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# "Can We Do A Happy Musical Next Time?": Navigating Brechtian Tradition and Satirical Comedy Through Hope's Eyes in Urinetown: The Musical

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“CAN WE DO A HAPPY MUSICAL NEXT TIME?”:  
NAVIGATING BRECHTIAN TRADITION AND SATIRICAL COMEDY  
THROUGH HOPE’S EYES IN *URINETOWN: THE MUSICAL*

BY

KATHERINE MARCUS REKER

*“Nothing is more revolting than when an actor pretends not to notice that he  
has left the level of plain speech and started to sing.”*

*– Bertolt Brecht*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a critical study of the theoretical framework of *Urinetown*, asking the question of whether or not the show is truly a “Brechtian musical,” utilizing the tenets and beliefs of Bertolt Brecht. Set in a quirky, Gotham-like town where you have “to pay to pee” due to a severe drought, *Urinetown* follows a cast of absurdist characters as they navigate a society plagued by the perils of big business, ecological devastation, and the inequalities of capitalism. While the show appears to make a relevant social commentary, supporting a righteous rebellion to overthrow the evil Urine Good Company, in the end, by proving that revolution does not always succeed, writers, Kotis and Hollman invalidate these commentaries, proving that despite its Brechtian appearance, the show in its textual form is much more simply a comedic parody. However, Pomona College’s production, in which I played Hope Cladwell, takes on a much more severe tone, creating legitimate commentary by replacing many of the comedic, two-dimensional characters with living breathing, realities. In a text traditionally lacking authenticity, I approached Hope Cladwell with the intention of finding strength and satire in an otherwise vapid character.

## KEYWORDS

*Urinetown • Hope Cladwell • musical theatre • Bertolt Brecht • satire • parody*

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URINETOWN: A DRAMATURGICAL EXPLORATION

“Well, hello there. And welcome—to Urinetown! Not the place, of course. The musical.”<sup>i</sup> Setting the tone for *Urinetown*’s quick-witted Brechtian style, Officer Lockstock, the main narrator of this story, welcomes the audience to the show, divulging details of the plot and bringing them into the world of the play. *Urinetown: The Musical*, written by Greg Kotis and Mark Hollman in 1999, which opened on Broadway in 2001, relies on the premise that a serious water-shortage has left a “Gotham-like city” with no alternative but to outlaw private bathrooms, forcing all citizens to pay to use public amenities. This extraordinary and absurd premise sets the scene for a clever, but caricatured parody of traditional musical theatrical conventions, creating clear and exaggerated portrayals of class disputes, environmental issues, and the perils of big business.

Utilizing Brechtian principles of the Epic Theater and alienation effect, taking influences from plays including *Threepenny Opera* and *The Cradle Will Rock*, and applying inflated parodies of musical theatre convention, *Urinetown* creates a satirized social and political commentary that allows the audience to take part through intentional narrative techniques. By parodying character tropes and socio-political scenarios, and mocking its own plot and devices through crisp and biting rhetoric, *Urinetown*’s satire provides audience members with a chance to immerse themselves in the blatant social commentary of today’s world hidden within the play’s dystopian setting. This thesis will examine *Urinetown*’s development through an analysis of its predecessors, Brechtian theory, and the genre of American musical theatre in order to argue that despite the anecdotal “Brechtian” descriptor often used to describe the play, *Urinetown* utilizes Brecht’s theory only superficially and in the end rejects his beliefs to focus on its parody of its own art form. Where Hollman and

Kotis fall short of Brecht's true mission is in their inability to move audiences to action, thus failing to create a commentary that inspires viewers to make change in society and their own lives, a result that Brecht consistently sought to achieve through his work. I must concede that depending on the direction chosen for each fully realized production of this text this may not be an accurate claim as individual directors may choose to take a more moving approach, heightening the stakes of the social commentary of the text. However, at a purely textual level, disregarding the variances in fulfilled productions, by simply utilizing Brechtian techniques at the surface level and combining them with parodic portrayals of musical theater, Kotis and Hollman are more than anything making a commentary on the ineffectiveness of traditional musical theatre as a commentary itself, and rejecting Brecht's anti-capitalist argument. By mocking the traditions of musical theatre and creating its own canon for commentary, *Urinetown* creates a clever and raw experience, where characters on stage engage and discuss the plot lines with the audience, allowing them to connect with the action on a quasi-interactive level. However, by reversing its stance at the end and proving that revolution may not always be the proper response, *Urinetown* invalidates the audience's experience throughout the show believing the blatant messages presented throughout the show and alienating the overall experience of the play, and failing to create a true Brechtian outcome, reminding its audiences that "it's just a musical."

### **Welcome to *Urinetown***

*Urinetown* takes place in a not-so-distant dystopian future where a 20-year drought has caused a massive political upheaval where private toilets have been banned and citizens have to pay a fee to utilize the public toilets, owned and controlled by Urine Good Company, a large monopolizing corporation run by Caldwell B. Cladwell. To keep the status quo,

citizens are threatened with the dreaded fate of being sent to Urinetown, a mysterious far-off wasteland, as their punishment. The story opens with Officer Lockstock, the main policeman of the town, and Little Sally, a poor street urchin girl, welcoming the audience to the show and providing the exposition for the plot to begin. We soon meet Penelope Pennywise, the warden of the poorest amenity in town, and her assistant custodian, Bobby Strong, whose sole responsibilities are to enforce the laws of the public toilets. Hope Cladwell, the young ingénue and daughter of Caldwell B. Cladwell, comes to town to work as the new fax/copy girl at Urine Good Company. As we begin to understand the power dynamics of the town and Act One unfolds, we see that Cladwell has made his fortune by taking advantage of the bleak environmental situation, and profiting from people's misery for his own personal gain. His daughter, Hope, is too optimistic for her own good, clueless about how her father's corporation exploits people's hardships; and Bobby, influenced by the optimism of his newfound love, Hope, dreams of a new world where everyone can pee for free.

In the Act One finale, as Bobby sparks a revolution and the citizens of Public Amenity Number Nine riot, Cladwell and his henchmen attempt to curb the revolt, and Bobby and the poor take Hope hostage, fleeing to their secret hideout. Pennywise brings word to Bobby that Cladwell wants to talk to him, and Bobby accepts, arguing for his cause, only to be sent to Urinetown as punishment for refusing to return Hope. It is here that we discover that Urinetown is in actuality a metaphor for death, as Bobby is thrown off the roof of the Urine Good Company building. When Little Sally alerts the rebels of his death, they threaten to kill Hope, but Pennywise steps in to protect her, divulging that she is in fact Hope's mother. The rebels turn to Hope as their new leader, and storm the UGC offices to



confront Cladwell. Despite his pleas that he was only trying to keep the city clean and prevent the drought from worsening, he too is sent to Urinetown. Hope renames Urine Good Company as the Bobby Strong Memorial Toilet Authority, and allows all people to pee for free at all times. The people's euphoria soon fades; however, as the water slowly disappears due to mismanagement and the population dies of thirst, while Hope's optimism devolves into delusional assertions about each citizen "being" the water. Hope meets the same fateful death as her father, and finally the townspeople "[recognize] their town for the first time for what it really was. What it was always waiting to be": Urinetown.<sup>iiii</sup>

Urinetown's storyline and plot, while satirical and outlandish in nature, presents a series of powerful depictions of class disputes, a monopolistic corporation, and natural disaster that despite their overly satirical nature create very clear commentaries on our society today. At the end of the show, Hope, who has taken over the revolution to pursue Bobby's dream of a better world where people can pee for free, has led the town into even worse disarray. Despite Cladwell's position as the antagonist, his solutions were, at least in part, simply what was necessary to keep the town alive. Every statement, order, and law he enacts does have some truth to it and his final words are, "Maybe I was a bad father and a cruel and vicious man! But I kept the pee off the street and the water in the ground."<sup>iv</sup> As dystopic as the town was, it was under Hope's naïve leadership that it became the desolate "Urinetown" they were threatened with throughout the show. Kotis even asks in his observations on *Urinetown*, "Would [Cladwell] really be so evil? For the world he was controlling was suffering from a nearly uncontrollable ecological disaster."<sup>v</sup> He simply did what needed to be done to keep the population alive. While there are significant social commentaries being made, this end twist undermines the claims that are seemingly being

built by Kotis and Hollman throughout the play. Because musical theatre convention has conditioned audiences to support the ingénue and revolutionary and despise the one who stands in their way, *Urinetown* intentionally creates an environment for the audience to root for Bobby and Hope, condemning Cladwell to the traditional antagonistic role. However, at the end of the play, Kotis and Hollman subvert this, presenting the idea that the “good guy” is not always in the right, undermining any perceived commentary on the corrupt nature of big business and the perils of the class struggles in the show. This creates a complex relationship with the term “Brechtian” as a descriptor of *Urinetown*, and many claim that it subverts the argument that *Urinetown* is the newest Brechtian Musical.

### **Contextualizing *Urinetown***

*Urinetown*, described by its creators as “a freak show of a musical, a Frankenstein’s Monster best kept in the basement,” boasts a journey of the underdog from a “hare-brained” absurdist musical in the New York Fringe Festival to a Tony Award winning Broadway production is one with many twists and turns along the way. Greg Kotis cites the inspiration for *Urinetown* as coming from a “poorly planned trip to Europe during the late winter/early spring of 1995,” where he was performing with a Chicago-based experimental theatre group called the Neo-Futurists. On an extended layover in Paris with limited funds, Kotis slept in train stations, filled up on cheap foods, and carefully calculated how often to use the pay-per-use public bathrooms. He shares, “And so it was that on one particularly cold and rainy afternoon in Paris, [...] trying to determine how badly I needed to go to the bathroom and whether I should splurge and use one of the toilet pods I could see looming in the distance [...] that the notion of a city where all public amenities in town were controlled by a single malevolent, monopolizing corporation came to me.”<sup>vi</sup> As Kotis realized the distant dystopia

of this premise, he added, “It would also be a grand, ridiculous reflection of the world as we know it to be, complete with rich and poor, the powerful and powerless, a government controlled by industry.”<sup>vii</sup> While it would feature love, rage, greed, etc., the drought, this natural disaster and its consequences, would trump it all.

