned, the blondes before 1950 were not easily classified into specific categories. Some were innocent, some spunky, some comic, some sexual. However, they were all blonde.

After the 1950's, the women's liberation movement heralded a return to the comic blondes found in previous decades. Goldie Hawn in *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* typified the “dumb blonde.” Her high pitched voice and large eyes convey a childlike innocence, hearkening back to Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford. Donna Douglas as Elly May Clampett in *The Beverly Hillbillies* offered a character similar to Goldie Hawn's on *Laugh-In*. Both were beautiful, but innocent and therefore capable of foolish statements and humor.

In 1970, the movie *MASH* had Sally Kellerman as Major Margaret O'Houlihan, a blonde who was not having more fun. The butt of Hawkeye and Trapper's jokes, this blonde type was dangerous because she insisted on having an affair with a married man. “Hot Lips” O'Houlihan was a completely sexual being, the distillation of the 1930's vamps and the 1950's bombshell. *All in the Family* also played on television during the 1970's, with Sally Struthers as Gloria, the

main character's outspoken daughter. This character portrays a step towards portraying a blonde as someone other than a sexual object or a woman of low intelligence.

During the 1980's, blonde stereotypes continued to change. *Baywatch* perpetuated the bombshell, with Pamela Anderson running in slow motion down the beach in the opening sequence. However, *Heathers* and *Working Girl*, both filmed in 1988, offered differing views of blondeness which tempered the perception of blondes. Lisanne Falk and Kim Walker both played popular blonde girls in the film *Heathers*. In the film, the two blonde girls, led by a brunette, are popular but cruel to a female classmate. This film popularized the stereotype of the "blonde bitch," the popular girl who does not need to be nice to anyone. In *Working Girl*, Melanie Griffith plays a blonde, Tess, subjugated by her duplicitous boss. Choosing to fight, this blonde takes on characteristics of the gold-digging blonde to win; while her boss is home with a broken leg, Tess takes on her boss's job, creates a business merger that saves the company, and steals her boss's boyfriend. Although the audience is supposed to sympathize with Tess in her struggle, the means she chooses to accomplish her goal are decidedly underhanded. This shift in blonde portrayal in the 1980's provided an alternative to the girls-next-door, the Hitchcock ethereal, and the bombshells.

The 1990's also contained a shift in blonde types, bringing the advent of the blonde superhero. Pamela Anderson in *Barb Wire* and Kristy Swanson in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* portrayed blonde characters who save the world. Joss Whedon, creator of the poorly received *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* movie, took the concept to television, recast, and created a new blonde type. In the commentary for the first episode of the *Buffy* television series, Whedon remarks that his inspiration for the character came from horror movies and a desire to subvert the stereotype of the "little blonde girl who goes into a dark alley and gets killed in every horror movie"

(“Welcome to the Hellmouth”). In the first episode, he subverts this stereotype twice, as the first “little blonde girl” the audience encounters is revealed to be a vampire, and the second, the vampire slayer. Whedon describes Buffy as “. . . a girl who has no patience for a horror movie who is not willing to be a victim” (“Welcome to the Hellmouth”). Another stereotype subverted by Whedon is that of the popular blonde; in *Buffy*, the mean, popular girl is a brunette.

In the present, blonde stereotypes have continued in the trends previously witnessed. *Mean Girls*, a film from 2004, continues the vilification of the blonde which began with *Heathers*. Sarah Jessica Parker as Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City* brings the ethereal blonde into the twenty-first century. The *Kill Bill* films provide Uma Thurman as Beatrice Kiddo, a woman who, while not exactly bent on saving the world, continues the tradition of blonde-as-action-hero. *The House Bunny*, a 2008 comedy, presents Anna Faris as Shelley Darlington and capitalizes on the bombshell stereotype in a send-up of an out-of-work Playboy bunny. There has also been a resurgence of the innocent blonde, as seen in the *Legally Blonde* films (2001 and 2003) and musical (2007). In the films, Reese Witherspoon plays Elle Woods, an eternally hopeful and always comedic blonde, whose vocabulary does not contain the word “can’t.” The films are witty, and celebrate the triumph of goodness and niceness over badness and meanness. The musical provides a more tongue-in-cheek view, however, Elle (played by Laura Bell Bundy) is still essentially kind to others and her virtue wins the day.

Another musical theatre blonde, Galinda in *Wicked* (2003), provides a stereotypical popular blonde who is not what she appears to be. An exploration of the lives of the two witches of Oz, *Wicked* offers a Galinda the Good (played by Kristen Chenoweth) who has behaved as the blonde bitch during school, learned the error of her ways and developed a friendship with an outcast, yet will not stand up for what is right and therefore spends her life pretending to be

happy and good, all the while knowing she has sacrificed true happiness to maintain her popularity. This addition of a conflicted blonde aids in moving away from more popular stereotypes and invites exploration of why bloneness is indicative of certain traits and behaviors, as well as how an actress can move beyond the stereotypes into a more realistic and three-dimensional representation of the character.

CHAPTER FOUR: BLONDE STEREOTYPES IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE 1950'S

Three predominant blonde stereotypes existed during the 1950's. The first two, the blonde bombshell and ethereal blonde, were mature women and were popular in American film culture prior to the 1950's. The girl-next-door, a type created during the 1950's, offered an innocent alternative to the more adult stereotypes; however, these women were all being coded into a specific niche in the patriarchy.

In the 1950's, Marilyn Monroe's stardom solidified the role of the blonde in Hollywood. An entirely male creation to combat the independent women created by the war, Marilyn Monroe was the perfect antithesis to the career woman. This blonde served initially to keep women in a subservient place. As Frueh asserts:

In profound innocence of their own attractiveness, members of Blonde Bunnydom may serve as buffoons in literary and film narratives and objects of abuse in their personal lives. *I'm blonde, I've got big tits, and I'm an idiot*: the dumb blonde pacifies men's and women's fear of powerfully aesthetic/erotic women who know, like Aphrodite, what they are. (274)

Therefore, for those like Frueh, the bombshell blonde served only to assuage male superiority at the expense of female mental acuity. The United States was not the only nation participating in stereotyping blondes. Britain's Diana Dors (*Yield to the Night* 1956) and France's Brigitte Bardot, who shot to fame in *And God Created Woman* (1956), were similar to Monroe, but Dors "refused to accept the connotations of dumb sexuality," (228) taking the opposite approach of Frueh's "dumb blonde" and inverting the initial male creation. This refusal to be perceived as completely foolish also is found in Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the 1925 novel

which was adapted as a movie for Monroe, placing the quintessential dumb blonde in a role subtly subverting the patriarchy.

According to Laurie J.C. Cella in “Narrative “Confidence Games”: Framing the Blonde Spectacle in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Nights at the Circus*, “[w]hat makes Lorelei Lee. . . so appealing is her ability to manipulate her own image and effectively become mistress of her own grand confidence game” (47). The point of the “confidence game,” then is for the blonde woman to create a construction of herself which will inspire men to fulfill her desires. If recreating herself requires “slip[ping] into a male fantasy constructed just for a woman of her build and coloring,” that is simply part of the game to be played (53). The ultimate prize, men doing her bidding, allows the blonde bombshell to use “the presentation of blondeness as an excuse for misbehavior while simultaneously using that sign of feminine beauty to achieve her goal. . . .” (54-55). To this brand of blonde, the ends more than justify the means; blonde is not only who she is, but also the means by which she achieves her goals. Ultimately, the blonde bombshell is not as dumb as she appears. She takes the male gaze and subverts its expectations, playing by the rules while using them to accomplish her own goals. The fact remains that the bombshell blonde, for all her subversion, is essentially a male construction designed to titillate.

In *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, produced in 1953, Marilyn Monroe plays Lorelei Lee, the quintessential blonde bombshell. Initially, Lorelei appears as innocent as Audrey. However, it quickly becomes apparent that Lorelei’s innocence is an act. In front of men, she enhances her sex appeal, appearing childlike as she bounces on a bed, smiling and batting her eyes while posing provocatively, and protesting her lack of intellect: “. . . sometimes life is very hard for a girl like I, especially if she is pretty like I, and has blonde hair” (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*).

Lorelei's bloneness is a construct meant to portray her in the best possible light so she can achieve her aims.

Lorelei's act, the beautiful but dumb blonde who relies on men to take care of her, ultimately saves her. Throughout the movie, she plots and plans to take various male millionaires for all they are worth. She is engaged to Mr. Esmond, and uses him to finance a trip to France. Her engagement doesn't stop her from fleecing other millionaires, specifically Sir Francis Beekman, whose wife's tiara she finagles. She is caught in every scheme, but uses her appearance to get her out of trouble. As Mr. Esmond Sr. says, "They told me you were stupid" (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*). Lorelei's looks combined with her carefully concealed intelligence create a bombshell who is able to take care of herself.

Sugar Kane in *Some Like It Hot* provides another Marilyn Monroe blonde. *Some Like It Hot* (1959) directly influenced Ken Ludwig's creation of *Leading Ladies*, to the point where he deliberately pays homage to the movie through lines: in the play the character Jack (an homage to Jack Lemmon) says of dancing as a woman, "It's like a whole other sex," while in the movie, Jack Lemmon's character, Jerry, says this of trying to walk in heels for the first time. Like Lorelei, Sugar is a gold digger. Unlike Lorelei, Sugar does not possess the intellect to scheme for what she wants; Sugar relies on a trip to Miami to meet a millionaire and marry him. The machinations of Joe and Jerry take place around her; she is not part of their schemes, nor does she have a plan to ensnare a millionaire. Sugar is secure in the knowledge that her beauty and bloneness will secure for her the future she desires. This blonde bombshell is simply a blonde bombshell instead of a carefully created construct made to fulfill men's, and the blonde's, desires.

Filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock used a different blonde stereotype. Instead of the buxom ideal of male fantasy, Hitchcock chose “slim, elegant blondes. . . fine-boned ethereal actresses with a glint of repressed sensuality lurking beneath a smooth surface” (229). His favored leading ladies were “Madeleine Carroll [*The Thirty-Nine Steps*], Ingrid Bergman [*Spellbound*], Grace Kelly [*Rear Window*]” and “Kim Novak [*Vertigo*]” (229). Hitchcock’s view was:

The more left to the imagination . . . the more the excitement. . .
The conventional big-bosomed blonde is not mysterious. . . .
The perfect “woman of mystery” is one who is blonde, subtle,
and Nordic . . . (230)

Hitchcock’s blonde was no innocent, no baby doll, but “dangerous, their bloneness a beautiful but false color that hid something dark and threatening” (230). Natalia Ilyin in *Blonde Like Me* describes this blonde as a “Moon Blonde.” For Ilyin, the Moon Blonde echoes the crone aspect of the ancient triple goddesses found in myth, like the Irish Queen Maeve. This blonde fulfills “the role of erotic destroyer” (145). The moon blonde represents danger:

Our Moon Blonde is decadent. She is the projection of the female Shadow. She gives us an outlet for morbid fantasies. Everything about the mythical feminine that our society chooses not to recognize—every vicious, mean, aggressive, brutal, unforgiving thing about the dark side of woman—is expressed in our Moon Blonde. (146)

While the ethereal blonde may not be as overtly dangerous as the moon blonde appears, this commonality in these blondes is the possibility of danger, the clear representation of unknowable depths in the blonde. In this way, both the bombshell and ethereal blondes contain a dichotomy, an outer self that does not necessarily correspond to the inner life.

While these two stereotypes are very powerful and represent the subversion of male dominated society, the rise of television prompted “the indoctrination of teenage girls” (232). Frueh echoes this sentiment, stating “the Bunny Goddess also neutralizes the intelligence of

young, beautiful, blonde women” (275). This third blonde stereotype was “the chirpy, peppy, girl-next-door represented on screen by the ineffable winning characters of Debbie Reynolds [the series of *Tammy* movies], Doris Day [*Teacher’s Pet*], and Sandra Dee [*Gidget*]” (232). This particular representation moves away from the sexual adulthood of the bombshell and the dangerous maturity of the ethereal blonde. “These perky blondes. . . were inoffensive girls with a resolutely clean and unthreatening sexuality” (232), a reaction to the bombshell and ethereal blonde created possibly to reveal how blondes, or simply young women, should behave.

According to Marianne Thesander, “The term ‘teenager’ appeared at the beginning of the 1950’s and the fashion industry increasingly tuned in to the buying power of these young consumers” (157). At this time, Christian Dior created a new fashion called “the H-line, which started a rumor that the female figure was on its way back to the straight, flat-chested, tomboy shape of the 1920’s” (162). The H-line may have echoed the style in the 1920’s, but it appeared the great fashion houses of Paris had joined Hollywood in creating a view of the American woman as child-like, naïve, and innocent. This rise in a younger fashion style and the blonde girl-next-door on screens large and small provided recourse for women who felt uncomfortable with the representations of Bardot and Monroe:

Sexual morality for women was still restrictive. Young girls were supposed to require a lot of coaxing before they gave in and men would thus regard them as ‘nice’ girls—and if they did give in, other people would label them as less nice and warn them that they risked ‘going off the rails.’ Big-breasted sex idols such as Marilyn Monroe. . . were more a fulfillment of men’s dreams than an expression of female self-confidence. (169)

Therefore, women, particularly young women, were presented with images of the bombshell blonde who was always attached to a man. Because marriage was the goal of most women in this time, the male-constructed bombshell provided one image of how to get a man. However,

the seething sexuality of the bombshell was not considered marriage material. The teenage blonde presented an image of blondeness which remained within the morality of the time.

The rise of teenage culture represented “a distinct break with the attitudes and styles of adults. . . The concept included various modes of expression, both social and sexual” (171). However, even within teenage subculture, the women still “were almost invisible in those subcultures: their behavior and dress conformed with the norms. . . “ (172). Ultimately, the force behind the fresh-faced, innocent blonde was to provide a model for young women to practice attractiveness which would lead to marriage. Frueh, in her commentary on all blonde stereotypes, appears to gear her statements towards the teenage blonde: “The cult of the Blonde Bunny Goddess tries to convert women into girls, experience into innocence and vulnerability” (273). Although women now had a blonde stereotype providing a more innocent, less sexually aggressive manner of behavior, the stereotype still was a construction meant to keep women in a specific societal place.

According to Bill Osgerby in “‘So Who’s Got Time For Adults!’: Femininity, Consumption and the Development of Teen TV—From *Gidget* to *Buff*,” the character Gidget “represent[s] a model of conventional teen femininity” (Davis 71). She was based on a 1957 novel by Fredrick Kohner, which detailed the adventures of his daughter, Kathy. A movie version of the book followed in 1959 (75). Gidget, played by Sandra Dee, creates a teenager who not only wants the attention of young men, specifically Moondoggie, but also wants to be one of boys. This means she has a complicated relationship with her body; she is athletic in a time when young women aspired to “bring out the best in a man” (Gateward 60). Gidget represents a young woman attempting to live on her own terms, but who is caught in social norms which dictate how she will live. The representation of the young blonde woman, athletic

and outdoorsy, maintains childhood innocence while holding the connotation of an adult sexuality yet to be explored. This third stereotype provides an alternative to the repressed sexuality of a Grace Kelly and the overt sexuality of a Marilyn Monroe. The burgeoning sexuality of Sandra Dee and Debbie Reynolds presents a stereotype which brings a true innocence to the blonde, as opposed to an innocent act to snare men.

As men created stereotypes to contain the blonde's power, blonde women found methods to circumvent the strictures ascribed to them. This ability to shift the power from male to female is evidenced in the continued creation of blonde stereotypes through the 1950's. However, blondes were not the only women to have their war time personhood stripped from them. The changing social climate of the '50's as men returned home from the war, and therefore back to the jobs women had taken during the war, created a distinct view of womanhood during the decade. In order to explore stereotypical blonde behavior in Audrey, Ken Ludwig's bombshell roller skating waitress in *Leading Ladies*, an exploration of the woman's place in 1950's society must also be conducted.

A Woman's Place in the 1950's

The effects of blonde stereotypes in media took its toll on the female population. Eleanor Pollock, in a 1955 article in *Good Housekeeping* stated:

In my studies of blonde behavior, I have seen yellow-haired Dynamos who can repair cars, run offices, talk knowingly about the H-bomb, do anything a man can do and do it better. So long as there are no men around. Let one appear, and our golden-haired expert becomes as fragile and helpless as a doe caught in the headlights of an automobile at night. This happens almost overnight, even to blondes by choice. What's more, it works. I'd like to see any brown-haired damsel get away with it. She'd be treated as if she had rocks in her head. (233-234)

The impact of the male gaze in the 1950's, or today for that matter, is not limited to blonde women exclusively. However, the place of the woman was different in the 1950's than in contemporary society. Published in 1953, editor Elizabeth Bragdon collected a series of essays about and sometimes by women, detailing the state and plight of the modern American woman. Divided into sections entitled: "The Big Problem: Career VS. Home," "The Emotional Problems," "As Time Goes By" (which covers the fate of single women, widows, and aging women and assigns them to the margins of female society), "Roles A Woman Must Play," and "The Men's Corner," the essays, even those written by self-avowed feminists, primarily recognize that the woman's appropriate and most important sphere is the home, with careers, education, and other activities taking a distinctly lower place.

I.A.R. Wylie, in her essay "The Little Woman," introduces the 1950's woman as a subject:

It would seem that Woman, who by accepted tradition is always a woman before she is anything else, in counterdistinction to a man who may be first and foremost a poet or a plumber.
(Bragdon 14)

In this way, the woman of the 1950's, from the perspective of a woman from the 1950's, may be striving against the traditional roles ascribed to her, may notice the dichotomies and inequalities in the place of women and men, but really does little to invalidate the standing social structure. In another essay entitled "People In Skirts," author Worth Tuttle Heddon believes the modern woman should be educated and able to support herself because "No longer with modern education have women the right to allow their love lives to mean all in all to them," and "Women who wait for men to be able to support them before they marry are waiting to sell their love" (45). No mention is made of the woman who is able to support herself and is content to

live this way. The foregone conclusion in this essay is that a woman should be able to support herself and contribute to her household if need be until her husband rises in status and pay.

Margaret Meade brings a more contemporary sensibility to the problem, recognizing that “more and more women are getting an education, and more and more women are working” (68). These educated and working women, according to Meade, “are becoming increasingly conscious that something is wrong with women’s place in the modern world” (69). So far, and this does not draw an accurate picture of a woman in the 1950’s any more than the *Donna Reed Show*, we have women who, regardless of achievement or education, are considered women first, and second, whose ultimate goal is marriage. Margaret Meade’s view of a changing societal place for women shares space with another essay, “Demon Lover,” in which Katharine Simonds, a woman with publishing experience but whose first credential is being the “wife of a Boston publisher” (99), asserts: “. . . the American wife goes on making demands ever more outrageous, unconsciously longing to be refused, to be mastered” (103). Women of this era were in flux; there was something more out there for them, but with such a sharply defined sphere it was difficult to move from one state of being to another.

Thesander approaches this confusion in women of the 1950’s, stating:

A great deal of propaganda was put out in the 1950’s to keep intact the feminine ideal of the post-war boom years: the woman who could manage a household, make sure that her family thrived and at the same time stay looking young and attractive, as it was her duty to do. (173)

Therefore, women were caught, after having experienced life during the war as active, contributing participants in society and the work force, having to return to a way of life that no longer fulfilled all their needs. Christian Dior helped facilitate this return to female helplessness in his creation of the “New Look,” a “return to elegant femininity, a welcome trend after the

clothes rationing, poverty and rather masculine lifestyle and image to which women had been subjected during the war years” (Thesander 155). While this look was embraced across the West, it also raised criticism “. . . that the New Look promoted an old fashion ideal—of the female corseted into inaction. . .” (155). From the male perspective, now the war was over women could return to their rightful place in the home and to their place as ornaments in public. Some women, however, disagreed with this view.

