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## "How to Succeed": Determining and Comparing the Musical and Non-Musical Influences behind the Broadway Adaptation of How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying

Gary Bogers  
*University of Central Florida*



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“HOW TO SUCCEED”: DETERMINING AND COMPARING THE MUSICAL AND NON-  
MUSICAL INFLUENCES BEHIND THE BROADWAY ADAPTATION OF *HOW TO  
SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
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at the University of Central Florida  
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Major Professor: Scott Warfield

## ABSTRACT

The following research project is the result of comparing and contextualizing the original non-musical and musical drafts of the original 1961 Broadway production of *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*. The intention is to detail the process of musically adapting a non-musical source, specifically the 1952 satirical text *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying: The Dastard's Guide to Fame and Fortune* by businessman-turned-satirist Shepherd Mead. Research was predominantly completed through analysis of the non-musical draft written by television writers Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert in the 1950s and acquired from the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library. This was supplemented through acquisition of the eventual musical draft by Broadway book writer and director Abe Burrows from the same institution. The research found that adapting non-musical satire for the Broadway stage can prove challenging and equally beneficial when mounting an American musical. The study additionally foregrounded the struggle to perceive *How to Succeed...* as “satirical” in the modern era against its implied sexist undertones evident in all iterations of *How to Succeed...* The overall findings intend to provide scholarship offering an in-depth examination of the two principal adaptations of a landmark Broadway musical considered part of the revered Broadway canon. Doing so will provide a richer context to its legacy and, simultaneously, provide a necessary discourse on determining the individuals responsible for its conception.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

Sam Zolotow for *The New York Times* reported in March of 1960 that a new musical from famed Broadway producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin was under consideration for production:

Rights to Shepherd Mead's popular book, "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying," published by Simon & Schuster, have been purchased by Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin. The producers of five consecutive musical hits and one strike-out envisage a musical version of the book, described as "a merciless exposé of the truth behind the gilded Madison Avenue façade."<sup>1</sup>

The show was set to star Broadway actor Robert Morse and American crooner Rudy Vallee in his first Broadway show in nearly three decades.<sup>2</sup> Expectations were additionally heightened with news that famed Broadway composer Frank Loesser and book writer Abe Burrows would reunite after their landmark musical *Guys and Dolls* (1950) to provide respectively the score and dialogue for the upcoming show:

Eleven years after their felicitous collaboration on "Guys and Dolls," composer Frank Loesser and writer-director Abe Burrows are in business together again. Big business, to be precise, for their new musical—with the formidable title—is "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying," a spoof of industry, its tycoons and tyros, set "in a new glass office building on Park Avenue."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sam Zolotow, "Musical Planned by Feuer, Martin: Team Obtains Rights to 'How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying,'" *The New York Times*, 25 March 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Milton Esterow, "Broadway Show for Rudy Vallee: He Will Co-Star in 'How to Succeed in Business,'" *The New York Times*, 11 May 1961.

<sup>3</sup> "'How to,' Etc., Etc.," *The New York Times*, 24 September 1961.

Expectations regarding this renewed partnership played into heightened anticipation for the show following the decade-long period between *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed...*. This is an important consideration against the general decline in the rate of Broadway productions by 1960 despite an evident increase in their quality that resulted in significant commercial and critical success. Gerald Bordman provides the following on this context:

The musical shows offered in the preceding seasons had been distressingly few. With the new theatrical year [1959-1960] the American Musical Theatre experienced the beginning of a numerically small, but proportionately not insignificant, rise in new lyric offerings....[T]he number of new musicals remained in the teens....<sup>4</sup>

Milton Esterow from *The New York Times* cited this schism between quality and quantity in an August entry of his “News of the Rialto” column: “With fanfare, the 1961-1962 season will start soon. Will the troubles of 1960-1 continue? Or is Broadway on the threshold of a renaissance? The expectations, as usual, are not small.<sup>5</sup>” Esterow continued with evidence that the expectations for quality shows continued to increase against the lack in overall productions:

At least 139 productions have been announced for the next two seasons. Not infrequently, of course, some are announced simply in the hope of discovering an affluent backer....This season, sixty productions are said to be definite....How many will not make it to or on Broadway?<sup>6</sup>

Rehearsals for *How to Succeed...* took up the majority of 1961 for Burrows, Loesser, Feuer and Martin. Subsequent revisions in musical staging, coupled with a contentious

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<sup>4</sup> Gerald Bordman and Richard Norton, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle*, fourth edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 675.

<sup>5</sup> Milton Esterow, “News of the Rialto: Big Expectations for Broadway This Year,” *The New York Times*, 27 August 1961.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

relationship between Loesser and Vallee, further complicated the production and was later recounted by Feuer:

Rudy refused to sing the songs the way Frank wrote them. The most egregious example was “A Secretary Is Not a Toy,” which Frank wrote in three-quarter time. A waltz. A great song. Rudy refused to go at Frank’s pace and finally Frank comes to me and says that I have to talk to Rudy.<sup>7</sup>

Feuer continued by noting the egotistical tendencies of Vallee that made Loesser noticeably irate:

I could hear steam coming out of Frank Loesser’s ears. Rudy Vallee went on, in his oblivious and insulting fashion. “This is not a very strong piece of material,” he says. He turns to me. “I’m trying to help the man. Do you know how many songs I’ve introduced in my career? I’m trying to help him out.”<sup>8</sup>

*How to Succeed...* was also not guaranteed to be a hit despite the notable parties involved in its production. The lack in presale tickets for tryouts in Philadelphia was blamed by Feuer on the somewhat diminished reputation of Loesser following the 1960 commercial failure of his previous musical, *Greenwillow*: “Because we had no Cole Porter or George Kaufman, the advance sale for *How to Succeed* was not very good. Frank was appreciated by the theatrical world, but he didn’t sell tickets.<sup>9</sup>” Loesser had focused his last two Broadway outings on aiming toward musical prestige that was directly implied in the operatic leanings of *The Most Happy Fella* (1956) and the folk-oriented intentions of *Greenwillow*. The key distinction with *How to Succeed...* was, perhaps, the reunion of “close friends” who had worked with Loesser on his

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<sup>7</sup> Cy Feuer and Ken Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here: The Amazing, True Story of How an Obscure Brooklyn Horn Player Became the Last Great Showman* (New York; London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 227.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 230.



landmark musical *Guys and Dolls* back in 1950. Production stage manager Phil Friedman was cited by Martin Mann as noting the importance in collaboration between Loesser, Burrows, Feuer and Martin.

The whole thing was a collaborative effort. It takes a tremendous amount of cooperation and the fact that these people were all friends, friends of long standing you see, Abe and Frank and Cy.... This was a collaboration not only of creative people but of friends, both Guys and Dolls and How to Succeed....<sup>10</sup>

This likely led to the eventual musical whose book-to-score integration and brings into context an overlooked discourse on the journey *How to Succeed...* took in getting to the Broadway stage.

The majority of scholarship on Broadway musicals cites *How to Succeed...* as written by Burrows alongside the team of Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert. Revisiting the history of this partnership reveals a unique discourse on how the 1952 satirical text of satirist Shepherd Mead entitled *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying: The Dastard's Guide to Fame and Fortune* was first adapted for a stage production. The existence of a non-musical draft written by Weinstock and Gilbert has been mentioned in countless sources and has been noted by the respective parties involved in the 1961 musical production. Analysis of the non-musical draft, however, has remained greatly overlooked in the scope of musicological studies on American musical theater. It is through this project that one can finally read excerpts from the Weinstock/Gilbert draft in comparison to that written by Burrows to present a fuller portrait of a defining hit of mid-twentieth-century American musical theater.

The present research will seek to present a semi-linear yet predominantly analytical approach to the conceptualization of *How to Succeed...* from the standpoint of its non-musical

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Mann, "The Musicals of Frank Loesser" (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 1974), 139.

and musical adaptations. A brief summary on American musical theater against consideration of the careers maintained by Loesser, Burrows, Mead, Weinstock and Gilbert will be required to establish further context. This will be followed by commentary on the initial conceptualization of a *How to Succeed...* stage adaptation after publication of the Mead text. The principal discourse will then be presented following a summary concerning how Feuer and Martin brought the work of Weinstock and Gilbert to the Broadway stage. This third section will detail the intrinsic similarities and differences between the non-musical and musical drafts in order to foreground the process of musically adapting a non-musical satire. Sufficient comparisons and informed discourse will then be followed by a conclusion that summarizes the legacy of *How to Succeed...* following conclusion of its original Broadway run in 1965. This will leave room for a brief yet necessary discussion concerning the subsequent film adaptation and musical revivals against somewhat recent criticisms regarding the musical and its current place in the Broadway canon. This will bring about a final consideration of how one should interpret musical satire during a period of heightened awareness to outdated societal norms presented in works like *How to Succeed....*

The non-musical draft of Weinstock and Gilbert is not intended to serve as a basis for critical attack but as the prime example from which the process of musically adapting a non-musical source can be understood. No direct attempt at diminishing the contributions of Weinstock and Gilbert is intended as their adaptation should be contextualized as equal to the musical draft in its intention to satirize corporate America in the 1950s/60s. The occasional critiques on the writing style(s) are presented but only in the larger context of Burrows and his significantly greater ability to mine potential from somewhat limited or narratively confined source materials.

## I. “THE COMPANY WAY”: SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS AGAINST THE “GOLDEN AGE” AND THE REPUTATION OF FRANK LOESSER

Exploring the early conceptualization of *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* requires a summary of Broadway and its history beginning around 1940 and going up to 1959. Musicals had begun to develop beyond the plotless musical revues and variety showcases popular throughout the early-twentieth-century. This transition was made evident by the premiere of *Show Boat* on 27 December 1927, a landmark work by composer Jerome Kern and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II that progressed beyond the “sameness and tameness” of melodramatic operetta and lighthearted musical comedy.<sup>11</sup> *How to Succeed...* similarly distinguished itself from its predecessors but did so through a context that remained explicitly attuned to contemporary audiences. This helped the show find immense popularity before American musical theater shifted further toward youth-oriented popular music and salvaged the industry from potential cultural irrelevancy. This places *How to Succeed...* and, in turn, its recent predecessors in an era of sentimental Broadway musicals removed from those that would subsequently define the mid-to-late-1960s.

Pinpointing a schism in the cultural relevancy of Broadway in the mid-twentieth-century requires recognition of the history on shows that constitute the “canon” of Broadway theater. Exploring the most prominent and commercially relevant shows from this period brings the narrative of composer Frank Loesser and his musicals into the discussion. Summarizing his

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<sup>11</sup> Stanley Green, *Broadway Musicals: Show by Show*, fifth edition, revised and updated by Kay Green (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1996), 60.

works alongside those that found success in the same era assists in contextualizing the success Loesser would achieve with *How to Succeed...* at the turn of a new decade. 1940-1947: Setting the Stage for Frank Loesser.

### **1940-1947: Setting the Stage for Frank Loesser**

Broadway found itself in a unique period of American history at the dawn of the 1940s. The United States continued to feel the economic effects of the Great Depression as it was in its final years while simultaneously witnessing the onset of World War II in Europe. Military drafts would slowly but gradually deplete the ranks of male performers while impending international warfare lessened depictions of satire, melodrama and anything considerably biting or forlorn previously popular on the Broadway stage.<sup>12</sup> An eventual decline in commercial prosperity would hit the industry, followed by a downward trend in the overall quality of shows being produced. The conclusion of the *George White's Scandals* revue series in 1939, for example, marked a transition from plotless, escapist musical entertainment as musicals grew more rooted in a cohesive narrative structure.<sup>13</sup> The Cole Porter and Ethel Merman vehicle *Panama Hattie* proved to be the big musical hit of the 1940-41 season with 501 performances, despite having what scholars consider to be a generally forgettable book and score.<sup>14</sup> Film simultaneously proved a formidable threat to the commercial and cultural standings of stage musicals as well. Many works for the Broadway stage were initially intended as feature films before being resigned to the stage, the 1939 Porter hit *DuBarry Was a Lady* being a principal example.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bordman and Norton, *American Musical Theatre*, 575.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 575.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 581.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 577.

Composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Lorenz Hart found prominent success in this tumultuous era by writing works in the book or narrative vein. *On Your Toes* and *Babes in Arms* proved significant successes with critics and audiences alike and would pave the way toward their 1940 masterwork, *Pal Joey*.<sup>16</sup> The show proved another hit with audiences and set the stage for how the narratives of Broadway musicals could be projected through a contemporary lens. The book depicted the “low-life” scoundrels of New York City, foregoing the typified depiction of relatively “clean-cut” protagonists evident in musicals from the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> The book centered around a financially-desperate dancer who is encouraged to continue his deceitful lifestyle through an adulterous relationship with an older woman. The story had been derived from the *New Yorker* stories written by John O’Hara, the author subsequently penning the book himself despite producer/director George Abbott deeming the show as commercially unviable.<sup>18</sup> *Pal Joey* ultimately proved successful despite hesitations surrounding the depiction of its unsavory characters and their eventful arcs. This adverse context prompted praise and skepticism from *New York Times* theater critic Brooks Atkinson:

If it is possible to make an entertaining musical comedy out of an odious story, “Pal Joey” is it...Taking as his hero the frowsy night club punk familiar to readers of a series of sketches in *The New Yorker*, John O’Hara has written a joyless book about a sulky assignation .... [T]he story of “Pal Joey” keeps harking back to the drab and mirthless world of punk’s progress. Although “Pal Joey” is expertly done, can you draw sweet water from a foul well?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For a recent study of *Pal Joey*, see: Julianne Lindberg, *Pal Joey: The History of a Heel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Martin Mann, “The Musicals of Frank Loesser” (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 1974), 13-4.

<sup>18</sup> Todd S. Purdum, *Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Broadway Revolution* (New York: Picador, 2018), 61.

<sup>19</sup> Brooks Atkinson, “The Play: Christmas Night Adds ‘Pal Joey’ and ‘Meet the People’ to the Musical Stage,” *The New York Times*, 26 December 1940.