Recognizing that because of the sheer absurdity of the premise, perhaps *Urinetown* should never have even reached the stage, but desperately wanting to create something out of this ludicrous idea, Kotis approached Mark Hollman, with whom he had worked in the past, pitching him a narrative outline and a couple of scenes. Hollman responded by composing “It’s a Privilege to Pee,” Pennywise’s anthem on the drought and the law in the style of Brecht and Weill. For three years, Kotis and Hollman slowly brainstormed, writing a comedic satire under the assumption that no one would ever see the finished product. As a result, they were carefree in their decisions, making choices that were “reckless for the sake of seeing where a story goes when it goes where it probably shouldn’t.” These choices made *Urinetown* the poignant production it is, simply because they asked, what happens when the hero dies desperately and not heroically, what happens if the heroine murders her father, and what happens if there is no true conclusion with a happy ending, and showed no concern that these choices broke convention.<sup>viii</sup>

In a time when environmental issues are always on the mind, Kotis and Hollman attempted to create a show that addressed the issue of just how fundamentally unsolvable these issues feel. *Urinetown* would be “absurd, allegorical, ridiculous, unproducible,” but it would present a society past the point of no return, where good intentions make no difference and little can be done to reverse things. They kept the villain a human entity, and an unhappy ending where despite their efforts the revolutionaries fail, and yet, stayed true to

musical theatre writing, taking inspiration from the greats, with musical and textual references to *West Side Story*, *The Music Man*, *Les Misérables*, and *Hello, Dolly*, despite their farcical applications.<sup>ix</sup> After a year of sending scripts and demos to producers, theatres, and agents with no luck, Hollman and Kotis settled on producing the show at the 1999 New York International Fringe Festival, a space for as many as one-hundred and fifty theatre productions from around the world to present their work over the course of ten days, vying for audiences and producers to give their work a chance. In a fitting hot and dirty garage converted into a theater, *Urinetown* premiered to its first audience. Kotis describes the experience, “An actor dressed as a policeman was addressing them from the stage. There are many kinds of silence in theatre, some good, some not so good. This was a good silence, an alert silence—they were paying attention.”<sup>x</sup>

After running twelve shows at the Fringe theatre and overselling nearly every performance, Kotis and Hollman began taking meetings with prospective patrons and theatre groups and began the process of finding the next step for *Urinetown*. They found a new director and re-cast the show, retaining two actors from the Fringe production, and presented a “20-hour reading” for industry professionals.<sup>xi</sup> Dodger Theatricals took the bait, and 19 months after the original Fringe Festival production closed, *Urinetown* opened Off-Broadway on May 6, 2001. *Urinetown*’s run sold out, garnering 11 Drama Desk nominations and two Obie awards, and two producers crafted the move to Broadway. Previews began at the Henry Miller Theater on Monday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001, with press nights scheduled for September 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. With the national terrorist attacks of 9/11, Broadway went dark, and *Urinetown* reopened along with the rest of an emotional Broadway the following Thursday. Director John Rando opened the show as Kotis

remembers, stating, “theatre could not save lives, nor could it put out fires, but it could offer creativity and life, which is what we hoped to offer that night.”<sup>xii</sup> One year to the day after opening Off-Broadway, *Urinetown* received ten Tony nominations and three wins, and subsequently, ran for 965 performances until January 18, 2004.<sup>xiii</sup>

### The Critics Speak

*“The title is emblematic, so thumb-in-the-eye unpleasant that it elicits an automatic question: Are you kidding? To which the answer is yes and no.”*  
*– Bruce Weber, New York Times*<sup>xiv</sup>

In most critics’ reviews, *Urinetown* was filed into three categories: an homage to and spoof of Brecht, referencing its similarities to *Threepenny Opera*; a social satire on individual freedoms, monopolies, and environmental issues; and a parody of old-fashioned musical theater. These three classifications were touched upon by the vast majority of reviewers, praising the show for proving that socially significant musicals (often referencing *Les Misérables*) do not need to be solemn or serious, but can be ludicrous parodies and genuinely entertaining.<sup>xv</sup> Regardless of whether the reviews were positive or negative, “Brechtian” has been an unavoidable buzzword for Kotis and Hollmann. Reviewers took the opportunity to educate the masses about the term “Brechtian,” explaining it broadly as theatre that breaks the fourth wall and offers a commentary through contradicting expectations. Weber of the New York Times praises *Urinetown* for being “an homage to and an outlandish spoof of the Brechtian theater of outrage and provocation,” while Robert Hurwitt of the San Francisco Chronicle highlights its “sardonic homages to the Brecht-Weill canon.”<sup>xvi</sup> These clear references to the Brechtian tradition from which it stems and the satirization of the issues, combined with the “loving parody” of the musical itself build an

image of *Urinetown* that prepares the audience to accept its innovative and often bizarrely creative approach. But, does *Urinetown* actually respect Brecht's beliefs or does it utilize them on a surface level, and when combined with the parody of musical theater, subvert their intentions?

### **Brechtian Dramatic Theory**

Brechtian theatre is often termed as a theatrical form that breaks the fourth wall and acknowledges its own art form, but beyond those anecdotes, it is rarely described in depth when used as a reference, for example, to a new "Brechtian musical." At its core, Brecht's theatre is politically interventionist, encouraging spectators and audiences to "pick out contradictions in society and seek new ways of reconciling them" and imploring that even the things we feel are fixed and immovable are in fact unstable and in flux.<sup>xvii</sup> He states, "There is no play and no theatrical performance that does not in some way or other affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience. Art is never without consequences."<sup>xviii</sup> By creating a theatrical form that made audiences aware of the fictional nature of theatre, breaking down the fourth wall between the actor and the spectator, Brecht was able to create a theatre that protested against the traditions of the bourgeois theater and encourage political awareness in his audiences.

Brecht achieved this by creating a "radical separation of elements" that comprises live performance. When these three elements, defined by Brecht as the music, text, and setting (i.e. the actor's voice, the actor's body, the lighting, the set, the costumes, etc.), are "fused together, the various elements will be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the

melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art.”<sup>xxix</sup> By creating signs on stage that are discontinuous and separated, the audience must decode them very intentionally and specifically, and therefore, question their meaning.<sup>xx</sup> Brecht utilized the term “epic theatre” to describe this specific separation of elements when combining dramatic and narrative forms. Brecht’s goal was to shift between different forms of presentation, including narration, songs that contextualize and reflect on the situations transpiring on stage, and banners that presented specific texts that advanced the scenes.<sup>xxi</sup> All of these methods create artificiality within the characters and storylines on stage, interrupting the emotional connections audiences have with them, and causing them to question the circumstances of the world presented to them. Often this world was not far off from their own situation, and for this reason, Brecht’s plays always “made strange to his audiences the normalcy” of everyday circumstances in the real world forcing the audience to ask the question “Why?”<sup>xxii</sup>

Brecht believed that theatre allows audiences to see the world in an entirely new way that they may feel little to no connection to at all. Therefore, he asks not what but *how* art is representing society, values, people, and issues; and what the spectator takes away from that representation.<sup>xxiii</sup> Brecht was adamant that his audiences feel emotionally distant from the characters on stage, in order to encourage their critical thinking. These alienation techniques “were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience’s subconscious.”<sup>xxiv</sup> In his essay, “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,” Brecht discusses the specifics of alienation techniques in the context of the Chinese art form in

contrast to the European tradition, which he is attempting to advance. He states, “The performer’s self-observation, an artful and artistic act of self-alienation, stopped the spectator from losing himself in the character completely, i.e. to the point of giving up his own identity, and lent a splendid remoteness to the events.”<sup>xxv</sup> Brecht describes the actors as having a detachment from the character’s emotions, portraying incidents of highest emotion and anger in a more subdued fashion than would be normal. He asserts, “It is quite clearly somebody else’s repetition of the incident: a representation, even though an artistic one.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Through this dispassion, he prevents the emotion from truly affecting the spectator and compromising their logical investment in the play. Every statement, Brecht emphasizes, is made with the approval and acceptance of the audience in mind, intending for the audience to react in real time.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Brecht’s theory of dialectics was introduced in his “Short Organum,” written in 1948, which featured influences of Marxism in the aftermath of the Second World War. Brecht’s work features Marxist views on the inequalities in society, his plan to fashion a new and improved society instead of reforming the old one, and his use of dialectics in bringing about change. Dialectics are defined as “mechanisms that account for why things change in history and society.”<sup>xxviii</sup> They are comprised of a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis.

“The thesis exists at a point of space and time, and continues to move forward through time until it is opposed by an antithesis. The relationship between the thesis and the antithesis is one of contradiction, and when the contradiction becomes too great, elements of the thesis and [...] antithesis form a new entity, the synthesis” which now becomes the new thesis until it is also confronted by a new antithesis.<sup>xxix</sup>



This theory emphasizes that should we find ourselves in oppressive or limiting situations we have the power to change it, providing a framework to comment on social values. Brecht was drawn to the dialectical view of society and identity, which very intentionally proposes that we are in a constant state of flux in regards to our relationships and new contradictions can emerge at all times. He too believed in this state of instability where anything can become political, change can be made, and that dialectical processes offer hope that change is not just an impossibility.<sup>xxx</sup> Brecht conceptualized his characters within a greater sociopolitical framework so nothing they did was truly individualized but instead a part of a larger issue or debate. To Brecht, the dialectical theatre was one of awareness raising, one where he could create “critical spectators,” audience members who would utilize their theatrical experiences to make modifications in their daily lives, therefore, thus creating broader socio-political change. Because dialectics are cyclical, they would continue to make radical changes in a constantly moving fashion.

### ***Urinetown’s Predecessors***

*“The music [...] became an active collaborator in stripping the bare of the middleclass corpus of ideas.” – Bertolt Brecht<sup>xxxi</sup>*

Without its predecessors, *The Threepenny Opera* and *The Cradle Will Rock*, which paved the way for *Urinetown’s* use of satire, parody, and Brechtian techniques, *Urinetown* could never have hit the stage. While it clearly utilizes Brechtian principles, as will be outlined in the following section, no study of *Urinetown* would be complete without a survey of its counterpart within the Brechtian canon.

*The Threepenny Opera* was first performed in Berlin in 1928. Set in Victorian London, the play follows the story of Macheath, a classic Brechtian antihero and London’s

most notorious criminal, as he marries Polly Peachum which earned the disapproval of her father, Jonathan Peachum, a cunning businessman who outfits the beggars of London with begging costumes to evoke more sympathy to gain more contributions. Mr. Peachum and his wife, seeking to have Macheath arrested and hanged, enlist the help of Macheath's former lover, Jenny, with a bribe to disclose his whereabouts. Macheath is arrested by Police Chief Brown, but escapes, only to be captured again and threatened with execution. As his friends, family, and other beggars visit him in his final moments, Macheath's death looms close. On his final walk to the gallows for execution, all the while lamenting his fate and begging for forgiveness, Brown announces a royal pardon, which creates a happy ending for the play. In the end, the cast sings about injustice and punishment, pleading for mercy and understanding in light of crimes and punishment. They sing, "We do implore, don't judge the poor too harshly. They turn to crime whenever times are tough. For life today is cold and grey and ghastly, and living, it is punishment enough."<sup>xxxii</sup>

*Threepenny Opera* was inspired greatly by John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), which focused on the beggars, criminals, and prostitutes of London's Newgate Prison, however, Brecht turned his story into a critique of capitalism and political upheaval. Using his theory of the separation of the elements, Brecht created a play where signs, helpful title cards, detached musical numbers, and asides helped tell the story with intellectual distance, allowing the audiences to critique and reflect on the story without the investment.