Set in the 1950’s, Ken Ludwig’s *Leading Ladies* defies being ascribed to a specific year in the decade. Despite this foible, setting the play in the 1950’s brings Meg and Audrey, the young women around which the play’s romantic entanglements center, to the cusp of the women’s liberation movement in the 1960’s. The movement did not spring to life fully formed at the start of a new decade; rather women like Meg and Audrey began questioning women’s place in society prior to the 1960’s, leading to the liberation movement. In this way, *Leading Ladies* incorporates the traditional view of women, seen in the character of Duncan, who wants Meg to be a traditional, 1950’s housewife, and juxtaposes this view against the desires of Audrey and Meg, two independent thinkers who desire education, travel, and are willing to work for their dreams.

Musical Theatre Blondes from 1950-2005

As primarily a musical theatre performer, it is necessary for my research and methods of developing characterizations to be useful in musical theatre also. Analyzing *Guys and Dolls*, *Grease*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Hairspray*, and *The Light in the Piazza* provides additional insight into blonde stereotypes and their representations onstage. These musicals have two primary things in common: all are set in the 1950’s and all have an important blonde character.

Although these musicals are all set in the 1950's, they were written during different decades, providing a chronological view of blonde stereotypes and the permutations in these stereotypes over the last fifty years.

Frank Loesser's *Guys and Dolls*, with book by Abe Burrows and Jo Swerling, premiered on Broadway in 1950. Miss Adelaide is this musical's traditionally blonde character. As the quintessential 1950's musical theatre blonde, Adelaide falls into the bombshell stereotype. She is an aging cabaret singer who has been engaged for fourteen years. She wants nothing more than to marry her fiancé, Nathan, but his dedication to running "the oldest established permanent floating crap game in New York" has prevented this union for fourteen years (Swerling 13). Adelaide has a great deal in common with Lorelei Lee from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* as she admits to Nathan she has told her mother they are married with five children. Adelaide's simple solution to the problem is for them to actually marry. This simplistic attitude is also evident as Nathan tricks Adelaide into believing he has given up the crap game. When they meet in the street, Harry the Horse asks Nathan "Any news yet?" (17). Nathan's response, "Not yet, Harry, I'll let you know" prompts Adelaide to ask "What was that about?" (17-18). Nathan passes off the conversation as Harry being concerned about his first wife's impending birth. Adelaide wonders why Harry would ask Nathan for information, but Nathan easily deters her questions and manages to get two of his henchmen to take her to the drugstore. Even though Nathan's behavior is suspect, Adelaide accepts his excuses and explanations with minimal questioning, proving her place as a dumb blonde bombshell. Adelaide's acceptance of Nathan's statements at face value is a quality shared by Ken Ludwig's Audrey. This provides a direct connection between Adelaide and Audrey. However, the primary difference between Adelaide and Audrey is that while Adelaide is a complex character, she is still very stereotypical. The humor is

derived from her innocence and her anger when she discovers the truth about Nathan, which is similar to the character of Audrey, but there is nothing in the script of *Guys and Dolls* which would allow for a less stereotypical interpretation of Adelaide.

Grease, with music, lyrics, and book by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, opened on Broadway in 1972. Sandy Dumbrowski is the stereotypical girl next door. In fact, Sandy's name is based on that of Sandra Dee, an iconic blonde 1950's film star. Jacobs and Casey describe their Sandy as: "Danny's love interest. Sweet, wholesome, naïve, cute, like Sandra Dee of the 'Gidget' movies" (Jacobs 5). The reference becomes even more blatant in the song "Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee." Sandy, therefore, falls into the third blonde stereotypical category: the girl next door. She is not stupid, even though her name contains the connotation "dumb brow," but is as described: "sweet, wholesome, naïve." Sandy lives solidly in this category until the final scene and does not cross into the others, as she truly has not had sophisticated experiences (smoking, drinking, piercing her ears).

Because of her girl-next-door behavior and appearance, Sandy perhaps has the most in common with Audrey. Neither sees themselves as sexual objects and sexual references are lost on both characters. Sandy, however, experiences more of an awakening than Audrey. In the reprise of "Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee," she acknowledges her "good girl" image and actively seeks to change:

SANDY, YOU MUST START ANEW
DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MUST DO?
HOLD YOUR HEAD HIGH
TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND CRY
GOODBYE
TO SANDRA DEE. (55)

Her transformation is total from girl-next-door to bombshell, complete with behavior to match. She is described in the script as “a Greaser’s ‘dream girl’” (56). She has “a new, wild hair style, black leather motorcycle jacket with silver studs on the back that spell ‘BIG D,’ skin tight slacks, gold hoop earrings” (56). The change is more than physical. She makes the “‘up yours’ gesture” when she picks up a microphone to sing (56), uses crude language when she says “The hell with it” (58), and utilizes incorrect grammar: “It don’t matter” (59).

This particular musical takes on the idea of repressed 1950’s womanhood and suggests that perhaps women were eager to break away from the roles set forth by the media. Sandy’s transformation is extreme, as she moves from one blonde stereotype to another. However, both incarnations of Sandy, while the character should be played sincerely, are overtly stereotypical in nature with little subtext to support a nonstereotypical representation. She’s an innocent girl exposed to adult activities: she gets sick when she drinks and smokes, she quarrels with her boyfriend, and she ultimately decides to change who she is to keep her boyfriend. These extreme shifts in her character are more easily rationalized through stereotype.

Little Shop of Horrors with music by Alan Menken and lyrics and book by Howard Ashman, opened off-Broadway in 1982, with a Broadway run in 2003. The heroine, Audrey, is a florist’s shop assistant dating a man who physically abuses her. This Audrey is a true bombshell, in line with Marilyn Monroe’s Lorelei Lee and Sugar Kane. However, Audrey doesn’t scheme her way to a better life as Monroe’s characters do. She shares the same dream of bettering her circumstances, and in “Somewhere That’s Green,” she shares a very 1950’s view of how her life should be:

A MATCHBOX OF OUR OWN
A FENCE OF REAL CHAIN LINK. . .
A TRACT HOUSE THAT WE SHARE

SOMEWHERE THAT'S GREEN. . .
I'M HIS DECEMBER BRIDE
HE'S FATHER, HE KNOWS BEST. . . (34-35)

Audrey submits to the 1950's idea that her place is in the home caring for her husband. It is, perhaps, her having to work that puts her in jeopardy. She explains to Seymour that when money was tight she worked in "The Gutter. It's a night spot. . . . I'd put on cheap and tasteless outfits. . . ." (Ashman 68). By going against the standard of appropriateness for women, Audrey can now be a victim of Audrey Two, the man-eating plant.

Through the character of Audrey Two, *Little Shop of Horrors* becomes primarily a Cold War musical, where the threatening plant represents Communism and the blonde Audrey represents an innocent, yet fallen, America. Audrey's relationship with Orin and her work in The Gutter tarnish her enough that she can be the plant's victim. However, her desire for a better life allows her to be identified with innocence.

It is interesting to note that Ashman and Menken chose to use Cold War themes in their 1980's musical, the decade when the Cold War drew to a close. Their treatment of the 1950's and womanhood in that decade creates a world fraught with peril where innocence will not survive because nothing is pure. *Little Shop's* Audrey in comparison to Audrey in *Leading Ladies* reveals two women who are beautiful and desirable; however, the Audrey of *Little Shop* knows how to use her beauty and is ashamed of it, while the second Audrey is innocent of the effect she has on men.

In 2002, *Hairspray*, with book by Mark O'Donnell and Thomas Meehan, music by Marc Shaiman, and lyrics by Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman, opened on Broadway. Although it is set in 1962, the adults' attitudes are representative of the 1950's, as seen in "Welcome to the Sixties," in which the heroine, Tracy, updates her mother's look. Unlike the other musicals,

Hairspray's blonde character is not a lead or secondary principal, but instead is the villain of the piece. Amber Von Tussle is described in the script as “. . .conniving and selfish, but superficially perky” (O'Donnell xv). Amber is a combination of bombshell and girl-next-door, a beautiful exterior and innocent surface which belies her nasty personality. She manipulates Link into dating her until he learns he was used to boost her career (“Tracy, it's Amber the talent scouts are coming to see. . . . She and her mother were just using me to make her look popular” 97), she attempts to publicly humiliate Tracy (Amber's song, “Cooties,” is a personal attack on Tracy), and when Tracy's popularity begins to rise, Amber begins to issue orders to the other students (“Everybody stop liking her!” 37).

Amber is, by comparison, much more stereotypical than the other blonde characters, even *Grease*'s Sandy. She is also indicative of a shift in the blonde stereotype. *Heathers*, a 1988 film, inverts the idea of the popular blonde girl, creates a subcategory of both the bombshell and girl-next-door: an innocent-looking, beautiful blonde who puts others down in order to raise her status. Amber, the Heathers of *Heathers*, and the Plastics in the movie *Mean Girls*, represent the female bully: a usually blonde, beautiful young woman who is the most popular girl in school but treats those not in her circle with derision and cruelty. This blonde stereotype, the mean girl, is newer than the others, revealing that the connotations of bloneness have shifted from 1950 to today. Amber has the least in common with Audrey; they are both lovely and share hair color, but the similarities end with appearance. Amber may be a product of the 1950's, but there is a decidedly contemporary sensibility in *Hairspray*, compounded by the inclusion of a new blonde stereotype.

Adam Guettel's *The Light in the Piazza*, with book by Craig Lucas, premiered on Broadway in 2005. Its blonde heroine, Clara, is the quintessential innocent girl-next-door. She

is a perpetual child, or so her mother believes, because of an accident when she was young. In this way, Clara's maturation through the play as she finds love and strives to lead an adult life mirrors the girl-next-door stereotype. This stereotype was created to combat the more sexualized bombshell and ethereal blonde types. By creating an innocent childlike stereotype, female sexuality becomes less threatening and provides a model for female behavior in which practiced attractiveness and less overtly sexual behavior leads to marriage.

Clara's innocence is not manufactured, but is a result of her childhood accident. In accordance with the stereotype, her behavior, so different than most American girls Fabrizio's family has encountered, does lead to marriage because she is "E una ragazza all 'antica. . . Ben educate" (Lucas 47). In the script this is translated as "She's more traditional, from a good family. . . well educated" (47). The Italians view her innocence as a good upbringing and approve of her behavior as "So much of what [they] hear and read about American women, young women, is not what [they] would consider to be necessarily the right kind of woman for [their] son" (Lucas 48). In the Italy of *Light in the Piazza*, the stereotypes encountered are clearly those of the bombshell and ethereal blonde.