Many of the subsequent musicals following *Pal Joey* failed to measure up to its intrigue and contemporary scope. The death of Lorenz Hart in 1943 would ultimately prompt Rodgers to team with another lyricist in the form of Broadway heavyweight Oscar Hammerstein II for the smash musical hit *Oklahoma!* The show was predominantly sentimental in nature, contrasting with *Pal Joey* by presenting a less contemporary approach and expressing tendencies toward the musical escapism of the 1930s. Gerald Bordman notes that it was also a less “topical” musical and found its success by forgoing the typified “wit and patently polished sophistication” previously evident on the Broadway stage—a more “earnest” show in retrospect.<sup>20</sup> The musical would run for an astounding 2,212 performances at the St. James Theatre,<sup>21</sup> the critical consensus being that Rodgers and Hammerstein had reinvigorated Broadway as a cultural touchstone in American culture against the backdrop of World War II:

“Oklahoma!” did Broadway and its vicinity a world of good, not only through reading the lesson that worth would be appreciated but through proof that thousands were only too anxious to shout a song of praise at the show deserving it...“Oklahoma!” along with the soldiers on leave and the war workers on a night off, helped interest in the theatre enormously.<sup>22</sup>

*Oklahoma!* would end its run in 1948 having earned a gross of nearly \$7,000,000. The musical had salvaged the American Theatre Guild from potentially floundering and made additional profits through record and sheet music sales throughout its original run.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Bordman and Norton, *American Musical Theatre*, 577.

<sup>21</sup> *Oklahoma!* Internet Broadway Database, accessed 28 January 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/oklahoma-1285>.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis Nichols, “Happy Old Year: During 1943 the Broadway Theatre Had Not too Bad a Time,” *The New York Times*, 26 December 1943.

<sup>23</sup> Sam Zolotow, “‘Oklahoma!’ Ending Record Run May 29,” *The New York Times*, 19 May 1948.

Subsequent productions such as the 1946 Irving Berlin and Ethel Merman vehicle *Annie Get Your Gun*, the 1948 Cole Porter smash *Kiss Me, Kate!* and the 1949 Jule Styne hit *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* kept musicals relevant in popular culture. The generally-comedic leanings of these shows were evident in their books and songs and distinguished them from the “musical play” intentions of *Oklahoma!* The show had its humorous moments but took a conscious effort to accurately adapt the 1931 play *Green Grow the Lilacs* into a musical iteration that forewent the “gags, wisecracks, the off-color jokes, the puns and double entendres” of so-called “musical comedy” up to that point.<sup>24</sup> This approach toward sentimentality remained a trademark of the Rodgers and Hammerstein II catalog and pointed toward a Broadway capable of depicting the real, the heartfelt and the human in musical comedy.

#### **Frank Loesser: An Initial Career Summary – 1948-1956**

The legacy of Frank Loesser stands alongside that of Cole Porter as one of the rare Broadway stalwarts to have written both the music and lyrics of his musicals. The success of Loesser was evident in both musical theater and film despite a generally limited number of shows produced for the Broadway stage. The quality of these musicals, however, would make them permanent fixtures in the musical theater canon and ensured their composer a place in the history books. Loesser was a New Yorker from birth, raised in a musically-inclined family that notably included his brother Arthur who earned renown as both a concert pianist and as an educator at the Cleveland Institute of Music.<sup>25</sup> Frank was viewed as intellectually and musically inferior to his older sibling as his Tin Pan Alley fandom drove his desire to work as a songwriter

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<sup>24</sup> Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theater* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 301.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas L. Riis, *Frank Loesser*, Yale Broadway Masters series, introduction by Geoffrey Block, ed. (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 17.

in the famed Brill Building of New York City. The aspiring composer would ultimately write his first works for the Broadway stage in the form of the 1936 revue, *The Illustrator's Show*. It ran for a mere five performances but gave Loesser the experience needed to continue as a songwriter.<sup>26</sup>

The late-1930s found Loesser in Hollywood composing songs for Paramount under a long-term studio contract. He would begin writing both the music and lyrics of his songs during this period, a process initiated with the 1939 title track for the film *Seventeen*.<sup>27</sup> The 1940s subsequently found him mounting programs for the Radio Production Unit in Santa Ana, California during World War II, a role preparing him for his 1943 transfer to New York as a writer of the “Blueprint Special” revues produced for troops overseas. His composition of “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition” had further solidified his reputation as a commercially-viable and culturally-relevant songwriter, predicting the cross-generational appeal his work would maintain throughout the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>28</sup> His first Broadway musical *Where's Charley?* would premiere in 1948 and ran for 792 performances at the St. James Theatre, subsequently earning star Ray Bolger the Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical.<sup>29</sup> Some critics overlooked its mediocre plot while praising Loesser for his multifaceted songwriting abilities that went beyond the limits of American musical comedy:

As the music master, “Where's Charley?” offers Frank Loesser, who is a very interesting composer.... For “Where's Charley?” he has scribbled off a lively score in a number of entertaining styles—Gilbert and Sullivan pastiche for the beginning, a marching song complete with umph-umph out of a French horn, a comic choral

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Where's Charley?* Internet Broadway Database, accessed 29 January 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/wheres-charley-2028#Awards>.



for some female gossips and standard romances in a pleasantly sentimental vein. Mr. Loesser combines song-writing with composing, which is a most acceptable notion.<sup>30</sup>

The success of *Where's Charley?* and recognition of Loesser as a Broadway composer set the stage for *Guys and Dolls* in 1950. That show proved pivotal in exploiting the characteristics and aesthetics of a New York setting yet did so in a less “gritty” realism akin to *Pal Joey*. This subsequently facilitated a burgeoning trend from musical comedy as a comedic “free-for-all” and toward its recognition as a legitimate “art form.”<sup>31</sup> Loesser was a master at exploiting both of these perceptions to fit his vision, composing songs that seamlessly integrated into the dialogue by enhancing significance of the art form through their “logical” placement throughout the show. This served the composer well early in his Broadway career as the music of *Guys and Dolls* was completed before book writer Abe Burrows wrote his initial draft of the accompanying book.<sup>32</sup> This led to a thoroughly-integrated musical work that impressed critics with its singular style and means of storytelling, notable in the assessment made by Brooks Atkinson:

Although “Guys and Dolls” is composed of the many bizarre elements essential to every musical show, it seems simple and effortless on the stage. Everything falls into place easily as though the play had been created in one piece, and every song and actor were inevitable...every now and then a perfectly-composed and swiftly-paced work of art comes out of the bedlam of Broadway producing and seems as if it had always been in existence in somebody’s imagination. You have an irrational feeling that it had to be done sooner or later, exactly as it has been done by the people who have now composed it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Brooks Atkinson, “At the Theatre,” *The New York Times*, 12 October 1948.

<sup>31</sup> Mann, “The Musicals of Frank Loesser,” 17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Brooks Atkinson, “‘Guys and Dolls’: Broadway Rat-Race Based on Some Damon Runyon Characters,” *The New York Times*, 03 December 1950.

Atkinson further praised the integration between book and score, noting the effort made to present the potentially fanciful facets of song and dance as integral to the character and storyline:

[M]r. Loesser has written gaudy or romantic songs and lively lyrics without once stepping outside the mood of the whole show. The humorously hackneyed “A Bushel and a Peck” and “Take Back Your Mink” from the tawdry nightclub scenes are as apposite to the general theme as “Adelaide’s Lament” and “Guys and Dolls,” which are written in the sidewalk vernacular.<sup>34</sup>

Any success achieved by Loesser prior to 1950 paled in comparison to the reception of *Guys and Dolls*, its 1,200-performance run and subsequent five Tony Awards that included Best Musical.<sup>35</sup> The commercial and critical success of the show still failed to predict yet another period of production slumps for musical theater in New York. This was noted in a *New York Times* article published the day following closure of *Guys and Dolls* on 28 November 1953:

With the 1953-54 theatre season only a little more than twenty-four hours from its exact midway point, a student of baleful facts wishes to intrude with the thought that the trend toward paucity in musical production continues. Last year, if you will recall, at this time there had been only three new musical shows, “Wish You Were Here,” “Burrito Square” and (even though purists may object) “My Darlin’ Aida”....[W]hen the books finally were closed on May 31, the figure had gone to a grand total of eight, including “Wonderful Town,” “Can-Can” and “Me and Juliet.”<sup>36</sup>

The lack in productions is notable against the fact that their overall quality fared significantly well from both a commercial and critical standpoint. The years 1953 to 1956 would include five of the longest-running musicals up to that point: *Pajama Game* and *Damn Yankees* from the

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<sup>34</sup> Atkinson, ““Guys and Dolls.””

<sup>35</sup> *Guys and Dolls*, Internet Broadway Database, accessed 29 January 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/guys-and-dolls-1892#Awards>.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis Funke, “News and Gossip of the Rialto: Sad Notes Anent Musical Production Rate—Other Items,” *The New York Times*, 29 November 1953.

short-lived partnership of Richard Adler and Jerry Ross proved the most successful at over 1,000 performances each, followed by the Porter hit *Can-Can*, the Harold Rome-composed *Fanny* and the Leonard Bernstein and Rosalind Russell vehicle *Wonderful Town*.<sup>37</sup> These shows all found commercial prosperity and awards recognition yet never reached the same cultural importance as *Guys and Dolls*, a musical viewed as “a masterpiece of musical comedy writing as Broadway is likely to produce.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Loesser in a Post-“My Fair Lady” Broadway: 1956-1960**

The Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe musical *My Fair Lady* beat the odds to become the most successful Broadway musical of its era. The show maintained a weekly gross of \$69,700 at a time when ticket prices continued to surge on Broadway, becoming a new cultural touchstone of the theater while proving another successful gambit for the Theatre Guild.<sup>39</sup> The success of *My Fair Lady* is crucial when discussing the subsequent musical hits of the mid-to-late-1950s. It would surpass *Oklahoma!* to become the longest-running musical on Broadway during a period of significant financial disparity in American theater.<sup>40</sup> The soundtrack simultaneously became the best-selling album for a musical show up to that point while remaining number one for fifteen weeks on the *Billboard* albums chart and selling six million units by January of 1966.<sup>41</sup> It is, perhaps, an adherence to tradition that made *My Fair Lady* such a commercial and critical success, scholars often citing the musical as similar to operetta in its

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<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey Block, “The Broadway Canon from *Show Boat* to *West Side Story*,” *The Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 531.

<sup>38</sup> Stempel, *Showtime*, 435.

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Gelb, “Economics of Two Hits,” *The New York Times*, 11 June 1961.

<sup>40</sup> Gelb, “Economics of Two Hits.”

<sup>41</sup> “Original Theatre Cast with Julie Andrews, Rex Harrison, Stanley Holloway, Robert Coote, Michael King, Gordon Dilworth, Rod McLennan, Philippa Bevans,” in *Million Selling Records from the 1900s to the 1980s: An Illustrated Dictionary*, Joseph Murrells, ed. (New York: Arco Publishing, 1984), 94.

embodiment of the cultural traditions from its source material, *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw—the “graceful and melodic score” reminiscent of early Eurocentric musical theater provided additional impetus for genre comparison.<sup>42</sup>

Loesser would maintain his oft-sentimental approach to composition and character development when conceptualizing *The Most Happy Fella* in the interim following the premiere of *Guys and Dolls*, recounting to *The New York Times* his disinterest in pursuing the dense sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of its source material, the Sidney Howard play *They Knew What They Wanted*: “I figured: Take out all this political talk, the labor talk, the religious talk. Get rid of all that stuff and you got a good love story. I can never forget a man who says: ‘I saw a girl and I love her.’”<sup>43</sup> Critics still found the attempts at music drama to be the most rewarding aspects of the show, praising the score while pinpointing the quasi-operatic intentions:

...Mr. Loesser has now come about as close to opera as the rules of Broadway permit. He has told everything of vital importance in terms of dramatic music. He has written about the longest score that Broadway has had since “Porgy and Bess.” In its most serious moments, “The Most Happy Fella: is a profoundly moving dramatic experience.”<sup>44</sup>

*Fella* was another Tony-nominated success and received praise from critics. Its sense of musical prestige, however, was conversely viewed as overwrought compared to the zippy, wry humor of the book and score to *Guys and Dolls*. The musical and Loesser still warranted enough attention

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<sup>42</sup> Bordman and Norton, *American Musical Theatre*, 661.

<sup>43</sup> Murray Schumach, “Molding a Musical: Discussing the Birth of ‘The Most Happy Fella,’” *The New York Times*, 29 April 1956.

<sup>44</sup> Brooks Atkinson, “Theatre: Loesser’s Fine Music Drama; ‘The Most Happy Fella’ Opens at Imperial,” *The New York Times*, 04 May 1956.

to garner promotion on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in October of 1956,<sup>45</sup> the television program that was possibly the leading force in “selling” Broadway to American audiences in the 1950s. Musicals such as *Fella* and *Lady* both benefited from the additional exposure television brought to their casts and songs, exploiting the context of music and performer without the need to witness the respective musical in-person.

*Fella* with its operatic tendencies demonstrated to producers the risk in adapting works outside the vein of traditional musical comedy or operetta. The 1956 Leonard Bernstein-composed *Candide* proved commercially disappointing after explicit attempts to merge eighteenth-century Eurocentrism with contemporary American music.<sup>46</sup> *West Side Story* premiered the following year and became a cultural touchstone by manifesting European tradition against contemporary issues of racism and gang violence. Its relevance to the tumultuous state of American youth proved groundbreaking yet fared less successful against sentimental, comedic productions like the Meredith Willson-composed *The Music Man*. That show surpassed *West Side Story* while earning greater awards recognition from the major guilds.<sup>47</sup> This trend continued with the 1958-9, 1959-60 and 1960-61 Broadway seasons following the respective premieres of *Gypsy*, *The Sound of Music* and *Bye Bye Birdie*. *Music* proved family-friendly and constituted the final stage musical written by Rodgers and Hammerstein II, proving more commercially successful against the biographical retelling of vaudevillian-turned-stripper Gypsy Rose Lee. *Birdie*, however, bucked convention by pandering

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<sup>45</sup> “‘Happy to Make Your Acquaintance’ & ‘Big D’ - Original Cast 1956 - Ed Sullivan,” accessed 16 January 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nn\\_kGQdoq8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nn_kGQdoq8).

<sup>46</sup> Bordman and Norton, *American Musical Theatre*, 665.

<sup>47</sup> *The Music Man*, Internet Broadway Database, accessed 10 February 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/the-music-man-2664#Awards>.

directly to the burgeoning youth counterculture, crafting a plot inspired by the recent military draft of rock musician Elvis Presley. Broadway was changing fast as the line between harmless entertainment and adult-driven dramedies merged around 1960. This proved the perfect storm for reinvigorating the careers of both Loesser and book Burrows.

## II. “THIS BOOK IS ALL THAT I NEED”: THE ROLES OF MEAD, WEINSTOCK, GILBERT AND BURROWS AS BOOK WRITERS

The challenges in adapting a non-musical source for the Broadway stage define a great majority of the production histories behind major shows premiered in the 1950s. Major revisions often occurred during both the initial conception and subsequent development, a situation that film director Garson Kanin recalled when discussing the pre-premiere legacy of *My Fair Lady*:

[A]t the time it wasn't anything. For years it had been said that you couldn't make "Pygmalion" into a musical because it was a perfect play. For [director] Moss Hart, there was a weird feeling that he had taken on more than he could handle. For us writers, once you've directed in the theater, you never want to do it again. There are too many people involved; you can't sit quietly in your study.