*Threepenny Opera* is clearly an example of Brecht's "Epic Theatre," in which he invited his audiences to think critically about the themes laid out in front of them. *Urinetown*, finds its inspiration in *Threepenny Opera* with both character counterparts, such as Mrs. Peachum and Penelope Pennywise, Mr. Peachum and Mr. Cladwell, Polly Peachum and Hope

Cladwell, Brown and Lockstock, etc., and a main story and theme that resemble those in the earlier work: the plight of the lower class and a critique of the capitalist world.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Without Brecht's canon and *Threepenny Opera* specifically, *Urinetown* would never have taken the shape it did.

Nine years after the premiere of *The Threepenny Opera*, a new American musical by Marc Blitzzen emerged as a Brechtian allegory of corruption and corporate greed set in "Steeltown, USA." *The Cradle Will Rock*, originally performed as a part of the Federal Theatre Project of the Work Projects Administration and then on Broadway in 1938, tells the story of Larry Foreman a worker and union organizer who tries to take down Mr. Mister, the greedy businessman who controls all of the town's social, political, and commercial ventures. In an almost entirely sung through production, we watch the various characters attempting to navigate the corrupt society in which they live, while Larry Foreman organizes a revolution. In the final scene, Mr. Mister attempts use his wealth to bribe Larry into submission, but is unsuccessful. The show concludes on a cliffhanger inciting the citizens to revolt with Larry singing, "That's a storm that's going to last until the final wind blows...and when the wind blows... The cradle will rock."<sup>xxxiv</sup>

As you can see, *Urinetown* clearly parallels Blitzzen's *The Cradle Will Rock* in form, characters, and themes. From the names indicative of their societal roles, such as Harry Druggist, Reverend Salvation, Editor Daily, and Mr. Mister, which echo *Urinetown*'s Bobby Strong, Penelope Pennywise, Hope Cladwell, and Officer Lockstock and Barrel, to the plot layout of the fight between the lower classes and the business savvy giant, *Urinetown* takes *The Cradle Will Rock*'s satire and adapts it for modern audiences. Similar to *Threepenny Opera*, the character counterparts are strong in this as well, especially in the revolutionary

everyman, Larry Foreman, who is undoubtedly the outline for *Urinetown*'s Bobby Strong, and in the corrupt monopolizing businessman, Mr. Mister, who in turn morphs into *Urinetown*'s Mr. Cladwell. Entire scenes, such as the one in which Mr. Mister bribes Larry Foreman, are reproduced in near exactness in *Urinetown*, moving the plot down the identical path. Even further, the music lays the groundwork for *Urinetown*'s intentionally diverse sound. While eclectic, the soundtrack as a whole creates a unified sound inspired by Kurt Weill, echoed in *Urinetown*'s miscellaneous soundtrack, which features individual tracks that showcase a wide array of styles and genres. In observing these clear inspirations for *Urinetown*, it is apparent that *Cradle Will Rock* and *Threepenny Opera* provided much of the groundwork for Kotis and Hollman to create the Brechtian satire that we know and love. While adapting the techniques of their predecessors, Kotis and Hollman were also able to honor these two works in creating clear parallels, homages, and counterparts.

### **A Brechtian Musical?**

*“Oh, I may be a cop, but I'm also the narrator. So no one can touch me, not if they want the show to end.”- Officer Lockstock*

Clearly, Kotis and Hollman's objective for *Urinetown* was to create a satirical musical that would, using its absurd premise and jocularly, make a political commentary on problems in society today. Previously, musicals that attempted to make a social commentary, including *Les Misérables*, *Show Boat*, *Evita*, *Hair*, *Rent*, and *In the Heights*, made a *true* commentary through featured solemn plotlines, severe deaths, and uplifting finales; however, Kotis and Hollman use a satirical standpoint and alienating techniques from the Brechtian style to create a show that did just the opposite, but arguably, made an even bigger commentary, purely on the basis of making the audience think more clearly

about it. By remaining objective and unemotional throughout the play, but utilizing alarmingly dark moments and witty cerebral language, Kotis and Hollman, acknowledging their own indebtedness to Brecht, created a script and libretto that taps into Brechtian tradition and farce to spark an innovative discourse in its audiences.

Lacking a gentle ease into the “Brechtian musical,” *Urinetown*’s bite begins immediately with the opening number, “Too Much Exposition.” Little Sally and Officer Lockstock welcome the audience to the show quite literally, explaining the “central conceit” and alerting the audience to plot points they “won’t see until Act Two.”<sup>xxxv</sup> To say that Kotis and Hollman were respecting Brecht’s desire to break the fourth wall and signal the audience of the fallacy of the play is an understatement. Lockstock’s repetition of the phrase “in a musical” emphasizes the fantasy of the situation the audience is experiencing, prohibiting them from become remotely invested in the story for long periods of time, always bringing them back to the reality of their participation as an audience member watching actors portray a story. “Never are we led to believe this is a reality; it is always a musical, no matter how many ideas it might contain.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> As Lockstock continues to vaguely describe the premise of the play, Sally, whose clear purpose as a character is to provide a witty counterpoint to Lockstock’s perceived omnipotence and intellect, questions him, “Say, Officer Lockstock, is this where you tell the audience about the water shortage?” Lockstock responds warning her that you can’t overload the audience with too much information, but she shouldn’t worry because they will find out all in due time. Sally criticizes Lockstock, and indeed the show itself, taps into the farcical nature of *Urinetown*, with her quips about how bad titles and bad subject matter can “kill a show pretty good,” and text that gives a knowing nod to the audience who have purchased tickets to a show all

about peeing. The title song, “Urinetown,” which trails “Too Much Exposition,” is most obviously directed toward the audience, reminding them that they are indeed in a theatre so no matter what happens next, they are indeed “just” watching a musical.

CHORUS:

*You our humble audience  
You have come to see  
What it's like when people can't pee free  
First act lasts an hour  
Don't assume you're fine  
Best go now, there often is a line.*

*This is Urinetown!  
One restroom here at Urinetown!  
It's unisex at Urinetown!  
All by design*

*You're at Urinetown!  
Your ticket should say Urinetown!  
No refunds, this is Urinetown!  
We'll keep that dough!<sup>xxxvii</sup>*

Lockstock and Little Sally act as the primary communicators with the audience throughout the script, referencing this Brechtian narrative form. In the Act One finale, for example, Little Sally breaks out of the action to ask Officer Lockstock what’s going on, to which he responds, “Why, it’s the Act One finale, Little Sally. This is where Cladwell arrives to snuff out the uprising. It’s a big song-and-dance number involving the entire cast.”<sup>xxxviii</sup> The didactic form of continuing to alert the audience of the mechanics behind the show is very Brechtian in wanting to separate the elements of the performance. By making the audience well aware of the conventions occurring, notifying them of the musical numbers about to take place (sometimes even indicating “musical sting” in the script to add dramatic effect and create an intentional fictitious effect), and crafting a separation effect between the narrators, the other characters, and the audience, they are creating a work in the

Brechtian “epic theatre” tradition, but on a purely surface level. Where *Urinetown* fails Brecht is its lack of audience participation. Brecht’s ultimate goal was for the audience to become a part of his commentary, taking control of the situation and becoming a part of the action. While *Urinetown* kicks down the fourth wall, separates the elements of music, text, and setting, and alerts the audience to its messages throughout, it never lets the audience take part directly in its humor, falling short of the true Brechtian mission.

Additionally, *Urinetown* finds its Brechtian nature in its ability to instruct and entertain audiences simultaneously through its alienation techniques. Throughout the play, the audience hears characters berate the complex sociopolitical and environmental situations taking place around them with text such as, “Rich folks get the good life, poor folks get the woe. In the end it’s nothing you don’t know,” “Ladies and gentlemen, twenty years ago we came to the people of this community with a simple proposition: Look the other way while we run this company the way we see fit, and we will keep the pee off the street and the water in the ground,” and “I’ve spent a lifetime building this company, paying off the police, bribing the political elite, and snuffing out popular resistance as if it were a naughty baby bunny in the palm of my hand.”<sup>xxxix</sup> These lines, while blatant and forceful, are tongue-in-cheek, and it must be said that *Urinetown*’s commentary comes largely from its ability to find “humor in the gleeful cartoon-treatment of Brechtian alienation.”<sup>xl</sup> Visually comical gags, heightened voices, bizarre character names, pee jokes, and inherent sarcasm create a setting in which audiences cannot find emotional or logical attachment to the characters or the situation itself. Simply because *Urinetown* is set in a far-off dystopian cartoon society where it is clear that the characters are very much actors on a stage, Kotis and Hollman prevent audiences from becoming lost in the characters, encouraging their critical thinking

and analysis of the show itself. As audiences laugh at the melodramatic and ludicrous plot lines, which often include dark moments of death, social disorder, and the dangers of mob mentality, they are unable to process the genuine severity of the themes due to the sardonic nature through which Kotis and Hollman present them.

While *Urinetown* clearly honors the Brechtian in its use of the separation of the elements of theatre to disrupt audience attachment and Brecht's alienation techniques, its Brechtian influences reach a hard stop in the final moments of this dark comedy. Throughout *Urinetown*, its political commentary revolves around the cruel and disparate management of the city's water by Urine Good Company. Cladwell, while a human face, is rendered as a greedy tyrant on whom we can place the blame for the trials and struggles of the citizens of our play. Kotis and Hollman intentionally comment on this anti-hero, building upon musical theatre convention to make the audience channel their anger towards him while supporting the traditional revolutionary every-man, Bobby Strong. Because they use Brechtian techniques to create a seemingly blatant socio-political commentary throughout the play, it is easy for the audience to fall into the habit of adopting this righteous notion of good vs. evil in the simplest sense, where because Cladwell is limiting citizens' freedoms, he must be stopped at any means. However, in the final moments of *Urinetown*, Kotis and Hollman turn this on its head, shocking the audience and overturning what they believed to be the true commentary of the show. Despite Hope's optimism and promise, her leadership after the downfall of her father leads the town into chaos, bringing them back to "The Stink Years" and turning their city into the mysterious "Urinetown" they were always afraid of. As Hope sings, "I See A River," the show's falsely uplifting finale, we see her ignorance and lack of foresight, proving that perhaps Cladwell's methods, while cruel, may



have been necessary. As one character begins to die of thirst, Hope instructs her that “the glass of water's inside you; it always has been,” illustrating her idiocy and ignorance to the audience and completely reversing the previously put forth argument that Hope’s reign might bring joy and promise to their desolate city. In the typical fashion of Kotis and Hollman, these dire situations are treated with humorous triviality, lending to the alienation techniques utilized throughout the show. But despite the light-heartedness of the song and inconsequentiality of the finale, they do make their case that Cladwell may have been in the right this whole time, and in a world and time where good intentions no longer mean anything, the most important course of action may not necessarily be the most obviously respectable one. At this point in the finale, Lockstock and Sally jump in to help articulate the contrast between Cladwell and his daughter’s methods:

LOCKSTOCK: Of course, it wasn't long before the water turned silty, brackish, and then disappeared altogether. As cruel as Caldwell B. Cladwell was, his measures effectively regulated water consumption, sparing the town the same fate as the phantom Urinetown. Hope chose to ignore the warning signs, however, preferring to bask in the people's love for as long as it lasted.