In the musical, it is Clara's mother, Margaret, who attempts to uphold the 1950's standards where Clara is not allowed to become an adult. She initially tries to thwart Fabrizio's interest in Clara by simply refusing to allow meetings with the young man. When Clara becomes frightened and hysterical after a bungled midnight meeting with Fabrizio, Margaret sings "Lullaby" in which Clara, who is twenty-six, is referred to as "LITTLE CLARA" and "BABY CLARA" (Lucas 59). Margaret knows what is best for Clara, has always known, and as a representation of the 1950's view of women, must take Clara away from Fabrizio, from the maturation process. Even Margaret's attempts to keep Clara in innocent childhood fail. Unlike

the other 1950's musical theatre blondes, Clara does not change who she is and has not been corrupted. The most innocent and childlike character has the most mature reaction to her status as a woman as she confronts her mother:

You're happy to be the one who knows everything I need and has the final word. . . . You ignore what I say, what I want. You make things up the way you want them. You lie about things. . . . To everyone! How we all love one another. Daddy doesn't love you! Look in his eyes for once. Look at yourself in the mirror! (71)

This outburst is from a source who should not possess this knowing, and it forces Margaret, the representative of 1950's morality, to examine her perceptions. Clara's innocence allows her to possess more knowledge than a girl-next-door blonde should. The possession of unacknowledged information takes Clara out of her initial stereotype and reveals a character like Ken Ludwig's Audrey, one which benefits from closer scrutiny and an approach not based in stereotypes.

The character of the musical theatre blonde, specifically in musicals set in the 1950's, has clearly shifted through the decades. As the musicals move closer to the contemporary period, the blonde characters become less stereotypical and begin to take on a life beyond their hair color. Additionally, in *Hairspray* there is a new blonde stereotype, the blonde bombshell bully, who did not exist until women's studies became more prevalent. This comparison shows that while not all blonde musical theatre characters are identically stereotypical, many do possess common traits which can be used by actresses to enhance or reject stereotypical portrayals.

CHAPTER FIVE: SCRIPT ANALYSIS

Leading Ladies is a complicated play because a great deal of important information is presented during the expository scenes that is crucial later in the play. The final scene contains conclusions to the various situations and glossing over important moments could contribute to audience confusion. By synopsising and charting structural elements of the play, character goals and obstacles are revealed.

Act One

Scene 1 (exposition and complication)

The thematic nature of this scene in relation to the script's super objective is to introduce the protagonist, Meg. She is a young woman from York, PA and she knows there is a life beyond her town; she just hasn't experienced it yet. Her fiancé, Duncan, is also introduced. He is Meg's primary obstacle in the play. In this scene, he merely thwarts her plan to see Leo Clark and Jack Gable in *Scenes From Shakespeare* at the Shrewsbury Moose Lodge by loaning their car to a parishioner. Duncan's relationship with Meg appears to be more that of parent to child than fiancé. Within the first lines of the play, the audience becomes aware of Duncan's nature; he's a homebody while Meg is eager to try something new. She reveals there are few opportunities for cultural entertainment in York, and that she thinks she ". . . loves the theatre more than anything in the world" (Ludwig 9). When Duncan reveals he has lent the car to a parishioner and they will therefore miss the performance, Meg's reaction is disappointment at missing Leo Clark specifically. This scene also reveals the social conflict in the play: will Meg remain in her place as a typical, married woman of the 1950's who subjects herself to her

husband, or will she discover her self and choose to live a life pleasing to her sensibilities instead of Duncan's?

Scene 2 (exposition)

The second scene takes place in the Shrewsbury Moose Lodge and introduces Doc Myers, his son, Butch, as well as Leo Clark and Jack Gable. Jack and Leo are performing their two man show, *Scenes from Shakespeare*, for a decidedly unappreciative audience. Doc's opening monologue reflects his position in the community, a leader who knows everyone, as well as his suspicion of Shakespearian entertainment.

The thematic purpose of this scene is to introduce Jack and Leo, as well as their situation. Their play is a scene cobbled together from many Shakespearean plays, and to the theatergoer who knows Shakespeare, the effect is comedic. They are trying to perform to the best of their ability, but their scene cannot hold the attention of Butch and the other young Lodge members. Leo and Jack have clearly been working together as performers for a long time and possibly have been friends even longer. They have an easy familiarity and Jack is able to diffuse Leo's temper when the young Lodge members walk out. However, the reaction to their scene is disheartening for both of them and it spurs their later schemes.

Scene 3 (exposition and complication)

This scene is particularly important because it provides all the information Jack and Leo will need to convince Florence Snider they are her long lost relatives. Thematically, this scene introduces the premise for the rest of the play, as well as the two large obstacles. When Leo

discovers Florence Snider's search for her relatives, Max and Steve, Jack informs him the plan to impersonate Max and Steve will never work:

We don't know anything about Max and Steve! How old they are.
When they left. Their mother's name. Their father's name. We'd
have to know somebody from York, Pennsylvania! (Ludwig 20)

At this point, Audrey's play begins. She roller skates into their car and onto Jack's lap.

When she reveals she lives in York, Leo takes advantage and asks her about Florence. She is able to answer each of Jack's questions and even volunteers more information about Max and Steve. Audrey represents the first complication in Leo's plan. She knows Jack's name, requiring Jack to wear a disguise. The second complication she reveals is that Steve is both deaf and dumb. Leo quickly incorporates this information into his plan.

Audrey's return to Leo and Jack's train car, however, presents the largest complication in the play. When Leo introduces a disguised Jack as Steve, his deaf and dumb brother, Audrey is amazed at two deaf people being named Steve. Leo's confusion is cleared when she reveals Max and Steve are "The two girls we talked about" (25). Max and Steve, short for Maxine and Stephanie, are Florence's estranged nieces from England. Audrey skates away, leaving Leo to convince Jack to be not only deaf and dumb, but also a deaf and dumb woman. Jack's reluctance to portray a woman also stems from his romantic interest in Audrey. His difficulty in winning her is compounded by having to be deaf, dumb, and a woman.

Scene 4 (exposition and complication)

This scene establishes Meg's knowledge of her cousins' impending visit. Eager to share the news, she telephones Duncan. Duncan's reception of the news, concern over Meg having to split her three million dollar inheritance, presents a new obstacle for Jack and Leo. He also

points out Max and Steve's timely arrival, as Florence may die at any time. This sets up Duncan's extreme suspicion of Jack and Leo, and creates the impetus for much of the antics in Act Two.

Scene 5 (rising action and complication)

Thematically, this scene sets in motion all complications in the script. The scene opens as Doc and his son argue over Butch's relationship with Audrey. However, Audrey has previously expressed interest in Jack, which creates an obstacle for all three of them. Duncan arrives to meet Max and Steve, and Meg rushes out to get flowers for her cousins. Audrey enters to announce Max and Steve's arrival. Leo and Jack enter, dressed as Max and Steve. They establish Steve's inability to hear or speak, but when Meg comes in, Leo clearly falls in love with her. He now has the same obstacle as Jack: how to woo a woman while dressed as one. Leo is committed to his plan, however, and proceeds to express his sorrow over not getting to meet Florence before her untimely demise. Meg is surprised; Florence is still alive. Even Audrey did not know this news. Leo and Jack now have a monumental obstacle: to fool Florence into believing they are her nieces and to keep the charade going until her death so they can collect the inheritance. They manage to convince Florence they are her nieces, but Florence collapses. While the family and friends take her to her room, Jack tries to convince Leo to give up the plan.

Meg comes back, and Leo sends Jack away so he can spend time with Meg. Leo convinces Jack to continue the charade for a few more weeks until Florence actually dies. Meg and Leo discuss their love of Shakespeare, and even perform an Olivia/Viola scene from *Twelfth Night*. Leo is totally in love with Meg and his attempts to discover any romantic attachment

provide an obstacle larger than the ones facing Jack and Audrey's relationship. Meg is engaged, so in order to win her, Leo must convince an honest, trusting, innocent woman to break her engagement. As Maxine, Leo discovers Meg is infatuated with Leo Clark the actor. He immediately formulates a plan that will allow him to meet Meg as himself. They will stage *Twelfth Night* as an engagement gift to Meg, and the famous Leo Clark will direct. Meg, overcome, exits to her room to cool off, and Leo leaves in search of Jack.

Audrey and Jack return and Audrey shows Jack to his room, which he and Leo will be sharing with Meg. He goes upstairs and discovers Meg lying nude on the bed. Instead of staying in character as Stephanie, he runs downstairs screaming. Meg rushes after him, trying to console him while Audrey notices the amazing occurrence in the chaos: the deaf and dumb Stephanie is speaking. Leo returns and Meg shares the astonishing news. He proclaims it a miracle and the act ends with Jack having to create a reason for his sudden "recovery."

Act Two

Scene One (rising action)

In this scene, the comedy continues to build as Doc and Florence bicker about her health. Florence is angry she has not been informed of Stephanie's recovery, and she is also angry at Duncan for insulting her "niece." Florence takes Stephanie off to talk, and Duncan calls Inspector Ballard, a policeman who will supposedly help him uncover the scheme in which he believes Maxine and Stephanie are engaged.

Meg returns from a shopping trip, of which Duncan disapproves. She relates her adventures; this is clearly the first time she has experienced some of life's sophistications. From her conversations with Maxine, she has been emboldened and informs Duncan that perhaps his

plans for their future are not what she has in mind. She has been offered a new way of viewing life and is taking full advantage of it, creating a rift in her relationship with Duncan. Duncan exits in irritation.

Leo has come into the living room, dressed as himself. Meg's reaction is everything he could have hoped. She is so overcome, she trips over things. Jack also enters, still dressed as Stephanie, and is also overcome by Leo's appearance. Meg introduces the two, then leaves to collect herself. Jack accuses Leo of jeopardizing everything, and Leo refuses to listen, leaving instead. Jack chases him.