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A great majority of the biggest Broadway hits derived from previously-successful or well-known source materials, the musicals of Frank Loesser being no exception. *Where's Charley?* was one of the many adaptations of the late-nineteenth-century Broadway play *Charley's Aunt* while *Guys and Dolls* set its story and characters in the David Runyon universe to convey a distinct New York literary aesthetic. *How to Succeed...* proved challenging in that its purely textual source material lacked subsequent stage, film or radio adaptations from which to gather inspiration for a musical setting. Revisiting its literary roots and non-musical interpretations will facilitate comparison of the unproduced play and hit musical through summaries of the writers.

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<sup>48</sup> “Loverly Memories of ‘My Fair Lady’: As the Classic Musical Returns to Broadway with Richard Chamberlin, Some of Those Who Were There at the Very Beginning Look Back,” *The New York Times*, 5 December 1993.

### **Shepherd Mead: A “Dastard’s” Rise to the Top**

Shepherd Mead had worked his way up to the position of vice president at the Benton & Bowles advertising agency in New York City by the dawn of the 1950s. It would be through his personal experiences from years climbing the corporate ladder at the company that the eventual impetus for his satirical text, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying: The Dastard’s Guide to Fame and Fortune*, was born.<sup>49</sup> Mead allegedly had written *How to Succeed...* on a “one-a-day flow of inspiration,” the success of the text and subsequent musical—coupled with his miserly tendencies—facilitating his departure from Benton & Bowles to work full-time as an author.<sup>50</sup> Abe Burrows, the eventual writer of the *How to Succeed...* musical adaptation, would ultimately befriend Mead and recounted his path toward literary success:

[Mead] really wanted to write – not ad copy but books. He finally figured out a way to do both. He wrote most of his book while working at an advertising agency, but being an honest fellow, he did it on his own time. He would come into the agency office about seven-thirty every morning while the rest of the admen were still in bed, and he’d spend two hours working on his book, the book that was going to get him off Madison Avenue.<sup>51</sup>

The hard work of Mead did not go unrecognized by his employer and resulted in circumstances that ultimately proved ironic to the events presented in *How to Succeed...*:

One of the bosses of the agency also used to come in early. He began to notice Ed Mead hard at work (or what seemed to be work) and he was impressed by this eager young man who was at his desk typing away long before anybody else showed up. It wasn’t too long before Ed Mead was promoted and he finally was

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<sup>49</sup> Rex Lardner, “A Place at the Top: How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying. By Shepherd Mead. Illustrated by Claude. 148 pp. New York: Simon & Schuster. \$2.50,” *The New York Times*, 14 September 1952.

<sup>50</sup> Harry Gilroy, “Mead Succeeds by Really Trying: Author of Hit Comedy Finds Way to Use Subconscious,” *The New York Times*, 28 February, 1965.

<sup>51</sup> Abe Burrows, *Honest, Abe: Is There Really No Business Like Show Business?* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 326.



made a vice-president of the agency! This piece of bad luck caused him to be stuck in the advertising business a little longer than he had planned; but the book he wrote and the ones that followed finally did free him.<sup>52</sup>

Rex Lardner from *The New York Times* would cite Mead as the “Tolstoy” of “the special, complex world of industry, advertising and commerce” in perceiving *How to Succeed...* as an uninhibited satire on the “business gestalt problem” of 1950s America:

The book will be welcomed by tycoons and tyros alike. The former will discover not only how to stay at the top of the heap but how they happened to reach there in the first place: for the latter it is an invaluable vade mecum, covering (1) the special language of the business world (“You oughta countersink the idea” and “Why not roll it into one ball of wax J. B.?”), (2) the technique of the memowright (memos should be vague, interminable and full of personalized philosophy), (3) the utilization and self-accreditation, in a fatherly way, of the ideas of subordinates without actually seeming to and (4) back-stabbing, back-protecting, false commuting and becoming a Fair-haired Boy. A funny informative book.<sup>53</sup>

The success appeared surprising to Mead and those at Simon & Schuster, the latter publishing an appreciative and fittingly wry response in an advertisement published in *The New York Times*:

Four weeks ago we published a little book—little only in the sense of its stature and small number of pages...we did not believe anyone would take such a project seriously....

Then, a week before publication, a busybody named John Crosby got hold of a copy. Evidently desperate for material, Crosby devoted one entire syndicated column to the book, on the flimsy pretext that the author, Shepherd Mead, was a television executive.

On publication day, the Doubleday Bookshops, on whom we had already unloaded as many copies as our conscience allowed (or in other words, too many) actually reordered another 1,000.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 326.

<sup>53</sup> Lardner, “A Place at the Top.”

...so far more than 20,000 people have been taken in by this book. The first printing was instantly exhausted, the second has just been delivered to the stores, the third is on the presses.

We are forced to concede that, regrettable though it may be, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* is a runaway best-seller. And we must assume that its principles, or lack of them, are being put into practice in business offices on a nation-wide scale.

Business immorality is on the march!<sup>54</sup>

The 1952 *How to Succeed...* is a unique concept. The text is told by Mead in the role of a pseudo-inspirational, sardonic narrator as he encourages the reader to pursue big business through a veiled satire. This is done through recognition of the competitive nature of the advertising industry while simultaneously lampooning its merits. The “word of caution” Mead presents to readers in the introduction makes this approach apparent:

*This book will be beneficial only to those who bring to it purity of thought. It is designed solely to show you how to succeed in business and to make money and will be effective only to those who read it with these aims in mind. Those who bring with them selfish motives will receive small comfort and scant benefit.*<sup>55</sup>

The text is unsentimental and told from the standpoint of a man whose experience working in the Madison Ave. district was defined by a lack in selflessness that extended to office politics and moral corruption. Readers related to the context quickly, allowing Mead to publish passages like the following from the book in *The New York Times*:

The real short cut to success is to establish yourself as a fair-haired boy. Find your employer’s hobby and dress accordingly. For example, if he is a sailing enthusiast, wear one regular business brogue and one well-worn faded blue sailing sneaker. Limp slightly, favoring the blue foot....[I]f you have planned your

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<sup>54</sup> “Display Ad 31 -- No Title,” *The New York Times*, 23 September 1952.

<sup>55</sup> Shepherd Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying: The Dastard’s Guide to Fame and Fortune* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), x.

wardrobe carefully, you will become Senior Executive. Your function now will be only to (1) impress the Board of Directors, and (2) Hold Down Costs.<sup>56</sup>

Adapting these clichés of corporate New York for the Broadway stage could have proven a risk from both musical and non-musical standpoints. The positive perception of big business remained persistent following election of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President of the United States, resulting in a subsequent surge in commercialism resulting from prosperity in the American workforce.<sup>57</sup> Two New York-based writers, however, felt obliged to tackle the subject head-on and crafted the first-known stage adaptation of *How to Succeed...*

### **Weinstock and Gilbert: A Summary**

A quick review of journalism on Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert published in the mid to late twentieth-century highlights their respective career trajectories. Neither were known initially for their contributions to musical theater, the two having met when Gilbert, a former vaudevillian, saw Weinstock, a notable doctor and teacher, for a medical procedure in New York. Their subsequent friendship and joint collaboration as writers for *The Howdy Doody Show* would comprise five years of work in television, a period that, in context to this research, followed publication of the Shepherd Mead text by four years.<sup>58</sup> Weinstock would subsequently acquaint himself with a number of Hollywood elites during his tenure as a renowned medical professional, having treated such luminaries as Roy Rogers, Marilyn Monroe and even Rudy

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<sup>56</sup> Shepherd Mead, “How to Dress Your Way to Success!” *The New York Times*, 27 September 1953.

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Means Fraser, “A Structural Analysis of the American Musical Theatre between 1955 and 1965: A Cultural Perspective” (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1982), 29-30.

<sup>58</sup> “Jack Weinstock, Urologist, Dies; Co-Author of ‘How to Succeed,’” *The New York Times*, May 24, 1969.

Vallee—the exact period which Weinstock attended to the latter is unknown, possibly occurring during the development of *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* around 1959-61.<sup>59</sup>

Weinstock first established his pedigree as a writer while attending Columbia College and provided works for varsity shows, a role he later stated as being for his “own amusement.”<sup>60</sup> His later experience working with colleagues at the United States Life Insurance Company would ultimately provide the direct impetus for adapting the Mead text, stating that the majority of those who influenced early drafts of the script remained unoffended by his own comedic depictions of executive life. Weinstock subsequently noted that individuals “seldom see themselves on stage.”<sup>61</sup> Determining why Weinstock and, in turn, Gilbert adapted *How to Succeed...* for the stage could be understood through recognizing the commercial prospects for television writers in New York. Those writing for the medium were receiving lucrative contracts to produce stage adaptations on and off-Broadway throughout the 1950s and found an opportunity for financial prosperity through relicensing of their original script(s) for the theater.<sup>62</sup> The duo was not, however, adapting their own television writings as they intended to stage a source that remained fixed to a satirical, plotless narrative—a risk when considering character development and dramatic tension. Identifying the potential for success required the expertise of an individual attuned to the trappings of Broadway theater and an awareness of intrinsic musical connotations in a non-musical source.

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<sup>59</sup> Milton Esterow, “Jack Weinstock, Surgeon, Case of How to Succeed by Trying,” *The New York Times*, 23 November, 1962.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Jon Kraszewski, “Adapting Scripts in the 1950s: The Economic and Political Incentives for Television Anthology Writers,” *Journal of Film and Video* 58, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 3, 8.

## Abe Burrows: The “Doctor” of Broadway Musicals

Writer and director Abe Burrows found initial success in radio after establishing the commercial viability of the program *Duffy’s Tavern* in 1941.<sup>63</sup> Subsequent projects would include the “juvenile adventure series” *Sky King*<sup>64</sup> and the Irving Mansfield-produced variety series *This is Broadway* concerning issues of American show business.<sup>65</sup> Burrows would mount a self-titled radio program in 1947 that lampooned Tin Pan Alley-era songwriting while satirizing Hollywood pretension and celebrity culture in the process. These subjects were approached in a predominantly-verbal manner, Burrows forfeiting the then-predominant reliance on “form” that defined radio American radio programs of the era:

Don’t get me wrong. There’s nothing wrong in format. A novel’s gotta have two covers, a beginnin’ and an end. But one of the weaknesses of present-day radio is that it’s so preoccupied with form—angles, tricks, noise. What the hell, let’s get words.<sup>66</sup>

The approach to format practiced by Burrows evoked ire from some critics who tired of his reliance on song parodies that stretched well beyond the limits of entertainment. *The New York Times* expressed relief when the routine “high society” bit was eventually abandoned by Burrows and the program continued to prove successful with listeners.<sup>67</sup> His success in radio would pave the way toward his first Broadway smash with *Guys and Dolls*, a period that followed a period

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<sup>63</sup> “7833: *Duffy’s Tavern*,” in *Encyclopedia of American Radio, 1920-1960*, Luther F. Sies, ed. (Jefferson, North Carolina; London: McFarland & Company, 2000), 176.

<sup>64</sup> “23856: *Sky King*,” in *Encyclopedia of American Radio*, 519.

<sup>65</sup> “25531: *This Is Broadway*,” in *Encyclopedia of American Radio*, 579.

<sup>66</sup> Edwin E. Gordon, “Mr. Abe Burrows: Some Notes on the Energetic Satirist Who Spoofs Tin Pan Alley and Corwin,” *The New York Times*, 25 January 1948.

<sup>67</sup> Jack Gould, “Programs in Review: Abe Burrows and His Specialized Comedy—Television Forum—Joan Davis,” *The New York Times*, 24 July 1949.

spent as panelist on the radio program *We Take Your Word*.<sup>68</sup> That show and its focus on vocabulary was a fitting role for the word-centric Burrows.

Burrows is best remembered for his role as “play doctor,” a term applied to Broadway book writers who salvage “sick shows” from potential critical or box office failure.<sup>69</sup> Burrows remained defiant when noting perceptions projected toward musical theater, recounting the dichotomy between the genre and more prestigious forms of stage works:

I don't like the word “revival.” Revival means that something is dead and you've revived it, you know? Like Lazarus...these things are classics...although I don't equate them with *Aida* or *La bohème*, nobody calls those operas revivals.<sup>70</sup>

The interim between *Guys and Dolls* and *Greenwillow*—the successor to *The Most Happy Fella* and a notable box office failure for Loesser at ninety-seven performances<sup>71</sup>—found Burrows on an active career trajectory throughout the 1950s. He went on to write a number of Broadway hits that included *Can-Can* (1953), *Silk Stockings* (1955) and *Happy Hunting* (412) that ran over 1,500 combined performances and earned numerous accolades. Burrows received no recognition from the major awards circuits for his respective contributions but he remained a prominent fixture of the New York theater scene nonetheless.<sup>72</sup> His simultaneous experience in writing non-musical plays and “plays with music” complemented his contributions to musical comedy and prepared him for adapting straight plays to fit the trappings of musical theater.

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<sup>68</sup> “27327: *We Take Your Word*,” in *Encyclopedia of American Radio*, 625.

<sup>69</sup> “Day at Night: Abe Burrows, playwright and screenwriter,” accessed 13 January 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VezbsmCriw4>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *Greenwillow*, Internet Broadway Database, accessed 29 December 2021, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/greenwillow-2192>.

<sup>72</sup> “Abe Burrows,” Internet Broadway Database, accessed 18 January 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/abe-burrows-3875>.

## Burrows and His “Co-Writers”

Weinstock and Gilbert did not go unrecognized by the press in their early efforts to adapt *How to Succeed...* as a non-musical play. Their names often appeared in passing as “cowriters” of the book alongside Burrows:

“H. T. S. I. B. W. R. T.,” to be sure, will be based on a book of similar name by Shepherd Mead, a satirical account of a somewhat ineffective young man who stumbles up the ladder of success. Its theatrical incarnation is in the hands of Abe Burrows, who, with Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert, is working on the final draft.<sup>73</sup>

Their designation as authors of the book continued to remain prominent in the immediate period prior to the start of production:

If rehearsals do not begin in March for a Broadway première in May, the offering will be held over to next season. Mr. Burrows will direct the entry. He is also collaborating on the story with Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert.<sup>74</sup>

Initial attempts at having the play produced were unsuccessful, even after an initially announced production by Broadway producer Joe Cates in 1957.<sup>75</sup> Cy Feuer, however, expressed interest and made explicit his initial impressions upon reading the draft by Weinstock and Gilbert. Feuer had previously established his career through working with Loesser on *Where’s Charley?* and *Guys and Dolls* while exhibiting a significant knack for recognizing musical potential in a non-musical source:

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<sup>73</sup> Lewis Funke, “News of the Rialto: Musical Reunion; Burrows and Loesser Are Working on Production—Other Items,” *The New York Times*, 16 October 1960.