LITTLE SALLY: What kind of musical is this?! The good guys finally take over and then everything starts falling apart?!<sup>xli</sup>

By shifting the blame quite blatantly from Cladwell to Hope at the very last minute, Kotis and Hollman turn their previous commentary on its head, causing a dramatic shift in the message of the play. In the end, they seem to invalidate any serious sociopolitical commentary made previously by articulating that at the end of the day, it does not matter what seems right, but instead that these forms of oppression may have been necessary in the first place. This final line of reasoning ultimately proves that the original production is truly more of a parody than a satire. Kotis and Hollman effectively create an experience for

audiences that allows them to believe in the social commentary through Brechtian techniques for a significant portion of their viewing experience; however, by alienating and revoking this experience in the final moments, they contest Brecht's wishes for enlightened audiences and a dialectical method for societal change.

### **Subverting the American Musical**

In his work, "Classical Status as an Inhibiting Factor," Brecht writes, "We must bring out the ideas originally contained in [the classic]; we must grasp its national and at the same time its international significance." Kotis and Hollman clearly took these words to heart, referring to not only Kurt Weill's musical canon, but also the musical theatre catalogue in creating characters, musical numbers, and plot points that honor and quite obviously, make a mockery of the traditional American musical theatre repertoire. By exploiting and parodying the traditions of the "Golden Era" of musical theatre and the classic 1920s-1940s musical, Kotis and Hollman ultimately present a show that in combination with Brechtian alienation does not make effective commentary because of its conventions.

Linda Hutcheon, in her work, *A Theory of Parody*, defines parody as "a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity."<sup>xlii</sup> Parody uses irony as it mocks certain characteristics, rhetoric, and semantics, but can do so in a playful manner or with the intention of satirical ridicule. Hutcheon sets forth a definition for the *ethos* of parody in two forms: a "reverential ethos," in which the text is imitated with the end goal of perpetuation and propagation of the form; and "a more neutral or playful" ethos, in which the text is evaluated and then often subverted.<sup>xliii</sup> *Urinetown*, for the most part,

utilizes the playful form of parody, creating a loving mockery of musical theatre convention by creating an effective and entertaining libretto and score that perfectly parallels its classic 1920s musical counterparts. With its unrealistic and telling character names, i.e. Officers Lockstock and Barrel, Penelope Pennywise, Bobby Strong, and Hot Blades Harry to name a few, and witty titles, such as *Urine Good Company*, *Urinetown* is clearly a parody on the surface, but in what ways does it intentionally subvert and mock the traditions of musical theatre on a deeper level than the comical overtones.

*Urinetown*'s score on the surface seems eclectic and mismatched, lacking an overall cohesive sound, but upon further listening, many of the musical numbers harken back to past musicals. "Snuff That Girl" bares a strong resemblance to *West Side Story*'s "Cool" with its jazzy fight style, dance breaks, swung rhythm, and snaps; while "Run, Freedom, Run!" resembles *Guys and Dolls*'s Gospel showstopper, "Sit Down Your Rockin the Boat." *Urinetown*'s Act Two opener, "What is Urinetown?" utilizes musical refrains inspired by *Fiddler On The Roof* in its use of the Klezmer clarinet and tambourine. "Urinetown" references *Les Misérables*' grandiose minor chords and overlapping melodies; "Mr. Cladwell" harkens back to the classic 1940s chorus number in the vein of *Hello, Dolly* or *Mame*; and "Cop Song" sounds very much like the fast-paced lectures of Harold Hill in *The Music Man*.<sup>xliv</sup> These numbers reflect the different styles and attributes of some of the most well known musicals, parodying their impact on the genre as a whole and lovingly mocking their convention.

Additionally, the characters of *Urinetown* fit very specific archetypes of the genre including the ingénue, the revolutionary hero, the old wise woman, and the precocious child. These character tropes are omnipresent in the musical theatre genre, providing the structure,

plot lines, and consistency within multiple musicals. Hope epitomizes the naïve and sheltered ingénue who falls in love with the romantic leading man, similar to Cosette from *Les Misérables* or Maria from *West Side Story*. Hope's exaggerated mannerisms and references as the beautiful and innocent daughter of Cladwell adopts the traditional characteristics of many leading ingénues and accentuates them to an almost annoying degree, creating a character that on the surface seems overly hopeful, ignorant, and optimistic. Miss Pennywise symbolizes the older wiser woman in a position of authority, for example, Miss Hannigan from *Annie* or Mrs. Lovett from *Sweeney Todd*. Pennywise represents the jaded money-driven old woman, a victim of circumstance in "The Stink Years," whose pessimism has left her defeated. Little Sally, of course, is the precocious young child, often an orphan, who sometimes offers wiser advice than the figures of authority (in this case, Officer Lockstock, who she subtly and shrewdly undermines throughout *Urinetown*). Sally's counterparts include Gavroche in *Les Misérables* or the title character in *Annie* to name a few. Bobby Strong, the typical musical hero, is a young, optimistic and revolutionary everyman, in the manner of Enjolras from *Les Misérables*, J. Pierrepont Finch in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, or Tony from *West Side Story*. Bobby, who works as the revolutionary leader of the lower classes and love interest for Hope, furthers the traditional structure of the American musical by creating an inciting character for the revolution to start.

By writing characters that fit these archetypes almost too perfectly, Kotis and Hollman set the scene for an exaggerated yet traditional plot of the American musical: two star-crossed lovers in the midst of social upheaval and revolt. While *Urinetown's* plot lines maintain the traditions, the way in which Kotis and Hollman present them is what creates

the playful mockery *Urinetown* is known for. Throughout the show, these characters and plotlines are staged in over exaggerated, comical ways to emphasize the ridiculousness of the tropes and shed light on the fact that these are known as conventional choices. From the love song taken too literally where Bobby proclaims, “Someday I’ll meet someone whose heart joins with mine, aortas and arteries all intertwined,” to Lockstock informing the audience of the rebels’ whereabouts, affirming, “Word has it they're holed up in some secret hideout somewhere. Perhaps this one-here,” pointing to a large sign that reads “Secret Hideout,” the audience is made aware of the ludicrous circumstances so often accepted in musical theatre.<sup>xlv</sup> Continuing this thread, Lockstock comments on the nonsensical convention of “love at first sight” during Bobby and Hope’s first meeting, informing Little Sally, “He’s the hero of the show, she has to love him.”<sup>xlvi</sup> Throughout *Urinetown*, Kotis and Hollman use the excuse, “it is after all a musical,” to explain why they present songs, plot points, and characters in the bizarre way they do. Through these hyperbolized portrayals of characters and plotlines and the running commentary on the show’s proceedings, the writers create an environment where the audience can think critically about their own involvement in the suspension of disbelief that must take place within a musical. Their methods for creating this environment can be seen in many of the commentaries found between Lockstock and Sally, who constantly acknowledge the art form and genre and its conventions to which they are bound. The following dialogue at the end of Act One exemplifies this:

LITTLE SALLY: Officer Lockstock, what's happening?

LOCKSTOCK: Why, it's the Act One finale, Little Sally. This is where Cladwell arrives to snuff out the uprising. It's a big song-and-dance number involving the entire cast.

LITTLE SALLY: Snuff out the uprising? But what about Bobby's dreams?

LOCKSTOCK: “Well now, Little Sally, dreams only come true in happy musicals-and a few Hollywood movies-and this certainly isn't either one of those. No, dreams are meant to be crushed. It's nature's way.

LITTLE SALLY: This may not be a happy musical, Officer Lockstock, but it's still a musical. And when a little girl has been given as many lines as I have, there's still hope for dreams!<sup>xlvi</sup>

By emphasizing the irrational conventions of musical theatre often neglected by audiences in the suspension of disbelief, Kotis and Hollman draw attention to the truly nonsensical nature of the genre, allowing audiences to realize the warped presentations of reality showcased on stage.

### **Hail Malthus!**

As you can see, at first glance, *Urinetown* presents a seemingly straightforward commentary on the perils of big business, environmental disaster, mob mentality, power dynamics, and classism. However, as we delve deeper into the techniques, rhetoric, and plot twists of the play, we begin to lose that focus, and all preconceived notions of what is right and wrong are distorted by the end resolution or lack thereof. By using Brechtian principles of epic theatre and alienation and the sheer absurdity of the setting, names, and plotlines as accomplished through the clear parody of musical theatre convention, audience members lack an emotional or intellectual connection to the characters on stage, allowing them to think critically about the action in the Brechtian vein. But just when audience members begin to think they understand Kotis and Hollman’s point, they are reminded that it’s simply a musical and we all know that musicals are not authentic. Because audiences are conditioned from a young age to accept the conventions of musical theatre as fact in the traditional suspension of disbelief, we are trained throughout the play to think that Bobby’s

desire for freedom is right. We support the revolution without thinking because that is simply what is done. But when the show paradoxically endorses the overwhelming power of corporate enterprise at the end, it destroys our belief in the liberal capitalist desire for and approval of revolution for the sake of virtues and morals. This subsequently invalidates any previous audience experience that condemns big business, and ultimately, showcases a world in which morals are not necessarily the determining factors; an authentic, but cynical world that you would never find “in a musical.” As Kotis stressed, “Musicals are all about good intentions, doing the right thing and being rewarded for doing it. They’re morality plays. We wanted to write a musical with no moral, because it’s too late for morals.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

Driving this point home amidst the absurdity of the finale is Officer Lockstock’s penultimate line, “Hail Malthus!” a subtle joke on the tendency of humans to outstrip their resources left unexplained for those who aren’t familiar with Malthusian philosophy to begin with. Thomas Robert Malthus, an English scholar from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, believed that population growth was the enemy of utopia, and sooner or later, population would be checked by famine, disease, or other natural disaster. The earth, according to Malthus, has a finite ability to provide subsistence for human kind. He wrote, “That the increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence, That population does invariably increase when the means of subsistence increase, and, That the superior power of population is repressed, and the actual population kept equal to the means of subsistence, by misery and vice.”<sup>xlix</sup> Clearly, *Urinetown*, despite its seemingly liberal and commentative nature throughout the majority of the plot, ultimately creates a world beyond morals and change, where even those who are obviously in the right cannot change the world for the better.