Duncan returns as Meg does, and she demands to know where Leo has gone. Duncan diverts her attention by showing a telegram he has just received. It details the arrival of Maxine and Stephanie, another Maxine and Stephanie, and has convinced Duncan that the two new arrivals in his life are frauds. Meg disagrees with his view, and instead of discussing it, works up the courage to tell Duncan she will be starring in a play with Leo Clark. This is brave of her as Duncan has previously expressed his disapproval of the theatre and its people. Duncan and Meg's reaction to Leo Clark has foundation in the first scene of the play. Their reactions have not changed one bit, except for the fact that Meg has now met Leo. She asks Duncan to leave. He does, and she acknowledges her new romantic feelings for Leo.

Scene Two (rising action)

This scene establishes the relationships between Leo and Meg, as well as Jack and Audrey. Doc, Butch, Audrey, Meg, and Stephanie have convened to rehearse *Twelfth Night*. Leo is directing, and is therefore dressed as himself. Jack seizes his opportunity to escape while Leo coaches Meg through a Viola/Orsino scene. During the rehearsal, Leo and Meg's mutual

infatuation and desire for one another becomes obvious, even though Meg is not ready to act on this desire.

Jack returns, dressed as himself, and interrupts the rehearsal process. Leo's specific reaction mirrors Jack's initial reaction in Act Two Scene One when Leo first appears dressed as himself. Audrey is now faced with an obstacle. While she fell in love with Jack in Act One, she did not think she would see him again. Now she, like Meg, has two suitors. When Leo shouts at Butch for speaking his lines too fast, Jack sends Leo to find Maxine and offers Butch a suggestion to help him slow down his speech. He and Audrey have a brief chance to reconnect, although Audrey almost ruins the charade when she asks how Jack knows Maxine and Stephanie. Jack's memory of Stephanie singing him to sleep every night is countered by Audrey: "But I thought she was deaf and dumb till recently" (Ludwig 68). Jack's quick retort, "She used a tape recorder and moved her lips," is completely within the realm of possibility for Audrey (68). This particular conversation provides the quintessential example of Audrey's nature: she notices small yet important details others overlook, but she is willing to believe everything said to her, no matter how implausible.

Leo's return as Maxine ends Jack and Audrey's conversation, as Jack must change back into Stephanie. Meg is having reservations about her acting ability, and Leo as Maxine comforts her. Stephanie returns and Maxine asks each performer to give their favorite line from *Twelfth Night*. While Jack and Meg deliver believable interpretations, Doc, Butch, and Audrey butcher the script, creating another obstacle for Jack and Leo. Audrey's interpretation of Sebastian as Brando is established earlier in the scene. Each of the other actors is coached by Leo, but Audrey's turn is interrupted by Jack's entrance. She does, however, inform him of her plans for a Brando imitation when he asks how the play is going. The payoff for this set up comes four

pages later. They may be able to fool Florence and gain an inheritance, but they might not be able to pull off *Twelfth Night*.

Interestingly, in this scene, Meg and Audrey interact very little with one another, Doc, and Butch. Meg primarily interacts with Leo and Audrey does the same with Jack. Although Audrey is supposedly in a relationship with Butch, she has no scripted reaction when he is yelled at by Leo.

Scene Three (rising action, climax, falling action, denouement)

Meg's engagement party is in progress and provides an excellent background for the comedic antics about to ensue. Duncan is again speaking over the phone to Inspector Ballard. He has been spurred into action because Leo as Maxine informed him Florence was leaving her entire fortune to Stephanie. Duncan panics when Florence calls for him and insists Inspector Ballard send a squad car and do something. Florence and Duncan tango, and are joined by Audrey, Butch, Doc, and Jack dressed as Stephanie.

The rising action continues with Leo's plan to break Meg's engagement to Duncan. Leo has written a letter detailing Stephanie's lust for Duncan. The plan is for Duncan to be so overcome by Stephanie's advances that he will accost her while Meg and Leo watch from a hidden location. Meg will be so shocked by Duncan's behavior that she will break the engagement and marry Leo. While Leo relates his plan to Jack, Audrey enters looking for Jack. Still dressed as Stephanie, Jack cannot do anything to woo her at this moment. Leo asks Audrey to deliver the letter. She agrees, and Meg enters looking for Duncan. No one has seen him, but Leo asks Meg to dance and they exit together. Audrey watches the couple with longing, and feeling safe with Stephanie, tells what she will do on her wedding night:

Isn't love great. Some day I'm gonna find just the right guy.
And believe you me, on that wedding night, in some big soft
comfy bed, I'm gonna make him really happy. Hey, come here,
you're drooling. Aw. Here. Give us a hug. Ooh! Stephanie,
watch your fingers! (77)

Audrey's statement has overwhelmed Jack and he gropes her while they hug. This causes Audrey to drop the envelope in the punch bowl, smearing the name on the envelope. While Jack hurriedly leaves, Audrey tries to figure out who the letter could be addressed to. She can tell it starts with a "D," but beyond that has no idea until Doc enters. She decides "D" stands for "Doc" and gives him the letter.

Doc is surprised that Stephanie would be interested in him, but decides to pursue her anyway. Leo and Meg re-enter and Leo begs Meg to break things off with Duncan. She refuses and runs into the garden; Leo follows her as Duncan enters. Jack (as Stephanie) tries to seduce Duncan, who gives him the telegram from the "real" Maxine and Stephanie. Duncan leaves when the doorbell rings, and Doc enters. He tries to seduce Stephanie, and forces "her" behind a screen as Audrey and Butch enter. They are in the midst of ending their romantic relationship. Doc and Jack knock down the screen and are discovered by the others. Butch kisses Stephanie to make Audrey jealous, Doc kisses Stephanie to make Butch jealous, and everyone chases Stephanie out of the room.

Meanwhile, Meg has found Leo dressed as Maxine and confesses her undying love for Maxine. Leo, as Maxine, tries to turn Meg's amorous feelings towards the male version. Meg is totally humiliated and runs out of the room. Leo starts to run after her, but is stopped by Jack. They read the telegram Duncan gave Jack, which details the "real" Maxine and Stephanie's arrival and realize their charade is at an end. This scene, and the prior scene between Doc and Stephanie, creates the gender conflict in the play, as Meg believes she has fallen in love with

another woman, and Doc has, in fact, been amorously chasing another man. Until this time, the only suggested gender conflict has been Stephanie's penchant for hugging Audrey.

Jack and Leo hear Florence and Duncan coming, so they hide. Duncan is dragging Florence to meet the newly arrived Maxine and Stephanie. Fresh from this narrow escape, they reenter and decide to change back into their men's clothing. As they pull their wigs off, Meg and Audrey enter from upstairs, catching them. The men exit, but now have an obstacle they know nothing about; Meg and Audrey are aware of the deception and want revenge. Jack and Leo's decision to change back into their menswear is prompted by a telegram stating Maxine and Stephanie will arrive at 8:15 in the evening. From the beginning of Act Two, Duncan has received telegrams from another Maxine and Stephanie he believes are the actual nieces. As Jack tries to seduce Duncan as Stephanie, Duncan puts a telegram in his hand. When Jack finds the telegram and shares it with Leo, they discover there will soon be two sets of nieces.

As Meg and Audrey leave to accost Jack and Leo, Butch enters to talk to Audrey. He apologizes for his behavior and she gently breaks off their relationship. Butch concedes to Jack, and to Audrey's wish that he make up with his father. Doc has overheard the entire exchange, admitting he was wrong about Audrey not being the right girl for Butch. However, Butch has already let the relationship go, so his primary obstacle in marrying Audrey is overcome too late.

Father and son exit and Audrey and Jack re-enter. Jack apologizes and proposes, quickly overcoming the obstacle of Audrey's anger as she accepts. Jack's proposal to Audrey is met with her incensed reply, one of the funnier lines of the play. She responds:

You are the most obstreperous, abominable, loathsome, odious, deplorable, despicable, obnoxious, vile, detestable man I have ever met! And of course I'll marry you! You just had to ask! Now give us a hug! (91)

Her acceptance of Jack's proposal enables them to escape when they hear Meg and Leo coming.

Meg informs Leo that she wants to speak to him and Maxine—together. Leo quickly exits as Florence and Duncan come in. Duncan reveals Leo and Jack's duplicity to Meg, stating that her "real cousins" have arrived "and they're willing to take only \$100,000 each and go back to England" (93). Meg admits that she knows of the deception, but she and Florence don't want the police to arrest the men. Meg sends Duncan outside by telling him she saw Jack and Leo in the front yard as Leo returns, dressed as Maxine. He tries to fool Meg by putting on and taking off his wig, moving from one side of the garden door to the other, disguising his voice, and stating he has hurt his leg and will let Maxine talk. He finally comes inside and Meg tells him she knew he was pretending to be Maxine the whole time. Meg agrees to marry him, but she and Florence try to make him leave because the police have arrived to arrest him. Duncan returns and grabs him as Jack comes back in.

At this moment, the climax occurs. Chaos is heard from the garden. Audrey, Butch, and Doc enter in great excitement. Audrey reveals that the police have arrested two women pretending to be Maxine and Stephanie. Audrey's announcement telling of the false Maxine and Stephanie being arrested by the police provides a *deus ex machina*, neatly saving Leo and Jack from being arrested. Impersonating Maxine and Stephanie is a concept introduced in Act One Scene Three by Leo, but it is not outside the realm of possibility that others would see the advertisement in the paper and decide to gain Florence's wealth.

The falling action begins with Leo, as Maxine, forgiving Duncan. Butch makes peace with Jack, allowing him to marry Audrey. Leo's announcement (as Maxine) that he and Meg are getting married horrifies Duncan.

During the denouement, Florence dies. As her family and friends rush to her side, she sits up and accuses Doc of being “the worst doctor that ever lived” (98). The actors hear the music for their performance of *Twelfth Night* and prepare for their performance as the play ends.

CHAPTER SIX: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Influenced by Sugar Kane in *Some Like It Hot* and Lorelei Lee in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the character of Audrey in Ken Ludwig's *Leading Ladies* presents certain challenges for the actress because of her complex nature. Upon initial reading, Audrey appears to be a stereotypical comedic character, not particularly intelligent yet adept at using her appearance to influence men. This immediate analysis is incorrect because upon further scrutiny, Audrey can be revealed as a multi-dimensional person with her own unique type of intelligence. An in-depth character analysis, exploring all aspects of her personality and situation in comparison to the characters Sugar Kane and Lorelei Lee, reveals how the actress can move beyond stereotypes to create a character which is still comedic.