<sup>74</sup> Sam Zolotow, “Morse May Star in New Musical: Weighs Lead Role in ‘How to Succeed in Business’—Corsaro Adds 2 Plays,” *The New York Times*, 4 November 1960.

<sup>75</sup> Zolotow, “Musical Planned by Feuer, Martin.”

The story was weak but tempting...The best part about it was that all of the characters were deliciously corrupt. It only lacked a love interest. But that could be fixed. The important thing was that we sensed a good musical in the debauched hive of corporate conformity.<sup>76</sup>

Feuer noticed flaws in the Weinstock and Gilbert draft and felt Burrows could rewrite their draft as a musical comedy. Burrows had initially expressed hesitations toward adapting *How to*

*Succeed*... after reading the original Mead text in 1956:

An agent sent me a copy and said he thought it would make a great musical. After I read it, I told him he was crazy. I enjoyed the book but who the hell would want to see a show about Big Business? And who would want to write a musical about Big Business? Besides, even though the book was funny, there was no plot, no story to build on. So I passed it up.<sup>77</sup>

The situation was further complicated due to Burrows oft-shifting mental and physical health noted by his colleagues over the years:

On the surface, Abe was a happy-go-lucky man, without a trouble in the world. I knew, however, that he was a secret sufferer. As a result, he had an indulgence problem. Food and liquor...and liquor and food....Abe needed work and he needed acclaim. What he needed most of all was a big hit. He hadn't had one in a few seasons. I convinced him that *How to Succeed* had all the ingredients for a smash. That's when he finally agreed to write and direct the show.<sup>78</sup>

Burrows had coincidentally befriended Shepherd Mead and was subsequently told about Weinstock, Gilbert and their theatrical ambitions.<sup>79</sup> The former eventually decided to adapt the

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<sup>76</sup> Feuer and Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 220.

<sup>77</sup> Abe Burrows, *Honest, Abe: Is There Really No Business Like Show Business?* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 326.

<sup>78</sup> Feuer and Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 220-1.

<sup>79</sup> Mann, "The Musicals of Frank Loesser," 131.



initial draft after recounting his experiences attending dinners with corporate sponsors, taking note of the constant shift in personnel concerning the head of advertising.<sup>80</sup>

The musical draft for *How to Succeed...* would be completed on the condition that neither Weinstock nor Gilbert contribute to what Burrows had written despite the pair still being recognized as “co-librettists” of the final draft.<sup>81</sup> Their distinction as pseudo-creators of the musical has been consistently cited in historical texts on American musical theater over the years and results in their “contributions” to the show remaining in the collective consciousness. As with many Broadway productions, however, the exact roots of *How to Succeed...* are often summarized to make way for analysis of the eventual musical iteration by Loesser and Burrows. The following scholarship intends to explore beyond this point and provide insight into the process of musically-adapting *How to Succeed...* through comparison of the non-musical and musical drafts. This is an investigation that has yet to be explored thoroughly, bringing about a new context concerning the show and its development into one of the canonic Broadway productions of the mid-twentieth-century.

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<sup>80</sup> Feuer and Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 220.

<sup>81</sup> Mann, “The Musicals of Frank Loesser,” 131.

### III. “HOW TO SUCCEED”: COMPARING AND DISTINGUISHING THE NON-MUSICAL AND MUSICAL DRAFTS FROM A THEATRICAL AND MUSICAL STANDPOINT

The dawn of the 1960s witnessed the premieres of Broadway musicals that widened the schism between portrayals of fantasy and reality onstage. The Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe musical *Camelot* further realized the illusion of musical theater as a means of escapism while keeping the genre rooted in an element of fantasy:

[*Camelot*] affirmed that there was an alternative reality...It’s not a new idea to suggest that art permits one voyages, or to argue that art can make a dreary life less so...those musicals were the greatest illustration that another world existed: one that held music, joy, and unfettered access to the extraordinary.<sup>82</sup>

The musicals of Frank Loesser brought similar entertainment but primarily through narratives focusing on realism through foregrounding the emotional and intellectual flaws of “unremarkable” people—those least likely to achieve success. Pierrepont Finch and his arc as a striving “twentieth-century man” in *How to Succeed...* was no exception as Loesser and Abe Burrows crafted an intentionally flawed protagonist whose oft-feigned intellect facilitated attainment of his career goals. He remains one of numerous schemers driving the action of *How to Succeed...* as noted by Thomas L. Riis: “Greedy opportunists, philandering bosses, husband-hunting female secretaries, craven yes-men, and work-averse drones all come in for

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<sup>82</sup> Kenneth A. McClane, “Musicals,” in “An Imaginary Country,” special issue, *The Antioch Review* 63, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 677.

lamponing.”<sup>83</sup> The depiction of a real-world setting inhabited by equally relatable characters resulted in two unique interpretations of the original Shepherd Mead text. It is in comparing the non-musical and musical adaptations that this context can be fully explored.

### **“How to”: Comments on Adapting the Satire of “How to Succeed…” for the Stage**

The plotline for *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* follows a relatively simple premise. New York window washer Pierrepont Finch reads a “self-help” book on making it in the world of big business that conveniently goes by the same name as the Shepherd Mead text. His naïve belief that the text be followed verbatim persuades him to enter the corporate world of Madison Avenue and he starts work in the mailroom at the World Wide Wicket Company. He gradually works his way up to vice president through a series of schemes involving emotional manipulation of his boss J.B. Biggley while developing an attraction to a secretary named Rosemary. This narrative comprises act one before delving into the repercussions of his scheming ways during the second half of the show that are complicated by the petty jealousy felt by colleague Bud Frump—the nephew of Biggley. Finch sets up a failed company “contest” that ultimately results in his presumed termination and those of his colleagues. It is at this time that he resolves the issue by recounting his association and relatability to his superiors and concluded the show with the “11 o’clock number” appropriately entitled “Brotherhood of Man.”

The Mead text and its contemporary setting were significantly realized in the eventual musical adaptation. References to Madison Ave. were visually-evident in the wardrobe and production design but the lyrics by Loesser proved most relevant to the show in their sexist, corporate implications. Burrows explored similar themes in the accompanying book despite the

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<sup>83</sup> Riis, *Frank Loesser*, 170.

songs carrying greater immediacy in their depiction of a mid-twentieth-century workplace. Songs entitled “A Secretary Is Not a Toy,” “Coffee Break” and “Paris Original” called to mind the superficiality, sexuality and mundanity of corporate American through humorous lyrical connotations and contemporary musical styles. Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert exploited similar ideas in their non-musical draft despite their narrative being readjusted to fit a musical comedy interpretation. The apparent differences in writing styles between the pair and Burrows brings into question how thoroughly and effectively musical adaptations alter the “narratives” of their non-musical source materials.

Defining the comedic style of *How to Succeed...* the musical against that presented in the plotless Mead text brings about discourse on interpreting “satire” for the Broadway stage. Critics who saw the original 1961 production understandably noted its reliance on a preexisting source material as a “safe bet” that lessened the risk of its production. This notion was obvious given the continued surge in adapting preexisting works into musicals noted by philosopher Henry Popkin in 1962:

[M]usicals tend to be safe and assured in another way. Usually they are based upon some previous book, play, or film. Seldom do we hear of the collaborative working out of an original idea that is inherently and unusually appropriate to the musical stage.<sup>84</sup>

Popkin continued with mention of *How to Succeed...* and the evident use of satire to drive the storyline:

The hit musical of the season, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, is effectively satirical without attacking anything. The satire is so framed that the absence of attack is not a real defect. Bureaucracy and cutthroat ambition are beyond the

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<sup>84</sup> Henry Popkin, “American Theater in Transition,” *College English* 23, no. 7 (April 1962): 568.

effective range even of social revolution. They simply exist, and their existence is, for the satirist, a cause for rejoicing. Deliberately, no effort is made to move us in *How to Succeed*.<sup>85</sup>

Interpreting Broadway musicals as constituting a safe bet if adapted from already-extant sources is entirely logical and integral to the present research. The lengths to which a non-musical narrative could be expanded upon to be fitted with the trappings of a Broadway show relied on a multitude of factors by the mid-twentieth-century. Chief among these was the effective exploitation of dramatic and/or comedic tension through an integrated book and score such as the one Loesser and Burrows provided for *Guys and Dolls*. *How to Succeed...* was an entirely different beast, however, as its predominantly satirical source material prevented much in the way of a fantastical or sentimental approach common in popular musicals of the era.

Riis cites the satire of *How to Succeed...* as having posed a new “challenge” for Loesser. His prior musicals had relied on “non-parodic” sources and never dealt directly with a contemporary setting, let alone one that simultaneously lampooned corporate America.<sup>86</sup> Burrows and his aforementioned lack of interest in depicting “Big Business” on the Broadway stage proved an additional obstacle before he and Loesser recognized its musical potential. The eventual interests of Burrows and Loesser alongside those of Feuer and Martin also resulted in various projects being sidelined to keep primary focus on *How to Succeed....* Sam Zolotow noted this in *The New York Times* when the show was in its early stages of conceptualization:

[The musical] will affect another of the attractions planned by Mr. Feuer and Mr. Martin. They were to have brought forth a musical, based on Elmer Rice’s comedy, “Dream Girl,” with Carol Channing starred. It was discovered that the values of the show were not quite right for her. Consequently, she withdrew. But the project has not been dropped. The producing team is on the verge

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 568.

<sup>86</sup> Riis, *Frank Loesser*, 171.

of tying up the rights to “Dream Girl” again to serve as the basis of an entertainment called “Skyscraper”....Messrs. Feuer and Martin also control the musical rights to “Cafe Crown,” H. S. Kraft’s comedy. Turning out the song-and-dance plot is Leonard Spigelgass, author of the successful comedy, “A Majority of One.” As soon as it is finished in May, the script will be dispatched to Frank Loesser, who embellished the Feuer and Martin production of “Guys and Dolls” with a notable score. If Mr. Loesser approves, negotiations will begin for him to create the music and lyrics.<sup>87</sup>

The article additionally notes the roles of Weinstock and Gilbert while providing a more accurate definition of their roles as book writers:

As a play it was adapted by Dr. Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert, both television writers....Discussing the prospect yesterday, [Ernest] Martin became enthusiastic over the skillful collaboration. He hopes the collaborators will go a step further and furnish the treatment for the musical comedy plot.<sup>88</sup>

The irony in this newfound challenge faced by the composer was that much of the Mead text was directly referenced in the eventual non-musical and musical scripts. Application of character names, a central corporate institution and their pertinence to various workplace scenarios establishes the Mead text as prime material for an adaptation. The book and its “happy-go-lucky cynicism” only required proper rearrangement by Weinstock, Gilbert and Burrows to make it work within the confines of American theater.<sup>89</sup>

Allusions to the 1952 book in the 1961 musical adaptation are directly evident through use of the text as a “self-help” guide by Finch throughout the show. The opening number “How

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<sup>87</sup> Zolotow, “Musical Planned by Feuer, Martin.”

<sup>88</sup> Zolotow, “Musical Planned by Feuer, Martin.”

<sup>89</sup> Riis, *Frank Loesser*, 167.

To” makes this apparent in its interpolation of chapter titles taken directly from the Mead work.

Those that apply are underlined:

How to apply for a job

How to advance from the mail room

How to sit down at a desk

How to dictate memorandums

How to develop executive style

How to commute – in a three button suit

With that weary executive smile

This book is all that I need

How to – how to – succeed<sup>90</sup>

The opening number demonstrates the importance of setting the scene while simultaneously establishing character development in order to allow narrative room for the songs to shine. The interim between Finch singing finds employees calling out orders in a bewildered and intentionally mundane manner:

PETERSON: Oh, say, Tackaberry, did you get my memo?

(FINCH XR of Peterson)

TACKABERRY: (Turns R to Peterson) What memo?

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<sup>90</sup> “FEUER AND MARTIN, In Association with Frank Productions, Inc., Present, THE NEW FRANK LOESSER and ABE BURROWS MUSICAL, HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING,” n.d., 1-1-2, box 38, folder 2, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, Abe Burrows Papers, Series III: Production Files, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York City. [Cited hereafter as “Burrows/HTS, etc.”]

PETERSON: My memo about memos. We're sending out too many memos and it's got to stop.

TACKABERRY: All right, I'll send out a memo.<sup>91</sup>

Finch realizes that he has found a company “big enough so that nobody knows exactly what anyone else is doing” and is delighted.<sup>92</sup> The above sequence showcases Burrows and his ability for establishing character traits and environment within a condensed period of time. The first few minutes convey that Finch was a window washer, found a self-help guide to big business, discovered his place of employment at World Wide Wicket and is surrounded by individuals oblivious to their company duties.

It is the ability to present action in a logical and direct manner that made Burrows a truly great book writer. The opening of *How to Succeed...* references an entire chapter of the Mead text entitled “How to Write Memos” in summary rather than through the initial nine pages written by Mead that detail five different subheadings. “How to Get People to Read Memos” and “What to Do with Other People’s Memos” certainly warranted little recognition in the eventual musical adaptation when considering which subjects/jokes to prioritize.<sup>93</sup> The same expertise in prioritizing content cannot be said for Weinstock and Gilbert who spend too much time establishing individual character types or “clichés.” Their opening comes off more as a succession of Madison Ave. clichés that reflects the absence of “attack” mentioned earlier by Popkin:

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<sup>91</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-2-4.

<sup>92</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-2-3.

<sup>93</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 60-8.



(TACKABERRY, A YOUNG MAN, IS SEATED AT THE DESK. COOPER IS POURING DRINKS. HE IS ABOUT TO POUR THE THIRD ONE. TACKABERRY HOLDS UP HIS HAND)

TACKABERRY: Count me out Vic.

(THE OTHERS STARE AT HIM, AMAZED. TACKABERRY REACHES UNDER HIS DESK AND BRINGS UP A BOTTLE OF MILK. SMILING PROUDLY, HE POURS A GLASSFUL)

TOYNBEE: Bob!!! Really----?

TACKABERRY: (NODS PROUDLY) Yep. Saw the doctor yesterday. The x-rays finally showed it. Big as a crater on the moon!

COOPER: (SHAKES HIS HAND) Congratulations, Tackaberry. You've made it! Your first ulcer!