In the end, *Urinetown* acknowledges its own absurdity, admitting that its dark moments of truth dispersed amongst preposterous moments of humor present a show unlike most other musicals. Whereas in the traditional American musical, there is a resolution, the “good guy wins,” and everything ends with a major chord, in *Urinetown*, none of these conventions come to fruition, and instead, despite the trying efforts of the lower classes, revolution is not the answer. These final interludes between Little Sally and Officer Lockstock in the final moments of the play emphasize these points:

LITTLE SALLY: What kind of musical is this?! The good guys finally take over and then everything starts falling apart?!

LOCKSTOCK: Like I said, Little Sally, this isn't a happy musical.

LITTLE SALLY: But the music's so happy!”<sup>1</sup>

[...]

“LITTLE SALLY: I don't think too many people are going to come see this musical, Officer Lockstock.

LOCKSTOCK: Why do you say that, Little Sally? Don't you think people want to be told that their way of life is unsustainable?

LITTLE SALLY: That-and the title's awful. Can't we do a happy musical next time?”<sup>li</sup>

*Urinetown* on the surface creates a firm socio-political commentary in the Brechtian vein, utilizing surface level techniques Brecht outlined in his own canon and writings, including alienation and separation of the elements. But is *Urinetown* a “Brechtian musical?” No. In fact, under the surface, Kotis and Hollman reject a vast majority of what Brecht stood for by creating an ending where the liberal revolution fails miserably. In an interview with PBS News Hour, Kotis said,

I really don't think capitalism is bad, and I actually take some pleasure in what a couple of conservative friends of mine call the neo-con ending of this show, which is



that, you know, the liberal do gooders out there, they actually, when you put them in power, they don't know what to do and they actually mess things up. [...] We know that revolution, you know, pick one. The Bolsheviks or Castro in Cuba or, you know, pick any of them and they start with a wonderful exuberant, romantic hope. And they lead to disaster.<sup>lii</sup>

In the end, *Urinetown* fails to create a commentary that leaves the audience wanting to make change, because of its cynical and manipulated ending, which rejects Brecht's traditionally socialist critiques of the capitalist world. By creating an affectionate mockery of the conventions of American musical theatre and creating its own superficially Brechtian canon for commentary, *Urinetown* creates a darkly comical experience for audiences to engage with issues of class, environmental disaster, and capitalism. But by twisting its final message to reject the liberal revolution's morals and presenting a reality where good intentions simply fail, *Urinetown* invalidates the audience's experiences, alienates the play's messages, and reminds their viewers that musical theatre cannot always make the effectual commentary we expect from it.

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE

In the previous chapters, I laid out my argument for what *Urinetown* attempts to do textually. In writing an absurdist world, mocking American musical theatre convention; and satirizing class issues, ecological devastation, and capitalism, Kotis and Hollman seemingly make a commentary on the perils of big business, environmental concerns, and a people's right to freedom. But in the end, by proving that Hope and Bobby's idealistic and blindly accepted vision for the world leads to even further devastation and death, they turn the commentary on itself, alienating the audience from the previously assumed message and pointing out that in fact sometimes the seemingly beneficial revolution is not always the solution. However, this is all done purely textually. The original world created in the writing by Kotis and Hollman and the original Broadway cast's interpretation of that text lends itself to this absurdist satire where the good guys lose and it's all fun and games, leaving no room for any real commentary. But, each individual production of *Urinetown* can obviously be adapted and altered depending on the director's vision. Our production of *Urinetown* at Pomona College has taken on a very different tone from the original intent. From the absence of the heightened character voices to the very relevant and poignant references to contemporary police brutality and racial violence to the reimagining of many characters and relationships, this production takes on a more serious tone in the manner of social commentary. However, in pairing this tone with select comical moments, the urgency and absurdity of the play is heightened, making the comic moments even more comical and the severe moments even more serious, leaving you with the conflict of whether or not the commentary is effectual or not. The challenging part of this production is finding the ways in which we as actors can attempt to complement this balance of absurdity and realism and

find meaning in a text that does not simply hand it to you. Additionally, there is the struggle of finding new meanings within songs that are intentionally written to have little meaning. “Run Freedom Run,” for example, is a song about eventually finding freedom, but until then fleeing at the idea of it. *Urinetown* at a textual level takes lines and phrases that make little sense and throws them around to heighten the absurdity of this production. It makes their rebellion feel less valid at a lyrical level, despite the upbeat and inspirational orchestral underscore that goes with them. But in our production, Director Giovanni Ortega wanted meaning and inspiration to make change, which presented a huge challenge for the actors to find that inspiration in lyrics that do not lend themselves to that by nature. This in turn was an idea that propelled us further into the Brechtian realm of satirizing its own writing and intent.

### **The Gravity of Our *Urinetown***

This production of *Urinetown* clearly presents a darker interpretation than the original production, changing some of the textual implications of parody and delving much further into political awareness and social relevance. As I expressed in my previous chapters, the original Broadway cast production featured comical portrayals of even the grimmest moments in the show. In our production, however, we are taking a more somber and thoughtful approach to many of these moments. The role of physical violence in the stage combat and choreography has a very intentional use in this production, creating a relevant social commentary referencing many contemporary racial issues and references. For example, at the end of “What is Urinetown?,” the poor fall to their knees, put their hands behind their heads, and Officer Lockstock takes a stance as if to fire a gun into the audience as a gunshot echoes through the theatre. The stance is also used when Bobby is taken

hostage and threatened by Officer Lockstock and Officer Barrel. This is a clear invocation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and series of killings of young African Americans in the past number of years. There is also an emphasis on the physical violence of the show, featuring many more instances of stage combat than in the original production. As Old Man Strong attempts to pee on the sidewalk for free, the police come in and beat him up in a very lifelike manner, unlike some of the more lighthearted and sometimes even comical stage combat in the original production. These forms of realistic violence within the show are also reminiscent of contemporary issues of police brutality. Moments where more relevant and serious issues are referenced make our production of *Urinetown* much more socially and politically aware. It is in these moments that we feel the fear of the people in contrast to the comical nature of the vast majority of the show.

Additionally, the written parody and triviality of some of the characters disappear in their portrayals on our stage. Penelope Pennywise, for example, is much less the jaded old woman she was in the original production, but instead a more sensitive soul looking out for the safety of her daughter and reminiscing of times past. Little Sally is no longer the annoying little girl with a vocal inflection reminiscent of a toddler who counters Officer Lockstock's knowledge of *Urinetown* itself, but instead a bright questioning young mind essential to the rebellion and often smarter than Officer Lockstock in text and attitude. Officer Lockstock, the kind, comical, and sturdy narrator of the show, and Officer Barrel, his reliable and joking companion, become terrifying examples of police brutality and devoted members of Cladwell's police force, often only moments away from wreaking havoc on the town and its citizens. My character, Hope, has also been reimagined, as I will discuss in the following chapters, taking a naïve, helpless, and almost childlike character,

and creating a character arc allowing her to question her father's methods and become a powerful force of revolution and hope for the people of this quirky little town. These previously two dimensional characters become infused with depth, complexity, and meaning in our production, creating a three dimensional world where the cartoon-like townspeople of the text become living, breathing realities; victims and perpetrators of violence, revolution, and oppressive power structures. Our darker take on the traditional goofy *Urinetown* dramatically changes the meaning of the text, and instills much more hope, fear, and response than the original text. I stand by my initial argument that the text itself creates a surface level Brechtian social commentary through satire and parody only to revoke it at the end by proving that the rebellion caused more damage than simply maintaining the status quo. It may not be visible in our production, but textually, this argument does hold true. However, I will concede that despite *Urinetown's* textual meanings and initially created absurdist world, it can be interpreted in many ways and intentionally make a stronger argument for revolution as seen through Pomona College's dark and socially relevant production. Even further, this concept created a difficult task for the actors to find authenticity in a script that intentionally has very little.

### **Hope's Journey: An Overview**

Hope Cladwell's journey within *Urinetown* presented a new challenge for me as an actor. Not only is this my first time playing the ingénue, but it is also a more challenging approach to the ingénue and more specifically the role of Hope. In the original production of *Urinetown*, Hope appears very unintelligent, following her father and then her love interest, Bobby, fairly blindly to a point where the audience questions if she can even think for herself. This is clear within the text itself from her bizarre comments and questions to

her shortsighted actions, but also in the vocal acting in the official Broadway cast soundtrack, where Jennifer Laura Thompson raises her voice to have a much higher pitch and very shrill tone, and often adds a childlike element to many of the lines, supplementing her excessive use of the word “Daddy.” This tradition of playing Hope as one-dimensional and quite frankly, unintelligent, was a convention I sought to break. I approached this process with an understanding of Hope as being more complex and profound than is textually implied, creating the opportunity for a transformative interpretation of the role. In talking with my director, Giovanni Ortega, he had envisioned a similar dissent from the original character; one that was not unintelligent, but instead brainwashed by her father, ultimately finding her footing and beliefs as the show progresses. We discussed Hope’s three transformations that take her from her initial state to her final image as the leader of the revolution with all the assumed confidence that must entail.

Hope Cladwell enters *Urinetown* freshly graduated from The Most Expensive University in the World, wide-eyed and ready to begin following in her father’s footsteps at Urine Good Company. I played this part of Hope’s journey as hopeful and filled with excitement to join her father, but also with a slight brainwashed element. She has been told her entire life that this is in fact her legacy, and that this is how it must be. So when she enters the scene for the first time in the bad part of town, she starts to look around and see the devastation, clearly sticking out like a sore thumb in her silvery dress and pristine white shoes surrounded by the dusty and distressed part of town that is Amenity #9. Hope enters her father’s office full of wonder and quickly gains the adoration of the staff of Urine Good Company, but upon overhearing conversations about fee hikes and smuggling money to pay

for trips to Rio, she starts to question her father's methods, ending the scene with, "Gosh, Daddy, they certainly do seem to adore you. So, why do I feel so conflicted?"<sup>liii</sup>

Soon, after falling in love with Bobby Strong, she discovers that there are ways to cross the boundaries between the rich and poor and finds herself in the middle of a battle between the two important men in her life as Bobby attempts to start a revolution against the new fee hikes. As her father attempts to "nip this unpleasantness in the bud," Hope starts to see the true nature of her father as he sings gleefully about using physical violence to put down this revolution. This scene is key for Hope's transformation, as she begins to understand where her place is within this larger revolution, what is right, and what is wrong. As the battle begins to ramp up, Hope is captured by the rebellion and is thrown into the world of the poor, who want to hang her for her father's crimes. As she sees Bobby's passion for what is right and feels the weight of his death as the inevitable end of this uprising, she becomes sure that the revolution is the solution to Cladwell's reign, convincing the poor to let her lead them to the UGC headquarters where they kill Cladwell and his staff and take over the company. Hope's final transformation is one of ultimate confidence in Bobby's vision, but also of naiveté. Convinced that overthrowing her father is the just thing, she assumes that that action will solve all problems of inequality, while in reality, her ignorance of the ecological landscape causes everyone's ultimate death including hers. This final phase of her character brings hope to the people and her confidence, warmth, and fierce belief in that vision is key to playing her in these final moments, even if ultimately she did the wrong thing. These three transformations have been my focus as I dove into the essence of this character, and as I complete more scene analysis in the subsequent chapters, I will elaborate on how my acting choices conveyed these moments.