In *Leading Ladies*, Audrey is introduced in the third scene of Act One. She is described as “. . . about 20, extremely well-built. . . She's a knockout” (Ludwig 20). While Ludwig makes no mention of bloneness in connection to Audrey's character, it is important to note that the original actress, Lacey Kohl, is a blonde. Additionally, the description of Audrey's physical appearance corresponds to that of the bombshell blonde. Her appearance has a decided effect on men: Jack immediately falls in love with her “at first sight” (20), Butch, her boyfriend, wants to “sleep with her” (32) before marrying her, and her figure engenders a running joke throughout the play when Jack, dressed as Stephanie, insists on continually hugging her. Her initial costume, which becomes a joke about the size of her chest in her first scene, solidifies this fixation on Audrey's appearance:

AUDREY: It's my first day at the Tastee Bite. See?
“Tastee Bite.”
(*She points to her chest, and her tight sweater has the words
“Tastee Bite” across the front.*)

LEO: The first E gets a bit lost in the middle. (21)

Audrey's looks place her in the bombshell category, but her personality falls under the third stereotype of the girl next door. Ludwig describes her "...extremely sweet and good-natured" (20). This personality is indicative of the unsophisticated girl next door. Audrey's experience is certainly limited, although she is attempting to become educated. Her innocence is extreme as she unwittingly facilitates Leo and Jack's confidence scheme by providing all the details they need to ingratiate themselves in the Snider household. She also possesses knowledge the other characters do not. Before Meg and Leo articulate their love for one another, Audrey notices their feelings for one another: "Isn't love great?" (77).

Simultaneously, what she does not know, or realize, is equally impressive. She has met Jack and Leo, but she is fooled by Jack's disguise of beard, wig, and glasses. Even after seeing "Maxine" and "Stephanie" change back into Leo and Jack, it takes her a moment to realize there are only two people instead of four: "I think we should kill all four of them. . ." she remarks after watching Leo and Jack change from their female clothes (89). This remarkable ability to accept everything at face value is the crux of Audrey's "dumb blonde" nature and is actually a non-stereotypical trait because it is motivated by the script instead of a preconceived interpretation. Audrey's combination of good looks and extreme innocence blend the stereotypes and create a blonde character unlike those found in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Some Like It Hot*.

Audrey is meant to be a bombshell like Lorelei in the previously discussed *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, but her sex appeal is unconscious instead of overt, providing a comparison to Sugar Kane in *Some Like It Hot*. She may be beautiful, but she doesn't intentionally use her appearance to manipulate Jack or Butch, even though they are both affected by her appearance. In this way, Audrey could be construed as a truly dumb blonde bombshell. However, her

extreme knowledge of events in York provides her with intelligence similar to Lorelei's. However, unlike Lorelei, the information Audrey imparts is not calculated for gain. Rather, Audrey shares her knowledge freely and without concern for the result. When Jack despairs of Leo's scheme to impersonate Florence's nieces, "We'd have to know somebody from York, Pennsylvania," Audrey skates in on cue (Ludwig 20). If Audrey is played stereotypically and is aware of the impact her physical appearance has on Jack, she is complicit to their schemes, as knowing her effect on men suggests knowing more about her circumstances than she iterates in the script. If she is unaware of her effect, however, Audrey possesses a true innocence coupled with knowledge, unlike the manipulative "innocence" Lorelei possesses. It is in this aspect of character that Audrey shows herself to be more childlike, more girl-next-door, than Lorelei's calculated and intentional childish qualities.

Audrey and Sugar do possess similarities. Sugar and Audrey both meet the male leads on a train. Both are innocent, and while Sugar was written to be played by Monroe, Audrey's blondeness is clearly indicated since much of her character is based on Monroe's creation. The innocence plays into the dumb, bombshell blonde stereotype, as both Audrey and Sugar are taken in by the men's disguises. Where Lorelei's "stupidity" is calculated, Sugar's is not. When Jack Lemmon, disguised as Daphne, tries to keep his party with Sugar private, Sugar blithely invites the other girls. Sugar is completely unaware of "Daphne's" discomfort, just as Audrey is completely unaware of the effect she has on Jack in the *Leading Ladies* train scene. Her appearance is enough to make him forget his name, which could be construed as a similarity to Sugar's use of her beauty to woo Junior, the millionaire she meets in Miami. In Audrey's first meeting with Jack her appearance has an effect on him, but there is nothing in the text, other than

the description of Audrey, to support Audrey using her appearance in the manner Sugar Kane and Lorelei do.

There are other dissimilarities between Sugar and Audrey than the use of physical appearance. Unlike Sugar, Audrey is not a lush, nor is she a gold digger. Sugar wants a millionaire; at the beginning of *Leading Ladies*, Audrey is ostensibly with Butch, but her initial infatuation with Jack, a penniless actor, establishes her as someone who gives her heart for very different reasons. Audrey is an innocent, but she is trying to improve herself and would never refer to herself as “stupid” like Sugar does. Audrey’s fixation with large words reveals a desire for self-improvement, which Sugar does not share. Audrey is trying to better herself by working her way through college, but she already knows a great deal.

While Audrey’s textual self does owe something to the bombshell stereotype perpetuated by Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Some Like It Hot*, there is more to her than just sex appeal. Audrey is clearly written to be physically appealing, and she also possesses a sense of humor and is the unwitting instigator of most of the misunderstandings in the script. This additional humor is a departure from the 1950’s blonde bombshell who may be in on the joke, but is the object of sexual desire instead of humor. Audrey is a comedic character and a blonde who must defy stereotype and become a more three dimensional character. How then does the actress create a non-stereotypical stereotype?

At stake in the character of Audrey is the opportunity to take a stereotypical female character from the 1950’s and de-objectify her. Like Lorelei and Sugar, Audrey knows what she wants. By seeking an education, she meets Jack, creating a situation which could portray her as a heartbreaker because of her attachment to Butch. However, the addition of a scene cut from

the published version reveals evidence of Audrey's kindness as she gently breaks off her relationship with him:

AUDREY: Butch. Listen to me. I love you very much. But we're not a couple. We're just not right for each other.

BUTCH: How can you say that?

AUDREY: We've been secretly engaged for seven years. You can build a railroad in seven years!

BUTCH: This is all my father's fault.

AUDREY: No it's not.

Leading Ladies unpublished scene

Audrey's responses to Butch indicate she has been contemplating their relationship for some time; she simply lacked the experience to know how to solve the problem. When she finally meets Jack, she refuses to allow Butch to only blame his father. It is the 1950's after all, even if Audrey loved him enough to marry him, she couldn't be the one to propose. Audrey's textual self is filled with an interesting mix of knowledge and innocence that makes a stereotypical physical representation onstage an inappropriate choice for actress and director.

As has been stated previously, women in 1950's film were objectified by men; by 2004, with five decades of feminist theory bolstering interpretation, Audrey can be a much different creature than the Lorelei Lees and Sugar Kanes where the "patriarchal cultural visions . . . reduce women to behavioural stereotypes" (Fortier 73). The actress's task is to defy these stereotypes seen in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Some Like It Hot*, to keep Audrey from falling prey to the male gaze, described by Laura Mulvey as a system of representation found in classic film where "the male 'gaze,' of the hero, the camera, and the audience, is imposed as the only way of seeing women" (73). Ken Ludwig has aided the actress greatly in writing Audrey as a character who possesses stereotypical traits, but also defies the common blonde stereotypes if the actress takes

time to find the ways this is achieved. Creating a non-stereotypical Audrey defies the traditional view of the 1950's women and upholds the struggle of women over the last fifty years:

Since the male gaze oppresses, silences, and distorts female realities, . . . one task of feminism is to overturn traditional systems of representation (73)

The careful actress will defy traditional and stereotypical representations of Audrey by paying attention to what the character knows.

Audrey is a rare character to find in a comedy. While upon initial reading she appears stereotypical, further scrutiny reveals layers to her personality which help the actress create a three dimensional character. Delving into Audrey's psyche brings the conclusion that she is not empty-headed, although she is naïve in many ways. However, in addition to her innocence, she possesses certain knowledge and sets into motion certain events that without her participation would unravel the entire narrative. In this way, Audrey becomes an important and vital character in the script with a definite point of view about matters which will enable the actress to create a non-stereotypical character.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTION AND DISCOVERIES

Although *Leading Ladies* could be considered light entertainment, there are several challenges in the script, such as making the story as clear as possible for the audience and creating believable characters within a zany situation. There are also challenges specific to Audrey's character. Her language is colloquial, which could lessen the import of her lines, her representation could easily fall into stereotype, she is on roller skates for the entirety of the first act, she has to poorly but recognizably imitate Brando, and the script is full of quick changes and inconsistencies. In addition to these challenges, there were issues specific to this production: rehearsing three shows simultaneously, receiving an additional scene for the remount, and rehearsing another show while rehearsing for and performing in the remount.

Vocal Production

Professor Mark Brotherton's directorial style is to sit and read through the scene with side coaching from him before putting it back on its feet. The side coaching made sure the story, intentions, and beats come through. I was able to apply my Meisner technique through the frequent repetitions of bits of dialogue as I made sure I found the appropriate delivery for audience understanding. I preferred this approach to sitting around a table for a week working on text. I enjoyed knowing what I was doing physically with the lines so movement motivated meaning and vice versa. When I can put together words and movement, I have an easier time memorizing lines and blocking. I also found this approach conducive to thinking about how I used my voice in production.

In creating Audrey, I placed her voice on a higher pitch than my natural speaking voice. As a singer, I realize I cannot speak that high without having a negative impact on my vocal health. In order to project my voice at such a high pitch, I decided to try singing my lines. Instead of singing on specific pitches and in specific rhythms, I simply placed my voice where I would if I were actually singing a song. Sometimes I felt as if I was shrieking my lines, but I now believe that was due to my vocal placement. I'm used to creating that sound on specific pitches and holding notes for an established duration. For the entire run, I used my singing vocal warm up, which I believe kept me from experiencing the vocal stress Mark Koenig (Jack) and Kyle Adkins (Leo) did from speaking at such a high pitch.