(BLACKOUT)

The stereotyping of characters or corporate “types” is entirely logical given the approach presented by Mead in his own plotless text. These humorous jabs kept the book engaging and remained similarly broad and obvious to workplace stereotypes as evident in depiction of the “junior executive”:

A junior executive is any male in an office who sits down. At first you will make considerably less money than the men who run elevators, wash the windows, and shine the shoes. But remember—you are being paid not in money but in experience. You are learning!<sup>94</sup>

Weinstock and Gilbert use Finch as a narrator throughout their draft, his wry observations supplying the most explicit reverence to the Mead text. The clichés lampooned by Mead in his book are strung together through passages offering broad character definitions that hyperbolize

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<sup>94</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 30.

the mundanity of American corporate. The approach was mirrored by Weinstock and Gilbert even as they attempted to form a thorough narrative for Finch and his ascent up the corporate ladder. It results in passages that read as direct references to the work of Mead that are readily apparent:

J. P. FINCH: (AUDIO) And so you become a junior executive. A junior executive is any male in an office who sits down....But we mustn't stop at the Junior Executive level. We must rise higher and higher. To do this, time is important--not the regular office hours. Everyone works then. But the man who works after hours--even Saturday mornings--is the one who will be noticed.<sup>95</sup>

Finch is serving as his own narrator throughout the show as he recounts his rise to the top. The Burrows iteration is cleverer in its allusions to the Mead text that are evident in the opening.

Finch is washing windows as he reads his new "How To" book as the audience suddenly begins to read along with him:

BOOK VOICE

Dear Reader: This little book is designed to tell you everything you need to know about the science of getting ahead.

(FINCH turns front toward the audience, and turns page in the book)

Now let us assume you are young, healthy, clear-eyed and eager, anxious to rise quickly and easily to the top of the business world. You can!

FINCH

(Looking up)

I can!

(He continues looking at book)

BOOK VOICE

If you have intelligence and ability, so much the better. But remember that thousands have reached the top without any of these qualities.

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<sup>95</sup> "HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING: A Comedy In Two Acts By JACK WEINSTOCK & WILLIE GILBERT; Based on the Book by SHEPHERD MEAD," n.d., box 38, folder 2, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, Abe Burrows Papers, Series III: Production Files, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York City, 1/28. [Cited hereafter as "Weinstock/Gilbert, etc."]

(Scaffold lowers to the floor) SCAFFOLD TO FLOOR  
Just have courage and memorize the simple  
rules in the chapters that follow. If you truly wish to be  
among the lucky golden few, you can!

FINCH

I can!<sup>96</sup>

This can be seen as an apparent tribute to the Mead text in its wording:

Let us assume you are young, healthy, clear-eyed and eager,  
anxious to rise quickly and easily to the top of the business world.  
You can!

If you have education, intelligence, and ability, so much the better.  
But remember that thousands have reached the top without them.  
You, too, can be among the lucky few.

Just have courage, and memorize the simple rules in the chapters  
that follow.<sup>97</sup>

Finch references the book throughout as a guide and takes the audience along with him.

Weinstock and Gilbert reference the style used by Mead but too often let it drive the central narrative.

### **Adapting the Satirical from a Musical Standpoint**

The supposed difficulty Loesser faced in scoring *How to Succeed...* was greatly facilitated after being granted an incentive by Burrows, Feuer and Martin to serve as co-producer of the show: “That he could make money by making fun of people devoted to making money was a nice, ironic twist.”<sup>98</sup> Loesser and his hesitation was further alleviated once he began composing the outright “satirical” songs of the show. Some of their titles derived in the same fashion as “How To” by lifting directly from the Mead text and referenced the book in a comedic

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<sup>96</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-1-1.

<sup>97</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Feuer and Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 221.

fashion. Other songs stemmed from oft-generalized traits of the American workforce as evident in the Act One number “Coffee Break.” The song and its “cha-cha”-inspired composition referenced musical hits from years prior such as “Whatever Lola Wants” from *Damn Yankees* (1955), simultaneously using the characteristically Latin rhythms to explore a sense of rote office mundanity.<sup>99</sup> The lyrics for “Coffee Break” are entirely satirical in their exaggeration of American workforce clichés and provide an easy opportunity for comic relief:

FRUMP: IF I CAN'T TAKE MY COFFEE BREAK  
MY COFFEE BREAK, MY COFFEE BREAK  
IF I CAN'T TAKE MY COFFEE BREAK  
(ALL sit up)  
SOMETHING WITHIN ME DIES

ALL: LIES DOWN AND SOMETHING WITHIN ME DIES<sup>100</sup>

Loesser further employs rhyming schemes to highlight the lyrics of the song against a relatively-limited melodic construction:

SMITTY: IF I CAN'T MAKE THREE DAILY TRIPS WHERE  
SHINING SHRINE BENIGNLY DRIPS  
(ALL crowd around machine)  
AND TASTE CARDBOARD BETWEEN MY LIPS  
SOMETHING WITHIN ME DIES

ALL: LIES DOWN AND  
(ALL fade up)  
SOMETHING WITHIN ME DIES  
(ALL collapse)<sup>101</sup>

Another opportunity for easy satire came with the Act One number “A Secretary Is Not a Toy.”

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<sup>99</sup> John David Cockerill, “A Little Rumba Numba: Latin American Music in Musical Theatre” (M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 2012), 34.

<sup>100</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-3-15.

<sup>101</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-3-15.

The song humorously stereotypes the male treatment of female employees and opens wryly with a waltz-styled introduction by personnel manager Mr. Bratt decrying the treatment of his female staff:

BRATT: Gentlemen. . . Gentlemen. . . MUSIC CUE

A SECRETARY IS NOT A TOY

BRATT: A SECRETARY IS NOT A TOY  
NO, MY BOY, NOT A TOY  
TO FONDLE AND DANDLE

[next page]

BRATT: AND PLAYFULLY HANDLE  
IN SEARCH OF SOME FUERILE JOY  
NO, A SECRETARY IS NOT  
DEFINITELY NOT, A TOY<sup>102</sup>

The song then transitions to a peppy comic number set to a lively triple meter in order to imply the lack of seriousness by which the male coworkers take Bratt and his declamatory lecture:

JENKINS: (XR - stops) You're absolutely right Mr. Bratt.

BUD: (XR - stops) We wouldn't have it any other way Mr. Bratt.

JENKINS: (XR - stops) It's a company rule, Mr. Bratt.  
(Exits R. ALL exit but THREE BOYS)  
(GIRLS XL to R)

3 BOYS: (C) A SECRETARY IS NOT A TOY  
NO, MY BOY, NOT A TOY

1 BOY: SO DO NOT GO JUMPING FOR JOY

5 BOYS: BOY

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<sup>102</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-6-42/1-6-43.

2 BOYS: A SECRETARY IS NOT  
A SECRETARY IS NOT  
A SECRETARY IS NOT

2 BOYS &  
4 GIRLS: A TOY<sup>103</sup>

The shift in tempo additionally materialized after Bob Fosse helped restage some of the musical numbers with help from wife and artistic muse Gwen Verdon. Feuer and Loesser witnessed the pair re-contextualize “Secretary” as a “soft-shoe routine” that resulted in the composer rewriting the lyrics in the above bluntly satirical style.<sup>104</sup>

The extent to which Weinstock and Gilbert addressed the clichés of a corporate workplace is a unique indicator as to how Burrows and Loesser interpreted the unsung musical potential of the Mead text. Mention of a “coffee break” appears prime for comic relief in a stage adaptation on Big Business satire but is only mentioned in passing by Weinstock and Gilbert among the secretaries:

ROSEMARY (DOING HER NAILS): Anybody got a cuticle scissors?

JANE (TALKING ON PHONE): No, Honey -- I can't quit early, I quit early yesterday and besides, I took a long lunch hour today!

NANCY (STANDS UP, TAKES NEWSPAPER): Will you answer my phone, Anne?

ANNE (READING A MAGAZINE): Don't take too long, Nancy, or you'll miss the coffee break.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-6-43.

<sup>104</sup> Feuer and Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 229.

<sup>105</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/3.

Mead mentioned coffee in his own work but went beyond its passive definition by referencing it as a necessary source of existence for office employees: “For two or three days and nights—two should be ample—remain in the office, consuming nothing but black coffee and cigarettes.”<sup>106</sup>

Loesser appeared to find more musical potential in “coffee” when recounting the need for a chorus number intended to “make some noise” amidst the more sentimentally-driven ballads of the show. It was additionally important for Burrows to help Loesser contextualize a realistic scenario that could be fully integrated into a satire on big business:

What would people working in an office sing about and not sound foolish? Well, we kicked this around for days and we finally came up with the idea of a coffee break.<sup>107</sup>

The choreography of Bob Fosse helped bring “Coffee Break” to life onstage and was additionally used to establish “A Secretary Is Not a Toy” as what Burrows referred to as a “funny, exciting song-and-dance number.”<sup>108</sup>

Finch starts his career at World Wide Wicket down in the mailroom where he befriends “company” man Mr. Twimble and takes his first steps toward being an absolute schemer. The Mead text categorizes the mailroom experience into three subheadings in the third chapter entitled “How to Rise from the Mail Room.” A witty introduction by Mead sets the stage for this chapter:

[Note: Those who have already risen from mail rooms, or managed to by-pass them altogether, need not learn this chapter by heart. It will be enough to run through it quickly a few times, jotting down important points. These may help you to rise from other things.]<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 45.

<sup>107</sup> Burrows, *Honest, Abe*, 333.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 334.

<sup>109</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 20.

Any wise musical book writer would use this context to expand narrative and, in turn, character development to humanize the protagonist before he or she reaches some dramatic apex by the conclusion of act one. Weinstock and Gilbert, in this case, ran with the idea and contextualized the mailroom as emotional development for Finch while discussing “company” life with long-time World Wide Wicket employee Mr. Twimble after the latter receives a commemorative gold watch:

FINCH (STILL POLISHING THE APPLE)

Well, you must have deserved it, Mr. Twimble. I wonder if I’ll ever get a gold watch like that?

TWIMBLE

Sure you will, Finch. You got the stuff. But it’ll take twenty years.

FINCH (WISTFULLY)

That seems like such a long time.

TWIMBLE

It’ll pass fast. But don’t worry, boy--you don’t have to wait that long. Why, when you’re here ten years, you get a pen and pencil set. And after only five years, you get your clock.

FRUMP (DRYLY)

Yeah...and when you’re here one year, they give you a dime to call Meridian 7-1212 for the correct time.<sup>110</sup>

Comparing the above excerpt to the Mead text reveals that Weinstock and Gilbert identified potential narrative development for Finch in the wording selected by the author:

But remember, the thing is to Get On, to succeed, to escape from the mail room, and it is to this purpose that this chapter is written. Let us leave the nostalgia to other, more skillful pens.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/10.

<sup>111</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 20-1.



Loesser could be considered under the “skillful pens” referenced by Mead as his musical contextualization of the interaction between Finch and Twimble emphasizes the “nostalgia” of living the “company way” practiced by the latter individual:

TWIMBLE: (To audience) WHEN I JOINED THIS FIRM  
AS A BRASH YOUNG MAN  
WELL I SAID TO MYSELF  
NOW BRASH YOUNG MAN  
DON'T GET ANY IDEAS  
WELL I STUCK TO THAT  
AND I HAVEN'T HAD ONE IN YEARS

FINCH: (L of Twimble): You play it safe?

TWIMBLE: I PLAY IT THE COMPANY WAY  
WHEREVER THE COMPANY PUTS ME  
THERE I STAY

FINCH: BUT WHAT IS YOUR POINT OF (VIEW)

TWIMBLE: I HAVE NO POINT OF VIEW

FINCH: SUPPOSING THE COMPANY THINKS (THAT)

TWIMBLE: I THINK SO TOO

FINCH: What would you say (if a)

TWIMBLE: I wouldn't say

FINCH: YOUR FACE IS A COMPANY FACE

TWIMBLE: IT SMILES AT EXECUTIVES, THEN GOES  
BACK IN PLACE

FINCH: THE COMPANY FURNITURE

TWIMBLE: OH IT SUITS ME FINE

FINCH: THE COMPANY LETTERHEAD

TWIMBLE: A VALENTINE!

FINCH: Anything you're against?

TWIMBLE: Unemployment.<sup>112</sup>

The song "Old Ivy" from Act One offers another direct reference to a specified section of the Mead text that carries a stronger sense of character development in a predominantly-plotless book. The eventual musical number derived from the fourteenth chapter by Mead entitled "How to Be a Fair-Haired Boy":

A few days spent at Old Ivy State Teachers Normal will supply you with all the necessary information and equipment. You need not bother with scholastic history or activities. Leave that to the professors. It will be enough to memorize the scores of all football games back to, say, 1903, the names of all local saloons, fraternities, dance halls, and traditional pranks, rushes, proms, and interclass wars....A good opening wedge may offer itself on a Monday following Old Ivy's defeat by a traditional rival. Shun obvious signs of mourning. But manage somehow to get close to the Old Man and mutter:

"Sorry, sir. Not myself today. Rarely touch a drop, but I did belt off one strong one yesterday. Those damned Chipmunks!"

Chipmunks?" (*His nostrils will begin to quiver*).

"Oh, beg pardon, sir, you can't be expected to know. The old school took quite a drubbing Saturday. Old Ivy."

"Old Ivy? You're not an Old Ivy man, uh—"

"Finch, sir. Old Ivy, '24."

"Well, by God, Finch! Old Ivy, by God! Well, we'll get the damned Chipmunks next year, won't we?"

We did it in '27 and we'll do it again, sir, if we ever get Ozymanowsky off sick list!"<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-4-27.

<sup>113</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 114.

The situation produces a potential plot device in and of itself. Its intention to earn the approval of the “Old Man” and the character contrast between the earnestness of the boss and pseudo-sincerity of Finch provide ample room for comedic appeal. Weinstock and Gilbert wisely noted this and found room for the scenario in their draft:

BIGGLEY: Sit down, Finch. (FINCH SITS) So you’re from Old Ivy.

FINCH: Why, yes, sir--how did you know?

BIGGLEY: Why, I can spot an Old Ivy man from a hundred yards! Were you at the game Saturday?

FINCH: Don’t remind me, sir! What a drubbing we took! Those damned Chipmunks!