### Finding Hope

*“Beautiful, bighearted, and now with a head filled with the best stuff money can buy.”*  
– Caldwell B. Cladwell

*“Your father mentioned the size and purity of your heart. He neglected, however, to mention the size and purity of your beauty.”* – Officer Lockstock

*“String up the strumpet daughter of the criminal urinal chain owner Cladwell!”*  
– Little Becky Two-Shoes

*“You're a good girl, Hope Cladwell.”* – Senator Fipp

*“Because ... Hope is my daughter.”* – Penelope Pennywise

These are only a few of the many things said about Hope Cladwell over the course of *Urinetown*. Most revolve around her outer beauty, her warm heart in a desolate world, and her privileged stance in society and the institutions for which she stands. Within the text itself, Hope acts as the inciting incident of the show, coming in to join her father’s operation and inspiring Bobby to follow his heart and righteous instincts to lead an uprising against Urine Good Company’s unjust methods. This rebellion becomes the central plot arc, in which Hope plays a vital role, planting the idea in Bobby’s head, serving as a hostage in the battle between the poor and Cladwell, inspiring the mob to let her lead them, and ultimately following in Bobby’s footsteps to bring Cladwell and his harsh measures to justice. At the beginning of the play, the world of *Urinetown* seems to have remained stagnant for some time now with Cladwell as the unelected yet definitive leader of the town controlling the population’s physiological habits and the size of their wallets. However, despite this maintenance of the status quo, there is tension slowly building as the new fee hikes take effect. As Senator Fipp puts it in Act I, Scene ii, “It’s a powder keg out there, Cladwell. This time I think it’s gonna blow!”<sup>liv</sup> Hope, the big-hearted, warm, and slightly immature



daughter of the cold and cunning Cladwell, unintentionally creates a climate in which her father's life's work is destroyed, all while finding love and herself in a battle against the unjust Urine Good Company.

In a production of *Urinetown* that has taken on many forms of commentary, I wanted to find Hope's place within the character breakthroughs in this show. While Pennywise becomes a woman with lost love and a victim of circumstance instead of a jaded old woman and the Henchmen break boundaries of gender and sexual orientation, Hope seems to remain stagnant textually, but I wanted to find her place within these sets of breakthroughs. Hope, to me, represents gender discrimination in the workplace, and I worked to find meaning in her scenes with McQueen and Senator Fipp especially. Fresh out of college, Hope joins Urine Good Company as a "fax/copy girl," already an obviously gendered job title, and finds herself immediately sexualized.

CLADWELL: You see there, Mister McQueen! Beautiful, bighearted, and now with a head filled with the best stuff money can buy.

MCQUEEN: Well, if the stuff in her head is nearly as big as the stuff in her heart, I'm sure she'll be running this company in no time.

CLADWELL: That'll be all, Mister McQueen.

MCQUEEN: Yes, of course.

FIPP: Well, I'll be. Hope Cladwell, and all grown up, too.

HOPE: Hello, Senator.

FIPP: Come to join your father's little operation?

HOPE: It's just a fax/copy position, of course. First day.

FIPP: A fax/copy girl, huh? Well, your father mentioned he was bringing on a new fax /copy girl. He neglected, however, to mention how beautiful she'd be. You'd be. You're so beautiful. Even as a little girl I always thought-

CLADWELL: That's enough, Fipp.<sup>lv</sup>

My understanding of Hope centers on this idea of her character symbolizing women everywhere who are subject to sexual harassment in the workplace. We see Hope blindly following these men as they subject her to gendered language and unfair advances while her father lightly reprimands the perpetrators in a joking manner. Throughout the show, characters make comments on the size of her heart, a clear insinuation of her impressive bust size. This problematic portrayal of women in the workplace is troubling throughout the vast majority of Act I, but by the end of the show, Hope turns this on its head, leading the rebellion, and killing her father and Senator Fipp, the main culprit of this harassment. In our staging, Hope kills Fipp herself, beckoning him towards *her* this time. Her ultimate position as the leader of the rebellion and her strength in taking that control reverses this stance. This representation of sexual harassment and sexism in the workplace is very understated in the original production and in ours as well, but in my portrayal of Hope, I wanted to focus on that as a large aspect of her journey throughout the show, at the very least, in the internal monologue.

### **The Beginning of Hope's Journey**

Hope enters the play as a wispy character, being pulled by her father's values and beliefs, brainwashed into believing that she should be joining her father's company, and blindly following the wishes of those around her. In Act 1, Scene 2, Hope enters the workplace to find that no one notices her until she opens her mouth. Her presence is literally unfelt by all as she attempts to interrupt them. Upon speaking up, she is immediately sexualized by her father's employees and literally summoned over by Senator Fipp. As Hope is often unnoticed and vulnerable in this setting, as well as in her costume as I will discuss in following chapters, she blindly follows the men in the scene, allowing

herself to be controlled by their actions. Act 1, Scene 3 is Hope's first substantive interaction with a man in the play who treats her as an equal, dispelling the clear power imbalance that has already been showcased in her other exchanges. Bobby, the assistant custodian of Public Amenity #9 and a dreamer in the midst of this bleak town, met Hope the same morning as she attempted to find her way to work; therefore, Act 1, Scene 3 is not their first meeting, but it is their first interaction of substance. What is important about this scene is the blend of playfulness, the excitement of love at first sight, and the beginning of Hope questioning the right and wrong in the world she lives. For the entirety of the play so far, Hope is summoned by others, acting upon the whims of the men around her, but for the first time, she reaches her hand out to Bobby signifying her first moment of real agency for her as a character. This is a transformative moment for her; a moment of finally being listened to and not just seen or barely heard. This scene allows her to share her views, explain to Bobby what his heart is telling him, and experience an interaction of value. This is a moment of new beginnings for Hope as she begins her journey to understand issues of class, fight for the people, and lead the town to freedom. As her first real interaction with Bobby comes to a close, she asks when they can meet again.

HOPE: Wait a minute, when can I see you again?

BOBBY: In this darkness I'm afraid you can't see me at all. But a bright, shining world is waiting to start, I can feel it. Come to Amenity Number Nine tomorrow. I'll show it to you.<sup>lvi</sup>

In this final dialogue, we see Hope's understanding of right and wrong, rich and poor, oppression and freedom begin. The emerging bright, shining world has been created by her spark and inspiration, and this moment is key to beginning her journey.

## Portraying Hope

Hope as a character is at first seemingly simple, but as I dove further into her character I found her to be complex in a multitude of ways. At first glance, Hope appears hopeless, naïve, shrill, and quite frankly, a little stupid. However, within her character lies the opportunity to be caring, warm-hearted, and maybe a little over-optimistic. I portrayed her as a loving character who might be a little naïve and unworldly, but has a transformation over the course of the play, becoming a leader of the rebellion with a strength that comes directly from her warm nature. At the beginning of this process, I was apprehensive about playing the ingénue role, a character I, as an actor, have never played before. Additionally, finding Hope's three-dimensionality was a very difficult task given the way she is written textually. Kotis and Hollman clearly aimed to create a character that despite her physical beauty was comically vapid and unintelligent. From some of her more ridiculous lines, including, "Gosh, I never realized large monopolizing corporations could be such a force for good in the world," to her clueless attempt at leading the rebels to their own deaths, Hope is the character you generally feel sorry for.<sup>lvii</sup>

In my depiction of Hope Cladwell, I sought to create the aforementioned three transformations very clearly; therefore, Hope takes on a couple of different forms throughout the play. In her first appearance, I needed to show a young woman fresh out of University walking into unknown territory. She walks tall with an airy grace; she is delicate and fair, optimistic and innocent. I approached Hope with a juvenile vocal tone with a youthful naïveté, adjusting my quality of voice to sound higher and a little younger. As she finds more meaningful interactions and powerful moments later in the show, I steadied my voice, lowering the tone to sound more serious and intentional with Hope's words. Hope

should be completely transparent in this first phase of her character, and therefore, I showed every emotion and reaction on my face quite clearly. From the first moment of falling in love with Bobby to interacting with her father and his employees, I presented each thought that crossed my mind to the audience in a very evident way. In theory, I wanted each and every character to also be able to look right through Hope, which is also achieved in the first costume as will be explained in the next chapter. To continue with this, when Hope enters the Urine Good Company office for the first time, no one notices her until she speaks. There is so little substance to her character that they see straight through her as if she isn't there at all. Slowly, Hope starts to understand the horrors of her father's business ("Don't Be the Bunny") and her first transformation begins. As her father sings gleefully about quelling the revolution, stepping on the poor, and shooting "bunnies," Hope begins to question his intentions. This song is the start of Hope's internal monologue; she does not sing or dance, simply observing the madness surrounding her. It was crucial for me to find lyrics and lines to react to, showing Hope's gradual understanding and realizations of the true intentions behind Urine Good Company. At first, she is simply confused and skeptical, responding comically and smartly to her father's words.

HOPE: A little bunny at a tollbooth?

CLADWELL: You heard me.

HOPE: But Daddy, bunnies don't drive cars.

CLADWELL: Oh, don't they?

HOPE: No, actually, I don't think they do.

CLADWELL: Live long enough, Hope dear, you see...many things.

HOPE: Even a daughter doubting her father?<sup>lviii</sup>

But soon, as she discovers the sincerity and seriousness of her father's words, she turns from confusion and skepticism to horror and fear.

CLADWELL:

*Don't be the bunny.  
Don't be the dope.  
Don't be the loser.  
You're much better than that, Hope!*

*You're born to power.  
You're in the money!  
So take your cue.<sup>lix</sup>*

This chorus was an intentional reaction point for me with “You’re born to power. You’re in the money!” being the operative phrase. In this moment, Hope realizes that she is being groomed to take on this position and follow in her father’s footsteps, a prospect she finds disturbing as she hears her father singing about the inequalities he is perpetuating. When Cladwell grabs her arm and pulls her closer to him, I developed very tense body language representative of being forced into something she does not really want. By the end of this song, Hope’s attitude has changed from confusion and comical disbelief to fear of the measures Cladwell might take to snuff out this uprising. The difficulty of this in my acting was creating the internal monologue in my facial reactions to cue the audience that Hope is having these realizations in real time without having any dialogue to state it explicitly.