The language in this play was particularly important because there was so much information to impart. The pitch I chose for Audrey's voice could have become shrill, but I continued to use my singing training and concentrated on my consonants. The crisp consonants slowed down my speech enough that I was intelligible and the pitch provided vocal energy.

Creating a Non-Stereotypical Character

My research into blonde stereotypes was prompted by a conversation after my callback. Later that day, I was explaining one of the jokes in the script to friends. As I explained, I realized I hadn't gotten the joke in the callback. Perhaps this was a factor in my very sincere reading. When I got the part, I made a conscious decision based on this to try not being aware when Audrey was making a joke.

In my research about stereotypes, I also came to the conclusion that Audrey cannot know her effect on Jack; she cannot know she is beautiful and use it to her advantage. Professor Brotherton's blocking for the train scene originally not only objectified Audrey, which was not

an issue for my interpretation of the character, but also showed she was aware of her beauty and using it to her advantage. Before blocking the scene, I had a suspicion this would be a factor, but even after trying the blocking, I wasn't convinced Audrey would behave like that. I wanted to make any move showing off her figure appear as an innocent accident.

As we left the blocking rehearsal, Professor Brotherton and I had a very brief conversation about Audrey's intelligence and innocence level. My contention was that she's clearly not stupid; she wants to go to college and is working to achieve this goal. However, she is innocent, unsophisticated, sincere, and has had no interaction with truly learned people. In this sense, she's operating at a disadvantage, but she doesn't know it. At the top of the next rehearsal, Professor Brotherton cited our conversation about Audrey's innocence and changed the blocking for that scene. He stated that my choice was the interesting one. Therefore, anything that objectifies Audrey or makes her aware of what she's doing to Jack is gone. She is definitely innocent and possibly lacking in common sense. In this way, she is able to do silly things (like ask Butch how he knew Maxine and Stephanie were coming) but still remain intelligent, warm, caring, and welcoming.

Playing innocence instead of sex appeal also helped with the comedy in the character. Her mistakes are made out of innocence instead of unintelligence. This also made her jokes funnier; instead of laughing at a stereotypical dumb blonde, the audience was engaged with an innocent, slightly wacky character who made endearing mistakes. It was still comedy, but having a non-stereotypical character creates a reason for the audience to care instead of simply laughing at jokes. In past farces I've been a part of, I was directed to just play the jokes. In *Leading Ladies*, it was nice to be able to find the reality of the character and play that.

Script Inconsistencies

During the read-through, we noted two script inconsistencies: one dealing with the time period and the other with the set. Both were the subject of much discussion until cast and crew reached the same understanding.

The stage directions in the first scene note the play is set in 1958. A line that comes later in the script changes the year to 1952. As a cast we went through the rest of the play, seeking references specific to both years. We realized that if the year of the play were 1952, it might be implausible for the film version of *Julius Caesar* to have been announced in *Variety*. This debate also affected Audrey's Brando imitation, as I didn't want to imitate Brando in a movie that wouldn't have been out yet. We finally settled on 1958, but excised any reference to a specific year.

We created another script inconsistency because of the age of the men playing Jack and Leo. In the script, they are meant to be in their forties, with Meg in her thirties and Audrey in her twenties. Our Jack and Leo were clearly in their twenties, as was Meg. In a way, this makes the relationships between these characters a bit more believable, but it did create a problem with one of Audrey's lines. When telling Leo and Jack about Max and Steve, Audrey mentions their being born in 1920. In order to make the years match the age of our actors, the line was changed to 1935.

The other inconsistency was discovered in blocking rehearsals. For the most part, Professor Brotherton kept entrances and exits as indicated in the script. For the first act, these made sense. However, as we began blocking Act Two, we discovered that many character's had

inconsistent entrances and exits. For example, in the final scene of Act Two, Audrey exits upstairs with Jack, but the next time she comes onstage, she comes through the garden door. This scene also takes place in real time, so there is no time lapse where Audrey could have changed locations in the house. While there simply could be a back staircase to the house, I concluded it was much more fun a rationalization if I made the choice for Audrey to shimmy down a drainpipe in her ball gown. Additionally, one Act Two exit was marked for the kitchen and there was not a kitchen in our floor plan or the Broadway production's floor plan. Professor Brotherton's directorial choice was to simply accept the strange entrances and exits as part of the wackiness in the script and not worry about the inconsistencies. However, as strange as the exits and entrances sometimes were, there were also times in the show where the inconsistencies created excellent comedic moments.

Imitating Brando

In the Shakespeare scene, Audrey's acting decision is to play Sebastian from *Twelfth Night* as Marlon Brando. She mentions this to Jack, who declares it a brilliant idea. When Leo asks each actor to present their favorite line from the play, Audrey's Brando imitation ends the exercise.

At the audition, Professor Brotherton asked each actress called back for Audrey to read her Shakespeare line as Brando. As I watched the other women create one act plays out of Audrey's line, I made some quick decisions. I knew I had no idea how to do a passable Brando imitation, I had the feeling Audrey really couldn't do Brando and therein lay the humor, so I decided to do the most horrible Brando I possibly could.

After being cast, I realized I had to research Brando, his distinctive voice and gestures, so my imitation is a good “bad” imitation instead of just embarrassing. Also, a distinctive gesture would help the audience realize I’m imitating Brando and not Butch. I researched different Brando movies to see which ones Audrey would have known. *The Wild Ones* was filmed in the right time period for Audrey to know the film, but I worried that audiences wouldn’t be as familiar with the movie.

We spent a good amount of time on Brando. In the end, I discovered how to create a decently bad Brando impersonation: higher pitch, nasal but in the middle of the soft palate, with a slight lisp on the “s.” We also added a Stella gesture on “sister” and I held out the word so the audience would make the connection.

Acting on Wheels

Perhaps the most exciting and most frightening part of this role, at least to me, is the fact that Audrey is on roller skates through all of Act One. I am a very cautious person, and the idea of roller skating on a non-level floor was quite overwhelming as I had not roller skated since I was ten years old. We rehearsed in a carpeted classroom, which allowed me to become comfortable on the skates without the possibility of falling down. During one of our final rehearsals in that room, I was given a note about not looking too comfortable on my roller skates; Audrey is, after all, new to the experience. I assured everyone that when we got onstage, I would be quite awkward.

I was quite concerned about skating on the stage. It isn’t a level surface, but after being painted for *Urinetown*, it now had warped boards. When I got onstage in my skates, I discovered the floor sloped in a variety of directions and had bumps in strange places. There was one

specific spot, where I tended to land for Jack and Audrey's final conversation on the train, and if I wasn't careful I would roll right into Jack.

Walking the set for the first time brought other problems to my attention. We only ran entrances and exits. I discovered that getting on and off stage for the train scene was one of the most terrifying experiences I have ever had onstage. I was on roller skates and I had a stack of books in one arm which affected my balance. I also had to come from the complete darkness backstage, through the main drape into half light, and then through another curtain into the full light of the train car where I had to land on Jack's lap. My solution was to ask crew members to page the curtains for me. This worked very well for the main drape, but the crew members on the train car often forgot to page the curtains for my exit. There were many exits where I got tangled in the curtains with only one hand to get things straightened. On opening night, I got horribly tangled and dropped a book behind the train car. I was just pleased I had made it offstage without falling down. The cross down to the trunk was also exciting on opening night. I caught my skate in the trap door latch and almost fell. I just shrieked "whee!" as Mark Koenig (Jack) caught me and sat me on the trunk.

I had many near misses throughout the run. One night, when I started to get up from the seat, my feet went out from under me and I almost landed on the floor. I grabbed Kyle Adkins's (Leo) pants and hoisted myself back up. It created an interesting moment between Audrey and Leo, but fortunately, Audrey is a free spirit so it worked for the character. I did make it through the entire run without taking a major spill onstage, and I count that as a successful run on roller skates.

A New Scene

We were given two additional scenes for the second run. Apparently, in the original script, the train scene was shorter (we didn't cut anything) and there was a scene between Butch and Audrey, and Butch and Doc, where the problem of Audrey being engaged to Butch but in love with Jack is resolved. This scene also provides more time for Jack's quick change.

When I received the new scene, I panicked, thinking it changed her character significantly. When we rehearsed it and got the scene up and running, I discovered it only provides additional dimensions to Audrey's character. Ludwig describes her as extremely good natured, and the fact that she never really expresses any emotion other than cheerfulness through the entire show makes it difficult not to fall into a stereotype of the character. It also made her anger at Jack hard to convey; she's been so accommodating up to the proposal scene that it's hard to believe she would actually be angry at someone. The new scene reveals the extent of Audrey's relationship with Butch and her exasperation as his inaction.

Our initial run of the show with the new scene revealed why it was originally cut. This scene really breaks the momentum of the show. However, the more we ran the scene and the more comfortable we became with the new material, the more we realized how integral the scene is to the show's resolution. Audrey and Butch come to an understanding and she is also able to bring reconciliation to Butch and Doc. It did slow the momentum of the show, but it gave the audience an opportunity to connect with the Audrey, Butch, and Doc.

Three Shows at Once

Leading Ladies was performed as the final show in the University of Central Florida's three show SummerStage series, with a remount in the fall for the beginning of the school year. I

was cast in all three shows: *Urinetown*, *UnLoved*, and *Leading Ladies*. For the first week, we rehearsed *Urinetown* and *UnLoved*. By the second week, *Leading Ladies* rehearsals had begun.

In order to get *Urinetown* in shape, I made the decision to focus more on that than *Leading Ladies*. This choice backfired as it took me longer to get off book, which let down my acting partners. During one rehearsal, I tried to be off book for Act One, Scene Three before I was ready and, as a result, left out a significant portion of dialogue. If there had been an audience, they would have missed information extremely important to the story. Instead of at least looking at my script over the five days we had five days off because of *Urinetown*'s tech and opening, I didn't, and as a result was severely behind when we returned. Even though no one on the *Leading Ladies* stage management team or the director said anything about my unpreparedness, primarily because the cast was not required to be off book at that point, as a graduate student I should have provided an example for the undergraduates.