BIGGLEY: Don’t worry about it, Son. We’ll get those Chipmunks next year! Well, what’d you want to see me about, Finch?<sup>114</sup>

Loesser further realized musical potential of this scenario and transformed into a “comedy number” that directly incorporated an Old Ivy “pledge” recited between the two:

(BIGGLEY marches down and then up)  
BIGGLEY: STAND OLD IVY  
STAND FIRM AND STRONG  
(FINCH stands to the L, watching him)  
GRAND OLD IVY  
HEAR THE CHEERING THROG  
(FINCH X to Biggley)

BIGGLEY &  
FINCH: STAND OLD IVY  
AND NEVER YIELD  
RRRRIP! RIP! RIP THE CHIPMUNK  
OFF THE FIELD<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/39.

<sup>115</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-8-59.

Both “The Company Way” and “Old Ivy” demonstrate that satire can be easily adapted for the stage if integrated into a realistic, logical context. This remains more valid for a musically-inclined iteration as the integration of book and score must prove relatable and feasible in the realm of narrative realism. The songs are crucial but an analysis of character, specifically Finch as the protagonist, remains of upmost prominence to the integrity of a successful stage adaptation.

### **Finch, the “Horatio Alger” Type and Conceptualizing Protagonists for Musical Comedy**

The character of Pierrepont Finch was a role Abe Burrows wrote specifically for actor Robert Morse after the two worked together in the 1958 musical play *Say, Darling* that had garnered the actor a Tony nomination for “Best Featured Actor in a Play.”<sup>116</sup> Morse initially trained as a dramatic actor in New York as a method-driven performer equally well-versed in skills required for success in musical theater:

I took dance lessons at Luigi’s [Faccuito] in New York, and I studied with Lee Strasberg for two years...When I first got my start in New York I did mostly dramas...My first musical was *Take Me Along*, before that I did mostly dramatic shows.<sup>117</sup>

Burrows had conceptualized the book for *How to Succeed...* over the course of a year and a half, and always intended the role of Finch to go to Morse after suggestions made by Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin.<sup>118</sup> The decision helped define the textual and musical direction the show would take as Burrows quipped humorously yet factually that “[Finch]’s a good singer, but not a great

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<sup>116</sup> “Nominations / 1959,” Tony Awards, accessed 22 January 2022, <https://www.tonyawards.com/nominees/year/1959/category/any/show/any/>.

<sup>117</sup> “Robert Morse--Rare 1984 TV Interview, “How to Succeed in Business,” accessed 30 December 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtObud2qbYA>.

<sup>118</sup> Burrows, *Honest, Abe*, 329.

one.”<sup>119</sup> Vocal acrobatics were not required of lead performers in hit musicals of the 1950s and 1960s. Acting abilities often constituted final decisions surrounding the eventual hiring of lead cast members and reached an apex with the “Sprechgesang” of Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*.<sup>120</sup> Rosalind Russell in *Wonderful Town* (1953) and Dick Van Dyke in *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960) provided additional evidence of the non-singing star leading Broadway hits of the mid-twentieth-century, and Morse proved no exception. The Tony-winning performances of Van Dyke, Russell and, eventually, Morse cemented the notion of Broadway musicals as being vehicles for acting prowess rather than just virtuosic singing.

Finch is often interpreted and defined as a “Horatio Alger” character and it predominates in many contemporary interpretations of his motives throughout *How to Succeed....* Howard Taubman would note this dichotomy between Finch and Alger in his initial review of the musical in *The New York Times*:

Imagine a collaboration between Horatio Alger and Machiavelli and you have Finch, the intrepid hero of this sortie into the canyons of commerce....[H]e is a rumped, dimpled angel with a streak of Lucifer. Butter couldn't melt in his mouth because he is so occupied with spreading it on anyone who can help him up the ladder you've heard about.<sup>121</sup>

Alger had been conceptualized by American author Horatio Alger to contrast the “one-dimensional” state of American literature and, in turn, its sociocultural constructs. Later depictions of this character reduced its complexity to focus primarily on him being presented as an “outsider” being assimilated into a modern society to sustain lifelong merit through

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<sup>119</sup> Mann, “The Musicals of Frank Loesser,” 133-4.

<sup>120</sup> “I’m an Ordinary Man - My Fair Lady,” accessed 15 February 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIX2aE02oBw>.

<sup>121</sup> Howard Taubman, “Musical Comedy Seen at 46th St. Theatre,” *The New York Times*, 16 October 1961.

instantaneous success.<sup>122</sup> Mead provided ample evidence of this trope in his own depiction of Finch by implying apparent clichés to first-time readers of his book: “Our character has been dubbed Pierrepont Finch, though there will be a few among you who won’t break into a sly smile of recognition as his career is unfolded.”<sup>123</sup> He serves as little more than a source of humor meant to centralize the plotless satire through a loose handling of the humor and characters.

Crucial to endearing Pierrepont Finch to audiences was consideration of his character development beyond mere name recognition from the Mead text. Lending relatability was required to make Finch work onstage against the context of the songs and setting. Envisioning him against the goofy, jovial portrayal by lead actor Robert Morse becomes difficult to envision against his depiction as an accomplished businessman evident in the draft by Weinstock and Gilbert. The pair highlighted a unique approach by introducing the character in their script as a thriving businessman right at the start of their draft:

(J. P. FINCH ENTERS FROM OPPOSITE WINGS AND WALKS BRISKLY ACROSS TO THE LECTERN, NODDING PLEASANTLY TO THE AUDIENCE AND THEN TO THE CHAIRMAN, WHO LEAVES. FINCH IS IN HIS FORTIES, DYNAMIC, FULL OF AUTHORITY. HE HAS THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS HIGH MORAL TONE CHARACTERISTIC OF ANY BUSINESSMAN WHOSE EYE IS ON A BUCK. HE IS GOING TO GIVE AN INSPIRATIONAL TALK OF THE KIND SO DEAR TO THE HEART OF THE AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN IN CONCLAVE OR CONVENTION ASSEMBLED...)<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., “Horatio Alger and American Modernism: The One-Dimensional Social Formula,” *American Studies* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1976): 11-2.

<sup>123</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, ix.

<sup>124</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/1.

He continues with a series of obvious corporate jokes Weinstock and Gilbert likely felt obligated to make as painstakingly obvious as possible to their intended audience:

J.P. FINCH: Good evening, good evening friends of American business. And I know you are all our friends. (PAUSE) Those of you who are here on an expense account, please raise your hands. (PAUSE) We have even more friends than I thought.<sup>125</sup>

Introductory character establishments are crucial to the investment audiences make while watching a Broadway show. Narrative perceptions are subsequently affected when said character maintains an arc both predictable and prematurely resolved while potentially spoiling the intrinsic tension intended for resolution at the conclusion. Burrows recognized this and re-contextualized Finch as a deceiving protagonist who remained ruthless under a veil of feigned naivety:

[I] eventually presented Finch as a charming character who in a gentle, disarming manner, clawed his way upward, cut down anyone who stood in his path, and yet remained loved by the audience. The moment Bobby Morse's name was mentioned, I felt that nobody else could play the part.<sup>126</sup>

Weinstock and Gilbert perceived Finch as a thriving businessman preparing for a company speech and prevented potential audiences from forming subjective conclusions about Finch and his arc throughout the show. Burrows rewrote Finch in a manner befitting the originally-plotless construction of the Mead text by depicting him first as an impish fool unlikely to find success before reading *How to Succeed...* This allows audience perceptions to evolve over the course of the show and form a greater connection to Finch as he moves through various plot devices. The humor of Finch is in how his narrative evolution remains somewhat stilted in the

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 1/1.

<sup>126</sup> Burrows, *Honest, Abe*, 329.

realm of “finding success” rather than taking into account his actions and their effect on his colleagues. It prevents severe dramatic consequences or emotional development but subsequently falls further in line with the musical as a satire rather than the oft-typified “musical play” or “musical comedy.” This notion is best exemplified in the concluding lines of the show written by Burrows:

FINCH: Rosemary, I’ve got a big decision to make. They want to make me chairman of the board. What do you think?

ROSEMARY: Darling, I don’t care if you work in the mail room or you’re chairman of the board or you’re President of the United States, I love you.

FINCH (Turns front): Say that again.

ROSEMARY: I love you.

FINCH: No, before that.<sup>127</sup>

### **Finch, Frump and the Protagonist Role in “How to Succeed...”**

Central to creating further sympathy between the audience and protagonist is an equally important antagonist or impediment to his or her ambitions. The Mead text does not offer this due to its satirical structure but bears mention of a “Bud Frump” in a chapter discussing Finch and his handling of company memos:

The “executor,” or the one who was supposed to do something about the memo, was a lad named Bud Frump of the shipping department. His name was never actually included in the typed version, but was written in red pencil on the tenth carbon.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Burrows/HTS, 2-10-56.

<sup>128</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 65.



The name is mentioned in passing just once more but does little to develop any sense of narrative function with the character. Weinstock and Gilbert were smart to take Frump and use him as the antithesis to Finch and his scheming ways through the former making witty observations on the latter and his obvious patronization of company stalwarts. An early example occurs around the time Finch attempts to garner advice from Twimble:

FRUMP

When I'm president of this firm I'm going to put you in charge of our plant in Alaska.

FINCH

Okay, Bud. What's the punchline?

FRUMP

You're an expert on snow-jobs.

FINCH

Oh, you mean Twimble? What harm is there in making the guy feel good?

FRUMP

None, Ponty, but you're wasting your time. Twimble can't do you any good.

FINCH (HIS FEELINGS ARE HURT)

I wasn't even thinking of that. I was just trying to be nice to the old boy. For crying out loud, must you have an angle for everything?

FRUMP

No...but you've got more angles than the Pentagon Building!

FINCH

Okay, Bud--what're you trying to tell me?

FRUMP

Just this--if you have any idea of climbing a ladder around here, the view is going to get awfully monotonous. Every time you look up, you'll see the seat of my pants!<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/10-1/11.

Frump is generally characterized as an antagonist but only in his mirrored ambitions to Finch. The audience is expected to root for the latter character despite his consistent distancing from reason and integrity throughout the show.

Frump is typical of the “flawed” character types explored by Loesser in his previous musicals and is exemplified through the direct attempts to schmooze Biggley that are evident in the first act. Weinstock and Gilbert initially presented Frump as condescending yet honest in his perceptions of character. This grows to intimidation and toward resentment as the draft progresses and reaches a noticeable apex when Finch is called to the office of Mr. Bratt:

FRUMP: Say, Twimble--what does Bratt want him for?

TWIMBLE: How should I know? I don't ask questions.

FRUMP: Is Finch getting your job?

TWIMBLE: Look, Bud--I don't run this company. They don't tell me everything.

FRUMP: Well, I'm telling you something! They'd better not pick that character over me!<sup>130</sup>

Frump eventually gets comeuppance by the conclusion of both the play and musical adaptations. Weinstock and Gilbert treated him far better than Burrows by simply having him exit the board room after Finch successfully pitches a new idea to Biggley. The Burrows draft provides a more ironic conclusion:

#### FINALE - THE COMPANY WAY

ALL: WE PLAY IT THE COMPANY WAY  
EXECUTIVE POLICY

(Scaffold rises outside windows US with BUD holding  
copy of :How To” book) IS BY US OKAY<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/16.

<sup>131</sup> Burrows/HTS, 2-10-56.

Frump finds himself in the same scenario as Finch when the musical started and brings to full circle the notion that perhaps naïve scheming is the principal path toward success in big business. The means by which the principal characters aspire toward a prosperous corporate career is ingeniously satirical as their motives remain driven by insincerity and a sense of naivety. Feuer provides possibly the best evidence as to why depicting Finch, Frump and the others in such a manner works for rather than against *How to Succeed...* Feuer reflected on this notion in later years:

The key to [the musical] was in the depiction of the characters as crafty and calculating buffoons. The show couldn't work if the cast was perceived as cruel, or even seriously sinister. These were all comic knaves in pursuit of ridiculous glory. Still, they would have to be appealing—the audience would have to like them, even grudgingly. The pathetic charm had to excuse their rotten behavior.<sup>132</sup>

“I Believe in You” is likely the most recognizable song from *How to Succeed...* and contains the trappings of a typified love song prominent in American musical theater. The song was not intended as the eventual number sung by Finch to himself in the bathroom mirror but as a sentimental love song. Burrows reiterated this intention and his own reservations toward the song after suggesting it not be performed between the leading man and woman:

Frank's first reaction was irritation, which turned to fury. He had been having trouble enough finding a love song for “the goddamn show.” He finally writes one and now Burrows is going to louse it up. I just sat there trying to look humble and apologetic. But I had a feeling I was right and I didn't say anything more.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Feuer and Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 223.

<sup>133</sup> Burrows, *Honest, Abe*, 334.

Determining a similar “I Believe in You” moment in the work of Weinstock and Gilbert that inspired Loesser and Burrows during their writing process proves interesting. Loesser and his tendency toward sentimentalism spurred the idea for the number but reviewing the non-musical draft foregrounds the fact that the entire play is Finch narrating his own “hero’s journey.” The show can be interpreted then as one centered around its protagonist bragging about his rise to the top and is established at the start of the show:

(A PIN SPOT LIGHTS UP YOUNG FINCH WEARING A SACK SUIT AND A BLACK KNIT TIE. WE NOW SEE FINCH AS A PLEASANT YOUNG MAN IN HIS MIDDLE TWENTIES.)

J. P. FINCH: (AUDIO) And there you are. . .young, healthy, clear-eyed, and eager. . .and ready to storm the gates of the company of your choice.<sup>134</sup>

It becomes easy to draw parallels to the Loesser song when considered against its interpretation by Burrows as an ode sung by Finch to himself in Act Two:

I BELIEVE IN YOU

FINCH: NOW THERE YOU ARE  
YES THERE’S THAT FACE  
THAT FACE THAT SOMEHOW I TRUST  
IT MAY EMBARRASS YOU TO HEAR ME SAY IT  
BUT SAY IT I MUST, SAY IT I MUST!  
YOU HAVE THE COOL CLEAR EYES OF A  
SEEKER OF WISDOM AND TRUTH  
YET THERE’S THAT UPTURNED CHIN AND THE  
GRIN OF IMPETUOUS YOUTH<sup>135</sup>

The song both references the confidence of Finch depicted by Weinstock and Gilbert while providing a brilliant parody of the sentimental romantic ballad placed in the second act of

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<sup>134</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/4.

<sup>135</sup> Burrows/HTS, 2-4-21.