Continuing this exploration of the internal monologue, I also worked to portray these transformations during Hope’s capture in the rebel’s secret hideout in Act II. After Hope is taken hostage at the end of Act I, she has very few lines to express how she is feeling so the internal monologue and facial reactions are key to portraying the inner workings of her mind. It is during this time she discovers the realities of the poor, hears Bobby’s call to action, and

discovers the true identity of her mother, Penelope Pennywise. But in these decisive moments, she is unable to say anything or show her feelings. While in the secret hideout, I was seated on a wooden crate on a platform just separate from the stage. This was meant to be a kind of jail cell where I can in fact hear everything being said behind me in the hideout itself, but I am still facing the audience, creating opportunities for me to act to the audience members directly. During this time, I hear the rebels discuss killing me in revenge for my father's crimes, discuss the realities of Urinetown as a place of exile, and Bobby's plan to negotiate with Cladwell to bypass years of struggle. It was important for me as an actor to pay close attention to this dialogue, react to key phrases and moments as they arise, and create that internal monologue and thought process in my head to show the audience that Hope is indeed thinking through these actions and responses.

A key moment for this was during "Tell Her I Love Her," the song in which Little Sally shares Bobby's last words. These final words are a call to action for Hope and for the rebels to continue his fight for freedom. In this number, Hope discovers that Bobby is dead, lamenting her love story that never came true; she hears his call to continue to fix the wrong in the world and sees Mama Strong mourn the loss of her son and husband. These are all moments that come together to create the final transformation of Hope's character. These are all realizations that she must have in order to discover the strength inside herself to lead the rebels. In "Tell Her I Love Her," there were several operative words and phrases I looked at to find these moments.

LITTLE SALLY:

*Ours was a short time.  
Ours was a love that never bloomed  
Yet in that love there lives*

***A brand new hope  
It's calling out to you***

*Its call is soft and gentle  
Tame and fine  
It's docile and benign  
[...]*

***Tell all the people  
Tell them the time is always now  
Tell them to fight for  
What they know is right<sup>lx</sup>***

In this verse, we hear Bobby through Little Sally's voice express to Hope that despite their love being short-lived and fading away, the hope for freedom and revolution still lies within her and she must answer that call. She must fight for what is right for the people in his name, and that is exactly what she does. "Tell Her I Love Her" is a vital moment for Hope's transformation because she discovers that vision. Her subsequent monologue is clearly inspired by these words,

HOPE: My heart is telling me many things right now as you can all well imagine, but one thing it's bellowing louder than anything else is that when there's wrong in the world we must right it. [...] Ladies and gentlemen of the rebellion, if you want to do to me what they did to Bobby I wouldn't blame you. But if this righteous rebellion were to peter out in Bobby's absence, sending his memory into oblivion, I *would* blame you. All of you!<sup>lxi</sup>

Because this monologue and the previous reflections of Hope feature very different aspects of her character, it was important to find the connection between this monologue and her previous character. In order to really connect Hope as a character over the course of these transformations, I had to find these moments during her capture to portray her changing thought processes and shifting beliefs.



Finally, Hope becomes a powerful symbol of the rebellion, convincing the poor to trust her leadership because of her love for Bobby. This transformation was sudden for me, as very abruptly she releases herself from her chains and jumps up to stand up for what she believes. In looking through these final moments (Act II, Scene 5), I found Hope to have an assumed confidence that is unfortunately unsupported by her actual abilities. Finding the balance between creating a strong character who knows what they're doing and a strong character who only *thinks* she can be successful was a difficult task and moments of dialogue had to hint at her small moments of doubt and unease. As Hope comes back on stage to join the rebels in their killing spree, I wanted her to find power in her blood thirst. Clearly, she eagerly leads the poor to this action to make them happy, but upon killing her father, she has a moment of realization. She discovers that by taking these steps, she has now placed herself at the forefront of this town. As McQueen asks, "What now, Ms. Cladwell?" she understands that the fate of these people and this town now falls upon her. She has a moment of panic and understanding as she turns back towards the audience after the blackout after her father's death, and then she begins grasping for her words. In this final monologue, she attempts to rally the troops explaining that a new age is beginning, a new day of compassion and freedom.

HOPE: Now is the beginning for all of us. Now is the beginning for all of us. Now is a new day when each of us, regardless of race, creed, class, or criminal history, can come together as one people and share the fruits of our labor as one. Now is the dawning of a new age of compassion and the right to do whatever you like, whenever you like, with whomever you like, in whatever location you like. Ladies and gentlemen, today marks the final day of an age of fear, an age that lasted far too long. Today marks the first day of a new age! A new age-

TINY TOM: Don't say it!

HOPE: Of hope!<sup>lxii</sup>

After analyzing this monologue, rehearsing it throughout the process, and working it specifically with my director, I came to the conclusion that Hope, attempting to seem powerful without really having the skills to do so, is grasping for words at this point. For the first two sentences specifically, she is looking for the right words to explain what follows this act of murder despite having failed to develop any real plan or infrastructure to move forward. I locked in on the word “dawning” as the point when she finds her place as the emerging leader of the town. From there, she continues to explain that her father’s reign has now ended and a new age of her leadership begins today. It was important to showcase her self-doubt in this speech, finding the comical elements in her searching for words and meaning in the first couple sentences, but also showing the point when it becomes clear to her that this symbolizes the beginning of her journey. This final transformation was the most difficult for me because it is the most dramatic. I sought to show her strength but keep her naïveté and overenthusiastic optimism alive.

Previously, I discussed the task of finding meaning in some of Hope’s more unintelligent phrases. Textually, Hope is written as childish, dumb, and often just pitiful. However, my interpretation granted her more dignity than that. This final scene was no exception to that. Particularly in her final interaction of the play, a dialogue with Mama Strong, she says some phrases that are, on paper, quite asinine. But depending on the inflection, they could take on alternate meanings. I crafted this dialogue to embody a tone of reassurance and comfort.

JOSEPHINE: Such a fever. If only I had a cool, tall glass of water, maybe I'd have a fighting chance.

HOPE: But don't you see, Mrs. Strong? The glass of water's inside you; it always has been.

JOSEPHINE: It has?

HOPE: Of course, it has. Don't you know what you are?

JOSEPHINE: A river?

HOPE: That's right. We all are.<sup>lxiii</sup>

If we interpret this text as Hope demanding the poor to have faith that they will survive and the determination to keep fighting, it becomes much less laughable. In order to help her townspeople keep the will to live, Hope must reassure them to have hope, and she must demand that they understand her intention. In their disbelief and doubt, she must keep their trust in her alive. This dialogue takes on new meanings from the original senseless interaction written on paper. In acting Hope, these final scenes were the most difficult in finding ways for her to be a character of substance and power, rather than a ridiculous and nonsensical leader. Despite her ultimate downfall, she does ardently take care of these townspeople until the end, encouraging them to keep fighting for their happiness and reassuring them of their faith and hope.

### **Dressing Hope**

A major component of my journey bringing Hope to life was in her costuming. Hope is the kind of character whose personal style and attire would be of the utmost importance, which makes the detail of her costumes even more important within the scope of the acting. Sherry Linnell, our costume designer, created three costumes for Hope as a part of her transformative journey from naïve daughter of Caldwell B. Cladwell to leader of the revolution. I found Hope in the fabric of these garments, making choices on how to play her through the intention behind the costume and by developing her physicality through the

range of motions and presence of the garments themselves. This was fairly easy due to the distinct transformations that occur between the three costume pieces.

First, Hope enters dressed in a delicate sheer silver dress with shiny embellishments and appliques covering her torso and midsection. This 1940s inspired silhouette feels very fragile, which is perfect for Hope's initial state within the play. Despite the dress being long-sleeved and hitting her at the knees, which in concept would feel much more covered than Hope would seem to want, because the fabric is a silvery white sheer organza with appliques only covering from the top of her legs to the sweetheart neckline, the dress shows off much of her body and legs in the process. With only a nude leotard underneath the dress, it appears as though she is almost completely naked on stage. This gown feels fragile, delicate, and dainty, lending an air of elegance and grace to Hope's character as she enters the filthy, dusty and desolate town of *Urinetown*. In the first scene, dressed in this gown, she immediately sticks out in visual contrast amongst the poorest of the poor dressed in slashed and stained clothes. These prominent silvery symbols of her wealth and social status are key to help place her within the context of the show. Another aspect of this garment that was particularly helpful in making acting choices is the way the sheer fabric lends an air of weightlessness to her character. Due to the sheer nature of the gown, it looks as though there is very little substance to hope; you can look straight through her like glass. In many instances when Hope enters the Urine Good Company office, she intentionally attempts to get Cladwell's attention while he is still talking to Senator Fipp or Mr. McQueen, but they do not see her until she begins to speak. I approached this interaction attempting to find a Hope who begins as a wispy character floating around this world she does not quite yet understand. Due to the lightweight, delicate, and transparent nature of this dress, I was able

to find her soft and weightless nature rather quickly.



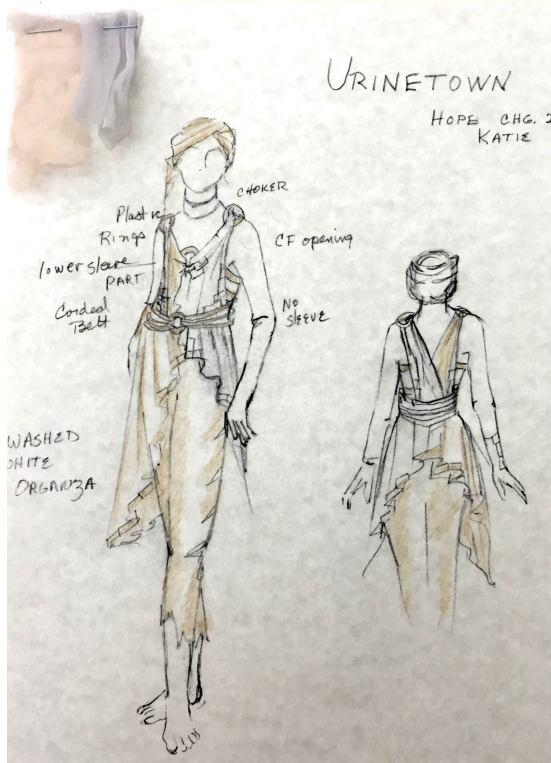
Costume Sketch #1



Photo by Janelle Asti

At the end of Act I, Hope is kidnapped by the rebellion and taken hostage for the majority of Act II. As she enters the stage at the end of intermission, we see her in her second costume: the shredded, stained, and destroyed remains of her first dress. This second costume features dirty tan leggings slashed along the legs, a stained headscarf, and a dress that she has seemingly created from the remnants of her first dress. Other than the clues signaling the audience that this dress is in fact made from the original costume, such as the same material and the various silver appliques that managed to survive the torture she has been through, the dress looks nothing like the first one. The fabric has been dyed grey and

reddish tan due to the grimy nature of the secret hideout and the sewers. It has no sleeves, is gathered at the waist with a belt, features many asymmetrical pieces of fabric that jut out at various angles and lengths, and is tied together around three silver rings to create a new structure of the dress. Clearly, Hope has scavenged for these materials from the sewers to salvage her old dress, or as I like to think, Little Becky Two Shoes has been using Hope as her own personal dress-up doll, lending to the disturbing nature of Hope's kidnapping. This dress is shocking, leaving the audience to contemplate the horrible sequence of events that led Hope to look as damaged and torn apart as she does. But again, following the argument of weightlessness and substance, Hope is growing. She is gaining not only fabric but also thought, understanding, and force as she begins to understand the harsh realities of the lower classes, tied up on the edge of the stage.