Quick Changes

Like *Lend Me a Tenor*, *Leading Ladies* has several quick costume changes. The majority of these occur in Act Two. Audrey only has one quick change, from her Shakespeare costume to a ball gown for Florence's party. The first time this change was rehearsed, my dresser unbuttoned the tiny pearl buttons on my gloves so they would slide on more easily. Unfortunately, we learned that it was almost impossible to rebutton the gloves in the limited light backstage. The solution was simple: my hands were small enough to fit into the gloves while buttoned. Another challenge I faced occurred halfway through the run when one dresser had a family emergency. My dresser had to fill in for him and an assistant stage manager was assigned to me. One evening, she forgot about the quick change, but I managed to dress myself with time

to spare. It was different and I did get a little thrown off; I knotted my crinoline tie instead of tying it. While I did have less time before the scene started, I was still ready well before I had to go onstage.

My costume change never affected me or the other performers negatively, but because there were so many quick changes, it was inevitable that some of them would go awry. Piper Patterson (Meg) had a problem changing from her shopping outfit to her Shakespeare costume in a dress rehearsal. Since we were working under show conditions, we continued the scene, improvising dialogue and staying in character and context. As a company we learned to trust and rely on one another in situations like that. The training our theatre program provides is excellent for these situations as it is Meisner based, which facilitates greater connections between actors as well as excellent listening skills.

The worst quick change in the script occurs in act two, scene three when Jack has to change from Stephanie's ball gown into a full tuxedo. There is a brief scene between Audrey and Meg to cover the change, but this scene should be played in about fifteen seconds, which is not long enough to complete the quick change. Piper Patterson (Meg), and I were asked to draw out our dialogue. This allowed us to incorporate some acting moments and character discoveries into a comedic scene. The scene is humorous as written, but when it is slowed down, the audience gets to participate in Audrey's discovery that Jack and Leo have been masquerading as Maxine and Stephanie. Another discovery for us was the depth of Meg's anger at Leo for his duplicity. Slowing down the scene enabled Piper and I to explore the fact that Audrey has a healthy fear of Meg's temper.

Kiss Me, Kate

The second run of *Leading Ladies* was scheduled for the first two weekends of the fall semester. My program moved to a theatre in Daytona Beach, so not only was I starting classes, I started classes in a different city and had to drive to Orlando for rehearsal each evening. The week before school started, I was given the opportunity to audition for *Kiss Me, Kate* at the Orlando Shakespeare Theater. I received an ensemble role, and on the first day of classes, I left class early to attend my first rehearsal, then left my first rehearsal early to attend a *Leading Ladies* brush up rehearsal. *Kiss Me, Kate* rehearsed for three and a half weeks and for two of those weeks, I was involved in *Leading Ladies*. The two weekends of the show became about running from Daytona to Orlando for rehearsal, then running across Orlando to do a show. I realized I was probably doing too much when a faculty member mentioned he was attending my show that Saturday and I got confused because *Kiss Me, Kate* didn't open until September. I did, however, become adept at compartmentalizing my life and only focusing on the task at hand.

I felt that by the second run I had already moved on from *Leading Ladies*. Starting new classes and a new show divided my attention and because I was familiar with *Leading Ladies*, it received less of my attention. This also was my first experience performing in a show where the other actors weren't involved in my next project. I realize that in the major markets, and even in Orlando, many professional actors have more than one project going on simultaneously, but I learned I don't prefer that hectic a schedule. I felt I was not completely dedicated to the second run, nor was I able to learn my *Kiss Me, Kate* choreography as efficiently or as well as I would have liked. I couldn't focus completely on either project and as a result felt I was not putting forth my best effort.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Creating non-stereotypical characters in comedic plays is a vital skill for professional actors. This is especially essential when playing a character such as Audrey in Ken Ludwig's *Leading Ladies*. Audrey could be presented as the stereotypical dumb bombshell blonde, but after script and character analysis, this choice lacks substance and misses a significant part of the humor found in the role. Exploring alternative interpretations for Audrey reveals a more complicated character as well as creating a reality for the character. In developing the character of Audrey, addressing these concerns allowed me to present a three-dimensional Audrey who did not rely on stereotypical behavior for comedic effect.

Researching blonde stereotypes prevalent in the 1950's provided a unique basis for my interpretation of Audrey. Understanding the prevalent perception of blondes during that time period as either the dangerous bombshell or ethereal blonde or the girl-next-door allowed me to circumvent stereotypical traps. Audrey easily could be played as either a bombshell or a girl-next-door, but only through gleaning which aspects of these stereotypes are pertinent to the character and which are extraneous can a three-dimensional character be achieved. In addition, awareness of the woman's role in 1950's society also provided valuable insight into Audrey's character. Audrey, by putting herself through college, eschews the traditional 1950's female role of housewife. By researching the women's liberation movement, I discovered Audrey's educational and career goals predate this movement by almost a decade. This process of examining stereotypes and the woman's role in the time period provides a new method for creating a character. Exploration of stereotypes and deliberately breaking them through

characterization illuminates facets of a character which might have gone undiscovered or unexplored without first addressing the stereotypical representation.

Applying the research in stereotypes to traditionally blonde musical theatre characters also provides insight into character development. While exploring these musical theatre characters, I discovered new insight for portrayals that are not usually the initial interpretation a performer or director conceives. Choosing to make any blonde character a beautiful, but unintelligent, bombshell provides an easy characterization for the actor and also creates a character with which the audience is familiar. However, refusing to fall into a stereotypical representation of a character such as *Guys and Dolls*' Miss Adelaide, *Grease*'s Sandy, or *Little Shop of Horrors*' Audrey offers opportunities to discover comedy in unexpected places. Instead of merely portraying Sandy Dumbrowski as a girl-next-door, deliberately breaking the stereotype creates a more interesting character with a more believable story arc. Additionally, a non-stereotypical interpretation will enable the audience to empathize with the character instead of simply laughing at the character. Also, while exploring blonde characters in musicals set in the 1950's, it was interesting to note the emergence of a new stereotype in 2002's *Hairspray*: the blonde bully, Amber. Perhaps, as feminism and women's studies have impacted culture and informed playwriting, new stereotypes based on observed female behavior have been created.

While stereotypes provide easy comedy, looking beyond the stereotype to the truth of the character will provide a more in-depth portrayal onstage. But knowing the stereotype upon which a character is based allows the actor freedom to move beyond the conventional as well as to use aspects of the stereotype that will serve character development. For Audrey in *Leading Ladies*, understanding the dumb bombshell stereotype allowed for a mix of two stereotypes: the bombshell and the girl-next-door, and the opportunity to develop a nuanced performance.

Mixing the two created an interpretation of Audrey that refrained from overt sexuality, allowing Audrey and Jack to fall in love based on story line and personal traits instead of proximity and superficiality.

The primary blonde stereotypes may focus on a lack of intelligence, as in the bombshell, or experience, as in the girl-next-door. Blonde characters do possess depth if actors will go beyond the surface. Debbie Reynolds's Gidget became wiser through her experiences and Marilyn Monroe allowed glimmers of her intelligence to shine through her characters in spite of sex appeal as the primary focus. By moving beyond stereotypes, the traits that accompany hair color can enhance a character rather than define it.

APPENDIX: AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY AND PRODUCTION HISTORY

Ken Ludwig is an internationally acclaimed playwright known for his madcap, fast-paced farces. His work has received two Tony nominations, and garnered the Laurence Olivier Award as well as two Helen Hayes Awards. His best known works include: *Lend Me A Tenor*, *Moon Over Buffalo*, and *Crazy For You*. Mr. Ludwig holds degrees from Haverford College, Harvard Law School, and Cambridge University.

Mr. Ludwig's comedy, *Leading Ladies*, lives up to his zany previous productions, and contains aspects of his life in theatre. In *Leading Ladies*, Ludwig is writing about a world he knows. He had been rereading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and was inspired: "I always loved the passages about the duke and the king. . . . I thought, 'What a fun story, what a fun basis for a play'" (Ken Ludwig). Instead of men posing as men, however, Ludwig takes the story further, forcing his leading men to become leading ladies in order to swindle a dying woman out of her fortune. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* becomes a premise in the plot, providing a way for the men to shed their female garb and woo the women they meet. When interviewed for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Celia Wren asked Ludwig about his choice of *Twelfth Night*:

Ludwig says he chose "Twelfth Night" because "it's the greatest comedy ever written in my opinion—hands down." He adds that the play's themes of gender confusion compliment the plot of his own comedy. (Ken Ludwig)

Ludwig's inspiration creates an atmosphere where anything can and does happen.

Another Ludwig trait in addition to fast-paced comedy is nostalgia. *Leading Ladies* and *Moon Over Buffalo* are both set in the 1950's, while many of Ludwig's other comedies have their setting in the 1930's. The time period influences Ludwig's writing, resulting in comedy that arises out of circumstance instead of through belittling or being cruel. Ludwig is proud of this, noting:

“The way producers tend to say it is my shows have a lot of heart,” he muses. I write what I care about. I know that right now it’s very hip to be edgy, very hip to be mean-spirited. . . . I don’t write about those things. They’re not part of my world.” (Ken Ludwig)

Leading Ladies was developed at the Cleveland Playhouse during the 2003-2004 season and was subsequently produced in full the following season. The Cleveland Playhouse was founded in 1915, and has the distinction of being the United States’ “first permanently established professional theatre company” (Cleveland Playhouse). The Playhouse also hosts a playwright’s initiative, which could explain how *Leading Ladies* came to be first produced there. Ken Ludwig directed the piece, which starred, according to Everett Evans of the *Houston Chronicle*, a “polished cast of A-List Broadway regulars” (Ken Ludwig). Brent Barrett, Mark Jacoby, Erin Dilly, and Lacey Kohl starred as Leo, Duncan, Meg, and Audrey respectively.

The original production was then moved to the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas on October 22, 2004. Evans recognizes men in drag as “one of the theater’s oldest and surest laugh-getters,” but asserts that Ludwig has added “some fresh twists and a few genuine surprises” (Ken Ludwig).

The Alley Theatre, founded over sixty years ago as Houston’s city theatre, “exists to provide audiences with the highest quality theatre, offering a wide variety of work including new plays, classics, the re-discovered and the rarely-performed, and new musical theatre, with an emphasis on new American works” (Alley Theatre). Additionally, Ken Ludwig is an associate artist of the Alley Theatre, which provides a reason for the theatre to produce his work.

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