Broadway musicals. This contrast between the sentimental and the satirical further sharpens the dichotomy between integrity and insincerity exhibited by Finch and was further noted by Feuer:

[I]n the end, no one was left off the hook. They were all out for themselves. That's what made *How to Succeed* different. That's what made it possible to have a scoundrel for the lead character. J. Pierrepont Finch was forgivable only in the context of the other dastards.<sup>136</sup>

### **“A Secretary Is Not a Toy”: Women and Their Roles in “How to Succeed...”**

The depiction of female characters in all iterations of *How to Succeed...* is a central point of contention for contemporary critics who note the now-outdated societal norms concerning women and their roles in the American workforce in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These overtly sexist perceptions of female employees and their abilities, however, should be interpreted solely from the standpoint of then-contemporary sociocultural constructs in order to understand the unsavory depictions. Employment gains in “nonagricultural industries” witnessed since 1950 remained evident as female employees comprised two-thirds of a new, burgeoning work force in the United States.<sup>137</sup> Notions of women maintaining careers in the mid-twentieth-century came before Betty Friedan and her perceptions on feminism as an unnamed issue as society still viewed motherhood and wifedom as the idealized female mystique.<sup>138</sup> The apparent sexism of

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<sup>136</sup> Feuer and Gross, *I Got the Show Right Here*, 223.

<sup>137</sup> Robert L. Stein and Herman Travis, “Labor Force and Employment in 1960,” *Monthly Labor Review* 84, no. 4 (April 1961): 344-5.

<sup>138</sup> Birmingham Feminist History Group, “Feminism as Femininity in the Nineteen-Fifties?” “Reflections on 25 Years,” special issue, *Feminist Review*, no. 80 (2005): 9.

the musical was likely viewed as a lesser offence than now given its premiere prior to official recognition of harassment as an “actionable” offense.<sup>139</sup>

Mead humorously dictates early on that the female and her role in the workplace should be one each woman views as being tailored to “inspire” her male counterparts to work harder, simultaneously lampooning the coveting of female employees by their male superiors:

Sex will be farthest from the male interviewer’s thoughts! He will be thinking of your mind. However, he will have learned in the School of Hard Knocks that good minds are most often found in good bodies, and that beauty and brains only too often go hand in hand!<sup>140</sup>

The role of gender is a major topic throughout the play and musical iterations of *How to Succeed...* as secretaries prove both willing to maintain ill-fated relationships with their superiors while some identify themselves as above the hapless attempts at flirting exhibited by their male colleagues. The lyrics to “A Secretary Is Not a Toy” imply a stance of female empowerment before being quickly overshadowed by the coy wordplay of the businessmen:

ALL: SHE’S A HIGHLY SPECIALIZED KEY COMPONENT  
OF OPERATIONAL UNITY  
A FINE AND SENSITIVE MECHANISM  
TO SERVE THE OFFICE COMMUNITY

DANCERS: WITH A MOTHER SHE SUPPORTS

BUD: (Enters R, XDC)  
AND YOU’LL FIND NOTHING LIKE HER  
AT F.A.O SCHWARZ.  
(Exits UR)<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Miriam A. Cherry, “How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying (Cases): Gender Stereotypes and Sexual Harassment Since the Passage of Title VII,” *Hofstra Labor and Employment Law Journal* 22, no. 2 (2005): 537.

<sup>140</sup> Mead, *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, 15.

<sup>141</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-6-44.

Weinstock and Gilbert were quick to note the potentially-predatory behaviors of male employees at World Wide Wicket. Rosemary confides to Finch early on that Frump is “wading through the stenographic pool” as he seeks out a female companion for lunch.<sup>142</sup> This pattern of behavior continues as Frump suggests he and Rosemary play “post-office” upon seeing her downstairs in the mailroom. The latter promptly declines his offer.<sup>143</sup>

The perception of women as objects of desire reaches an apex with the Act I number, “Paris Original.” The number finds the female coworkers in disarray when they discover that their highly “exclusive” French party dress is being worn by the majority of their colleagues despite being sold on the notion that it was a one-of-a-kind fashion item. It should be noted, however, that the number is not an entirely sexist affair. It exploits the cliché of females as superficially-motivated by fashion/clothes while simultaneously highlighting their struggles to garner attention or respect in a male-dominated workforce:

ROSEMARY: FOR HIM --  
FOR HIM --  
THIS IRRESISTIBLE PARIS  
ORIGINAL  
I'M WEARING TONIGHT  
  
(FIRST GIRL enters R wearing same  
dress)  
  
SHE'S WEARING TONIGHT  
AND I COULD SPIT<sup>144</sup>

A point of contention to be made between the Weinstock/Gilbert and Burrows drafts is how Rosemary, the principal female character, is positioned in both iterations with regard to

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<sup>142</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/5.

<sup>143</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/13.

<sup>144</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-12-73.

establishing character development. Loesser had remained adamant to Burrows about the necessity of a central love story in the musical despite the latter noting Finch and his focus on corporate “climbing” distracting him from any potential romance.<sup>145</sup> Weinstock and Gilbert introduce Rosemary, or “Rosie,” as a preexisting love interest in the life of Finch. This is made apparent amidst a conversation held among the female employees:

JANE: Say, who’s the half-back? He really threw old Biggley for a loss.

ANNE: I wish he’d tackle me! Who is he?

ROSEMARY: Just a fellow I’ve been dating. He needed a job so I told him about the opening in the mailroom.

DOTTY: He’s cute.

ROSEMARY: I just hope he doesn’t make a fool of himself.<sup>146</sup>

Burrows wisely withheld the budding romance between Finch and Rosemary until the concluding moments of Act I. This was used by Burrows and Loesser to set up preconceptions about female duties as an office worker through a thoroughly-integrated book. “Happy to Keep His Dinner Warm” provides a brilliantly-comical analogy on the aforementioned and idealized female “mystique” of the mid-twentieth-century as Rosemary daydreams about a potential romance and future with newcomer Finch:

(ROSEMARY sings):  
I’LL BE HAPPY TO KEEP HIS DINNER WARM  
WHILE HE GOES ONWARD AND UPWARD  
HAPPY TO KEEP HIS DINNER WARM  
‘TIL HE COMES WEARILY HOME FROM DOWNTOWN  
(Sits)  
I’LL BE THERE WAITING UNTIL HIS MIND IS CLEAR  
WHILE HE LOOKS THROUGH ME, RIGHT THROUGH ME

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<sup>145</sup> Burrows, *Honest, Abe*, 333.

<sup>146</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/7.



WAITING TO SAY “GOOD EVENING, DEAR,  
I’M PREGNANT. WHAT’S NEW WITH YOU FROM  
DOWNTOWN?”<sup>147</sup>

Burrows admitted that the satirical numbers such as “Coffee Break” and “Secretary” were completed prior to the love or sentimental songs. This was likely done since the Mead text contains little to no reference concerning a relationship between Finch and a female coworker. It also allowed Loesser to anticipate an impending courtship between the protagonist and Rosemary through the musical numbers as evident in “Been a Long Day.” The song is sung by Finch and Rosemary but predominantly led by fellow secretary Smitty as she narrates and encourages an impending date between the two:

SMITTY: WELL HERE IT IS FIVE P.M.  
THE FINISH OF A LONG DAY’S WORK  
AND THERE THEY ARE, BOTH OF THEM  
THE SECRETARY AND THE CLERK.

(ROSEMARY looks at Finch, FINCH  
looks at her. SHE looks away.  
ROSEMARY looks at Finch, FINCH looks  
Away. ROSEMARY looks away)

NOT VERY WELL ACQUAINTED  
NOT VERY MUCH TO SAY  
BUT I CAN HEAR THOSE TWO LITTLE MINDS TICKING  
AWAY<sup>148</sup>

NOW SHE’S THINKING

ROSEMARY: (Turns front) I WONDER IF WE TAKE THE SAME BUS

SMITTY: AND HE’S THINKING

FINCH: (Turns fast) THERE COULD BE QUITE A THING BETWEEN US

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<sup>147</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-2-13.

<sup>148</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-7-49.

A clever rhyming scheme is established in the lyrics before Loesser pivots to continue highlighting Finch and his hesitance toward entering into a relationship as he climbs the corporate ladder:

SMITTY: NOW SHE'S THINKING

ROSEMARY: HE REALLY IS A DEAR

SMITTY: AND HE'S THINKING

FINCH: BUT WHAT OF MY CAREER?

SMITTY: THEN SHE SAYS

ROSEMARY: (Yawns, XR to Smitty)

SMITTY: AND HE SAYS

FINCH: HMMMMMMMMM (XL to Smitty)  
WELL IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY

ALL: WELL IT'S BEEN A LONG  
BEEN A LONG  
BEEN A LONG  
BEEN A LONG  
DAY.<sup>149</sup>

Discussing the romance between Finch and Rosemary in the Weinstock/Gilbert draft provides little interest on its own as the relationship remains somewhat stalled as the show progresses. A chance encounter between secretary Hedy and Finch results in an angry Rosemary storming out of the office at the conclusion of act one.<sup>150</sup> They appear to sort things out by the finale but her exit is portrayed in a somewhat clumsy, unflattering manner lacking the sentimentality of the Burrows conclusion:

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<sup>149</sup> Burrows/HTS, 1-7-49/1-7-50.

<sup>150</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 1/56.

FINCH: She's no treasure hunter, Wally. She's a treasure. And I found her.

BIGGLEY (PLEASED): Really? You and Miss Miller? Congratulations, Finch. Congratulations, Miss.

(ROSEMARY ABOUT TO THANK HIM, WHEN SHE APPEARS TO LOSE HER BALANCE AND FALLS OUT OF VIEW. CRASH OFFSTAGE)<sup>151</sup>

The exit of Rosemary remains somewhat sudden and does little to endear her to audiences. This makes the more female-driven focus utilized by Burrows and Loesser a refreshing interpretation of the Madison Ave. clichés initially explored by Mead.

### **Perceiving the Legacy of Weinstock and Gilbert**

The above observations concerning the non-musical and musical drafts prove unique in that there is an evident attempt at remaining faithful to the Mead text by both Burrows and the team of Weinstock and Gilbert. Summarizing the intentions of the respective parties reveals a direct effort to adapt satire for the commercial market of Broadway theater. This is evident despite an additional awareness to the more distinctive level of technique exhibited by Burrows. This can be attributed to both his years of experience in theater and a general understanding of corporate life:

[I] hadn't written the show out of hatred. If you really hate something, it's difficult to satirize it....I enjoyed the excitement of my days on Wall Street, I liked my involvement with the big radio and television networks and big companies like Revlon. But I did see a lot of funny things happen in those corporate giants. If I had hated them, I wouldn't have thought the funny things that happened were very funny. And when I started thinking about the show, I remembered many funny things.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Weinstock/Gilbert, 2/43.

<sup>152</sup> Burrows, *Honest, Abe*, 328.

Weinstock was attuned to the corporate life as well through his own prestigious medical profession and work in the television industry. It was Gilbert who likely held less perspective due to his strictly entertainment-oriented career dating back to the 1940s. The partnership is, therefore, a likely necessity for both Weinstock and his creative partner as each provided the respective business and theatrical perspectives needed to conceptualize a Broadway show. Weinstock would continue his medical practice despite the recognition he achieved with *How to Succeed...* and wisely recognized the reliability of maintaining a profession outside the entertainment field: “I’ve been terribly lucky,” Dr. Weinstock said. He added: “I won’t ever drop my medical practice. I enjoy it too much. My medicine is serious. I try not to neglect either.”<sup>153</sup>

Countless scholarly texts attribute the success of the book in *How to Succeed...* to Burrows alone while Weinstock and Gilbert remain overlooked as “collaborators.” Their limited role in crafting the musical draft merits their influence as irrelevant to the contributions of Burrows, their lacking presence on Broadway following *How to Succeed...* doing little to help matters—follow-up efforts *Hot Spot* (1963) and *Catch Me if You Can* (1965) ran for a combined one hundred and forty-six performances.<sup>154</sup> It is best then to view the draft of Weinstock and Gilbert as a necessary impetus from which Burrows and, in turn, Loesser could produce a Broadway adaptation. Their direct revision of an inferior non-musical draft reignited a creative spark unseen since *Guys and Dolls* and brought a heightened sense of their own creative powers to fruition. This is not to say that the work of Weinstock and Gilbert should be discredited as weak as the Mead text remained their sole source material. Attempting to adapt satire from a non-musical standpoint is naturally limited in theatrical potential as satire works best from a

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<sup>153</sup> Esterow, “Jack Weinstock, Surgeon, Case of How to Succeed by Trying.”

<sup>154</sup> “Jack Weinstock,” *Internet Broadway Database*, accessed 19 March 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/jack-weinstock-6560>.

purely-textual standpoint. The work of Mead has an ability to interpret broad clichés of New York corporate through a wry commentary distinct from the interference of dramatic tension expected of narrative-driven works. This proved an immediate disservice to anyone attempting a play or musical adaptation of *How to Succeed...* as their efforts would require conceptualization of a new, previously non-existent story.

The non-musical adaptation of *How to Succeed...* can best be defined as a satire within a pseudo-satire since the preexistent and lacking narrative prevented it from being purely satirical in execution. This should not, however, merit the effort irrelevant to what audiences and critics saw at the 46th Street Theatre in 1961. It was through the establishment of a romance between Finch and Rosemary, the contentious relationship between Finch and Frump and a “protagonist” capable of making mistakes and regaining his composure that the musical adaptation of *How to Succeed...* was made possible. Mead had left the pieces of the puzzle for a musical adaptation but Weinstock and Gilbert provided the necessary blueprint from which Burrows and Loesser could craft a hit musical comedy for the ages.

#### IV. “THERE IS A BROTHERHOOD”: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON “HOW TO SUCCEED...” IN THE BROADWAY CANON AGAINST CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE

The efforts of Abe Burrows, Frank Loesser, Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin would pay off in spectacular fashion from both critical and commercial standpoints when *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* premiered on 14 October 1961 at the 46th Street Theatre. The show was lauded by critics and the enthusiastic response was contextualized against the gamut of mid-twentieth-century Broadway theater by *New York Times* critic Louis Calta:

Not since “My Fair Lady” opened here some six years ago had a Broadway musical generated such excitement among the critical fraternity as has “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying,” the new musical that opened at the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre Saturday. The praise was unstinting and no reviewer could find anything to cavil about.<sup>155</sup>

Calta continued with direct evidence of its quick commercial ascent:

Patrons—sometimes numbering as many as 200—began lining up at the theatre as early as 9:30 A. M. Two box-office windows attended to the ticket requests. By noon, it was estimated that \$9,000 worth of tickets had been sold through March. Sales were expected to add up to about \$20,000 for the day.<sup>156</sup>

Howard Taubman of *The New York Times* additionally found much to praise in his initial review:

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<sup>155</sup> Louis Calta, “‘How to Succeed’ Is Doing Business: New Musical a Hit With the Critics and at Box Office,” *The New York Times*, 17 October 1961.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

It's an open question whether business in America should be warier of trust busters than of the new musical that frolicked into the Forty-sixth Street Theatre Saturday night. The antitrust watchdogs can crack a mean whip, but "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" applies a gigantic hotfoot. It stings mischievously and laughs uproariously.<sup>157</sup>

Taubman went on at length concerning the musical and its place in the then-current pantheon of Broadway musicals while noting its striking lampoon of corporate America:

Not a bypath in the honored folkways of big business avoids a going over. The mailroom, plans and system, personnel, advertising, the president, chairman of the board, the executive conference, secretaries, stenographers, cleaning women, the coffee break and even the executive washroom are sources of anything but innocent merriment. Not even love is sacred, but being shrewd showmen, the authors don't knock it. "How to Succeed" arrives bearing previous gifts of an adult viewpoint and consistency of style.<sup>158</sup>

*How to Succeed...* would receive numerous accolades that included the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and seven Tony Awards that included Best Book (Musical) and Best Director (Musical) for Burrows, Best Actor (Musical) for Robert Morse and the top prize for Best Musical that was awarded to Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin.<sup>159</sup>

Loesser ultimately walked away empty-handed from the Tony Awards as the prize for "Best Original Score" was granted to Richard Rodgers and his work for *On Your Toes*.<sup>160</sup> This was perhaps a sympathy vote following the death of Oscar Hammerstein II in 1960 as the score remains less revered in the mid-twentieth-century Broadway canon. It is worth noting that

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<sup>157</sup> Taubman, "Musical Comedy Seen at 46th St. Theatre."