Costume Sketch #2



Photo by Janelle Asti

When Bobby's ghost issues a call to action to continue the revolution in his name ("Tell Her I Love Her"), Hope finds her new objective in this show: to free herself from her capture and lead them in the rebellion against her father. After she gives one of her final monologues inciting the people to continue the rebellion in Bobby's memory and to trust her to lead them, she changes into her third costume of the show. This final garment is a pristine white jacket with a high neck, asymmetrical coat tails, and gold metallic accents. It is paired with black leggings, short black boots, and a white silk head wrap. This is paired with the final phase of Hope's transformation, where she finds her ultimate strength and power as the leader of the revolution. To me, this costume symbolizes the full circle transformation of Hope from a wispy and weightless ingénue to a substantive and powerful leader, despite the fact that her actions are ultimately unsuccessful. She may not fully grasp how best to save the population of this town or have the foresight to see how her actions might fail, but she has an assumed confidence that she is doing the right thing for the people's happiness and following in Bobby's footsteps. Therefore, this image of power is important nonetheless. This costume is the first time that Hope is almost completely covered in the play, signifying her ultimate transformation from a delicate and weightless character to a leader of substance, solidity, and an assumed confidence.

As I discussed in my previous chapter, *Hope's Journey: An Overview*, Hope's transformation throughout the show happens over the course of three major phases. These costumes signified those stages in how I approached the role and allowed me to find parts of Hope's physicality in the fabrics. For example, when walking in the first dress, it moves with you very easily and feels as though you are wearing nothing. The fabric, instead of providing limitations on how you can move, moves with you, floating in the air as you walk

across the stage. Through this, I wanted to find a dainty walk, something that would accommodate the flowing delicate nature of the dress.



Costume Sketch #3



Photo by Janelle Asti

Whereas, the final costume provided much more structure in both the jacket and the shoes, limiting my movements in a way that allowed me to find a powerful stance and stature for Hope's final moments. The jacket has a very sturdy cut to it that does not allow for the free-flowing movement of the first dress, but it does help me stand taller and feel more supported. I also gain a steadier footing with the boots than I have with the strappy wedges of the first two costumes. These little details lend themselves to Hope as a character and her journey throughout the play.



### FINAL REFLECTIONS

After conducting the dramaturgical research, analyzing the script, and rehearsing for five weeks with the cast, it was somewhat surreal to finally be performing this production. In particular, it was helpful to have an audience to understand the success of my decisions and choices and finally come together as a cast to present our work. Before each show, to fully get into character, I tried to do a quick imagination meditation after our cast warm up, which featured vocal warm ups for singing and diction and projection exercises. With this show, because it does lie in this absurdist world, I felt I needed to really put myself in that place before walking out on stage. In my experience, hearing the overture begin to play was my cue to begin this task. In the three to five minutes before I entered the scene, I allowed the first lines of music and dialogue to help me find that place and find Hope as a character.

The performances, which ran April 7-10, 2016 in the Seaver Theatre at Pomona College, for the most part were very successful. As a cast, we agreed that almost all aspects of the show continued as expected with very few accidents or mistakes. Personally, I felt that my performance at the Saturday Matinee had little less energy than my other performances, but I was very happy with my performance in the end. I discovered that something in my portrayal of Hope clicked at our Preview show on Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>. As a performer, I have always felt that the excitement, buzz, and energy of the crowd pushes my performance to the next level, and *Urinetown* was no exception. I found that once I knew where the laughs fell I became more comfortable exploring my phrasing. In a way, I stopped thinking about how to say certain lines and just immersed myself in the scene and found my energy was greater, my delivery felt more natural, and my responses to other characters' actions were heightened. From the beginning of this process and well into

rehearsals, I honestly felt unsure of myself as Hope. I struggled to find the authenticity in her words, desperately wanting to find the kind, warm-hearted nature of Hope in a character who is textually unintelligent and pitiful. She intimidated me because of the duality of her character and for a long time I was unsure I would be able to find it. By the end of this process, I felt I had succeeded in finding that part of her character. With the help of my director and my cast, I was able to find the ways in which Hope's character is perhaps smarter than we think through intention behind every line and every motion. After hearing audiences' reactions and talking with people afterwards, I was sure that I had achieved this. Several people who had seen the show before told me that I created a Hope that was neither hopeless nor shrill but warm, good-natured, and just a little naïve.

Returning to the initial dramaturgical exploration of this paper on *Urinetown* as a Brechtian inspired musical, I would like to reflect on Hope's role within our production and its deviation from the original intent of the text. Purely based on the written word, I argued that Kotis and Hollman's musical creates a quasi-Brechtian experience, whereby it uses Brechtian methods such as the separation of elements and self-awareness of its own art form on a surface level. And by utilizing and subsequently acknowledging theatrical convention, *Urinetown* creates a loving mockery of American musical theatre, all while making pointed jokes surrounding issues of classism, environmental devastation, and capitalism. But despite the satirical and absurdist lines of dialogue that seemingly make an effective commentary with messages concerning saving water, rebelling against the establishment, and other social issues, *Urinetown* invalidates its own messages by manipulating the ending to reject the liberal revolution's morals and presenting a reality where good intentions simply fail, rejecting Brecht's traditionally socialist critiques of the capitalist world. Our

production, however, intentionally strays from this textual meaning, featuring a directorial vision that succeeded in creating a legitimate commentary throughout the play, substituting some of the more absurdist and comical elements with moments of severity.

To successfully execute this vision, it was crucial to create a reimagined Hope as her role in the rebellion can either support or reject the textual message, influencing the way in which the message is interpreted. Originally, Hope's stupidity lends itself to outcome in which the liberal rebellion fails miserably because of ill-advised plans and lack of foresight. In blaming her idiocy, we can laugh at the revolution's collapse, creating a comical response to a solemn concept. But in reimagining Hope as simply a naïve but good-natured person who despite making a bad decision still means well, some lines of dialogue that are authored as senseless and asinine gain deeper meaning and intention, creating commentaries that resonate. It is much harder to joke about the revolution's downfall when the intentions and actions were always virtuous and benevolent, but the harsh realities of the environment were not supportive, creating a true, meaningful satire and abandoning the inane parody of the text. For our production's vision to succeed, it was essential that Hope be a strong leader rather than one who is idiotic and pitiful. Her altered leadership creates an environment in which the audience can stand with her rather than laugh in derision at her ignorance and stupidity. Hope's strength and confidence in her abilities commands respect and courage from her townspeople, creating an environment in which audiences can connect with her and be inspired by the tenets of the revolution, despite the play's inevitable ecological devastation and ill-fated ending.

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- <sup>i</sup> Mark Hollman and Greg Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical* (New York, NY: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1998), [9]
- <sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.
- <sup>v</sup> Greg Kotis, "'Urinetown' confidential: The untold story," *American Theatre* 20, no. 2 (2003): [18].
- <sup>vi</sup> Kotis, "'Urinetown' confidential: The untold," [18].
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Bruce Weber, "How Reality Affects a Play," *The New York Times* (New York), September 21, 2001, [1], accessed September 24, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/21/movies/theater-review-how-reality-affects-a-play.html>.
- <sup>xv</sup> John Bush Jones, "New Voices, New Perspectives," in *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theater* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, published by UP of New England, 2003), [356].
- <sup>xvi</sup> Mark Hollman and Greg Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical* (New York, NY: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1998), [Page #].
- <sup>xvii</sup> David Barnet, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* (n.p.: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), [4-5].
- <sup>xviii</sup> Bertolt Brecht and John Willet, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), [210].
- <sup>xix</sup> Bertolt Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," trans. John Willett, 1930, in *Theatre/Theory/Theatre*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York, NY: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2000), [450].
- <sup>xx</sup> Brecht and Willet, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development*, [65].
- <sup>xxi</sup> Barnet, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre*, [73].
- <sup>xxii</sup> Kathryn A. Edney, "A New Brechtian Musical?: An Analysis of *Urinetown* (2001)," in *Brecht, Broadway, and United States Theater*, ed. J. Chris Westgate (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), [102].
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Barnet, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre*, [13].
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," trans. John Willett, 1935, in *Theatre/Theory/Theatre*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York, NY: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2000), [454].
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 455-456.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 456.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Barnet, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre*, [18-19].
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Brecht and Willet, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development*, [86].
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*, composed by Kurt Weill (n.p.: n.p., 1928).
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Marc Blitzstein, *The Cradle Will Rock* (New York, NY: Random House, 1938), [Page #].
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Mark Hollman and Greg Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical* (New York, NY: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1998), [9].

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- xxxvi Jones, "New Voices, New Perspectives," in *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social*, [358].
- xxxvii Hollman and Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical*, [12-13].
- xxxviii *Ibid.*, 49.
- xxxix *Ibid.*, 13, 23, 80.
- xl Anne Beggs, "'For Urinetown is your town...': The Fringes of Broadway," *Theatre Journal* 62 (2010): [42].
- xli Hollman and Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical*, [99].
- lii Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (n.p.: University of Illinois Press, 2000), [xii].
- liiii *Ibid.*, 60.
- xliv *Urinetown*, performed by Original Off-Broadway Cast, RCA Victor Broadway, 2001, compact disc.
- xlv Hollman and Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical*, [37, 61].
- xlvi *Ibid.*, 38.
- xlvii *Ibid.*, 49.
- xlviii Kotis in Foster
- lix T. R. Malthus and Geoffrey Gilbert, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), [61].
- <sup>1</sup> Hollman and Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical*, [99].
- li *Ibid.*, 100.
- lii Greg Kotis et al., interview by Paul Solman, *In Tune With the Times*, PBS, May 10, 2002.
- liii Hollman and Kotis, *Urinetown The Musical*, [27].
- liv *Ibid.*, 21
- lv *Ibid.*, 21-22
- lvi *Ibid.*, 38.
- lvii *Ibid.*, 24.
- lviii *Ibid.*, 47.
- lix *Ibid.*, 47.
- lx *Ibid.*, 88.
- lxi *Ibid.*, 91.
- lxii *Ibid.*, 97.
- lxiii *Ibid.*, 99.

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