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> "Nominations / 1962," Tony Awards, accessed 14 March 2022, <https://www.tonyawards.com/nominees/year/1962/category/any/show/any/>.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

Weinstock and Gilbert still received credit as book writers alongside Burrows which resulted in the pair garnering recognition as “Tony winners.” Perhaps this explains the utter shock felt by Weinstock upon receiving the honor:

When he won a Tony Award last April as co-author of “How to Succeed” he planned to make an acceptance speech in which he would say, “I like to think I’m the medical profession’s answer to Dr. Kildare and Ben Casey.” “But,” Dr. Weinstock said, “I froze and all I said was ‘Thank you.’”<sup>161</sup>

The popularity of the Broadway musical would continue at the dawn of the 1960s even with the general decline in productions premiered during that time period. This was not unnoticed by Calta:

The success of the Abe Burrows-Frank Loesser-Jack Weinstock-Willie Gilbert lampoon of big business also underscores Broadway’s strong preference for musicals. Significantly, three of this season’s five musicals are thriving handsomely and are expected to be around for many terms to come.<sup>162</sup>

*How to Succeed...* restored the commercial vitality of both Loesser and Burrows while further highlighting their statuses as masters in mounting the integrated musical. The composer retained his ability to capture the attention of audiences through a score filled with musical variety and witty lyrics. This differed from his last musical “hit” *The Most Happy Fella* in its focus on stylistic contrasts rather than purely motivic or formal diversions driven by operatic intentions.<sup>163</sup> Burrows, meanwhile, would receive the Pulitzer Prize for Drama alongside Loesser and continued to maintain a successful career writing musicals and plays for the Broadway stage.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Esterow, “Jack Weinstock, Surgeon, Case of How to Succeed by Trying.”

<sup>162</sup> Calta, “‘How to Succeed’ Is Doing Business.”

<sup>163</sup> Riis, *Frank Loesser*, 170.

<sup>164</sup> Burrows, *Honest, Abe*, 324.



*Cactus Flower* proved a significant hit with 1,234 performances and demonstrated the continued ability of Burrows to write non-musical productions.<sup>165</sup> Weinstock, Gilbert and their recognition in Broadway scholarship is also guaranteed as long as scholarship on *How to Succeed...* continues among the next generation of musical theater enthusiasts. Determining how society should perceive the musical in a contemporary context is another issue requiring additional discourse.

### **Perceiving “How to Succeed...” from a Contemporary Standpoint**

Criticisms of *How to Succeed...* in the immediate years following its premiere remained predominantly limited to personal rather than public dissent. Musical director Herbert Greene would take legal action against Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin after accusing them with redirecting Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert toward collaborating on their musical adaptation of the show. This allegedly occurred after Greene had acquired rights to *How to Succeed...* despite the claim being denied by theatrical lawyer Irving Cohen based on the argument that the Shepherd Mead text remained open property for adaptation.<sup>166</sup> This did little to affect the success of the show and remained a mere blemish against its near-flawless critical and commercial reputation. *How to Succeed...* even maintained enough longevity to be considered for a film adaptation by the Mirisch Corporation in October of 1964.<sup>167</sup> Burrows and Loesser would communicate regarding the proposed movie but the latter figure remained cautious of potential distribution:

Since we have already been approached regarding a pre-production motion picture sale of “How To etc.” I think I had better tell you here of certain conditions which I would have to insist on seeing in

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<sup>165</sup> *Cactus Flower*, *Internet Broadway Database*, accessed 18 March 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/cactus-flower-3271>.

<sup>166</sup> Louis Calta, “SUIT FILED TO HALT ‘HOW TO SUCCEED’: Herbert Greene Claims He Owns Rights to Musical,” *The New York Times*, 03 January 1962.

<sup>167</sup> “How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying (History),” “AFI Catalog,” *American Film Institute*, accessed 13 November 2021, <https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/23810>.

any motion picture agreement. From our conversations lately you seem to favor the idea of a pre-production deal, and so do [Cy] Feuer & [Ernest] Martin, apparently...if the time came for an objection by me to closing a sale regardless of the money price, you as well as the producers would then have known in advance about this hazard, and I won't have surprised anybody.<sup>168</sup>

The completed film would be released by United Artists in 1967 just over two years after *How to Succeed...* ended its 1,417-performance run in New York.<sup>169</sup> *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther praised the film adaptation with significant aplomb:

Nothing has happened in five years to diminish the suitability or the sting of "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" as it was originally done on the Broadway stage. And certainly David Swift has done nothing to diminish the wit, the sparkle and the zing of the musical show in transferring it into the movie that opened at the Radio City Music Hall yesterday....Indeed, we'll wait long for a better musical film than "How to Succeed."<sup>170</sup>

The movie adaptation of *How to Succeed...* saw release near the dawn of the 1970s and followed the premieres of more contemporary-driven musicals that included the John Kander and Fred Ebb-composed *Cabaret* (1966) and the Off-Broadway-to Broadway cultural touchstone *Hair* (1967) with music by Galt MacDermot and accompanying lyrics by the team of Gerome Ragni and James Rado. The cultural significance of the latter production is often remembered for its wildly exuberant embrace of the hippie counterculture that blossomed in the late 1960s. Many scholars continue to define *Hair* from this standpoint without regarding its significance in

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<sup>168</sup> "Mr. Abe Burrows, c/o William Morris Agency, 1740 Broadway, New York, New York," Abe Burrows Papers, box 11, folder 10, "Correspondence / Frank Loesser," May 17, 1961, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>169</sup> *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, Internet Broadway Database, accessed 14 March 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/how-to-succeed-in-business-without-really-trying-2885>.

<sup>170</sup> Bosley Crowther, "Screen: 'How to Succeed' Does Again; Musical With Morse and Vallee Opens," *The New York Times*, March 10, 1967.

simplifying the staging of a Broadway musical. The musical and its Off-Broadway heritage cultivated the desire for socially conscious works that found the implementation of scripts as primitive in their “textual authority.”<sup>171</sup> Some critics even countered this ideology with the perception of *Hair* as being reminiscent of the Broadway revue genre predominant in the early-twentieth-century:

[*Hair*] can be appreciated for what it essentially is—a wild, indiscriminate explosion of exuberant, impertinent youthful talents. What if coherence is lacking, discipline meager and taste often deplorable? The youngsters—authors and performers—have the kind of vitality that sends the memories of an older theatergoer wandering back to the twenties—to the bright impudence of “The Grand Street Follies” and “The Garrick Gaieties.”<sup>172</sup>

Broadway appeared to be undergoing a cultural renaissance while inadvertently bringing the “new school” back to the frolic, spontaneity and danger of the “old school” that preceded it.

*How to Succeed* contained a number of elements that distinguished it from the “old school” productions of the historic Broadway canon. The show and its purely satirical nature distinguish it from the direct sentimentality of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II while exhibiting a wit and charm distinct from the explicit tragedy found in *Porgy and Bess* and *West Side Story*.<sup>173</sup> The faithfulness to then-contemporary societal norms rooted predominantly in a corporate setting additionally made *How to Succeed* irrelevant to the stronger characters and settings portrayed in the “canon” shows. This kept the relatability of most post-1959 musicals limited to the wealthy, prestigious and capitalistic members who were in attendance on any given

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<sup>171</sup> Stempel, *Showtime*, 506.

<sup>172</sup> Howard Taubman, “‘Hair’ and the 20’s: Pert Musical on Lafayette St. Recalls Another Era’s Off-Broadway Revues,” *The New York Times*, 14 November 1967.

<sup>173</sup> Block, “The Broadway Canon,” 532.

evening. Geoffrey Block additionally claims that musicals premiered following those designated under the “canon” distinction were often intended as purely-commercial commodities rather than exhibiting a desire to revel in artistic ingenuity.<sup>174</sup> This perspective would increase following desires by some composers, book writers and producers to cultivate a similar Broadway canon of their own. Noting the direct attempt to christen new works similarly to more noteworthy predecessors is cited by Block as an effort to “win space in the museum, hung on the wall next to the ‘classics.’”<sup>175</sup>

Two prominent revivals would keep *How to Succeed...* in the realm of “classic” status in the years following *Cabaret* and *Hair*. The 1995 revival starring Matthew Broderick proved quite successful and earned its lead a Tony for Best Actor in a Musical, the same honor bestowed on Morse in 1962.<sup>176</sup> The 2011 Daniel Radcliffe-led production was conversely viewed as a weaker tribute to the musical and was made evident in a *New York Times* review by Ben Brantley: “[T]his production doesn’t have a sensibility to call its own, unless you count the evident feeling of relief that – thanks to the success of “Mad Men” – you don’t have to make excuses for enjoying the bad behavior or sexist cads in neckties from the early ‘60s.”<sup>177</sup> The subject of feminism provides an additional issue of contention for contemporary critics of *How to Succeed...* Miriam A. Cherry provides the most explicit condemnation surrounding the sexist undertones from a contemporary standpoint:

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 537.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 537.

<sup>176</sup> “Nominations / 1995,” Tony Awards, accessed 19 March 2022, <https://www.tonyawards.com/nominees/year/1995/category/any/show/any/>.

<sup>177</sup> Ben Brantley, “Wizard of Corporate Climbing: Daniel Radcliffe as a Cold Kind of Fella, Upon Whom Good Luck Smiles,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2011.

Today, World Wide Wickets would be a hotbed of sexual harassment litigation, and the EEOC would likely be called to investigate. Secretaries who refused men's advances for sexual favors could bring a quid pro quo action for sexual harassment and all of the sexual comments and innuendo would bring charges of a hostile working environment....[I]t is widely acknowledged that sexual harassment constitutes an abuse of power and that it causes serious emotional and psychological damage....[Training and education] measures are a far cry from the joking innuendo and horseplay that was widely tolerated, even encouraged, by the executives at World Wide Wickets.<sup>178</sup>

Producers of the 1995 revival even went so far as to remove the number "Cinderella Darling" from the original Loesser numbers. This was replaced instead with a reprise of "How To" that took on a more feminist edge:

How to survive as a bride  
How to assess all his assets  
How to arrange for divorce  
How to wind up with a beach house  
How to establish a strong credit line  
How to create  
Your own separate estate<sup>179</sup>

The continued interest in and appeal of *How to Succeed...* can be attributed to various factors. Leading these is the notion that Burrows wrote a musical satire rather than an edgy or resentful attack that would have poorly underscored the lively music of Loesser while rendering the comedic aspects nearly obsolete. The performative limitations of each musical number are

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<sup>178</sup> Cherry, "How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying (Cases)," 538.

<sup>179</sup> "How to Succeed (Reprise)," accessed 28 August 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFxrxI0k\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFxrxI0k_E).

equally important to consider as evident when comparing the songs to the exceedingly complicated operatic numbers performed in *The Most Happy Fella*. Many of the songs remain set in vocal ranges comfortable enough to be adapted by a wide array of singers with varied abilities. The prior mention of Morse and his distinctively non-virtuosic vocal skills provide the most explicit evidence of this notion. These contexts all remain less-relevant to the central conclusion which is that perceiving *How to Succeed...* as purely satirical prevents a public outcry regarding its overt sexism and outdated setting. The truth is that the “sexist” depiction of female characters and the situations involving them stemmed from very real and still-pertinent societal norms regarding gender equality in the American workforce. Former Ketchum, MacLeod & Grove secretary Rose Mendicino recalled this in an interview for *New York Daily News*:

“All the account executives, all the art directors, all the copywriters—no matter how dumb—were men,” she recalls. “I don’t even know if the women even thought about it that much. A lot of them were looking for husbands.”<sup>180</sup>

The additional recognition of these Madison Ave. clichés and their continued relevance to capitalistic corporate greed lend additional relevancy to *How to Succeed...* Such conclusions keep the work relevant despite accusations of its seemingly outdated sociocultural relevance.

It seems that the cultural relevancy of *How to Succeed...* remains persistent even as Broadway lends further contemporary edge to its musicals. The premieres of *Hamilton* (2015), *Hadestown* (2019) and *Jagged Little Pill* (2020) highlighted a continued urgency in appealing to current ideals and musical styles as the revival of mid-twentieth-century works remains in flux. *How to Succeed...* received its most recent revival with the Radcliffe-led production and even

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<sup>180</sup> Larry McShane, “Real New York Executives Fondly Remember the 1960s of ‘Mad Men,’” *New York Daily News*, published 16 August 2009, accessed 20 March 2022, <https://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/real-new-york-executives-fondly-remember-1960s-mad-men-article-1.400302>.

saw popstar Nick Jonas work his way to the lead role of Finch in subsequent performances.<sup>181</sup> This perhaps demonstrates a longevity of both satire and mid-twentieth-century Broadway theater in their simple yet effective means of providing musical and comedic entertainment. It should be noted, however, that each musical hit derives from an intrinsic form of inspiration, even if said influences remain overshadowed throughout decades of history. Weinstock and Gilbert might not have gotten their own *How to Succeed...* adaptation to Broadway but they can be credited with bringing a cherished musical landmark to the starting line of a long, fruitful and complex legacy.

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<sup>181</sup> *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying* (2011 Revival), *Internet Broadway Database*, accessed 20 March 2022, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/how-to-succeed-in-business-without-really-trying-488364#Replacements>.

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