Fall 1998

Direction of the Musical: Little Shop of Horrors

Jon Kerr
Central Washington University

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Little Shop of Horrors: The Production Thesis Documentation

Jon M. Kerr

Professor Hawkins
Professor Hubbard
Professor Vasek

Theatre 700

21 September 1998
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1. Proposed Title: Direction of the Musical Production Little Shop of Horrors.

2. Purpose of Study: The direction of the musical Little Shop of Horrors serves as the culminating experience in theatre graduate studies.

3. Scope of Study: Documentation based upon the preparation of pre-production research, post-production evaluation, the direction of the production (including the casting and rehearsal of actors, the preparation of the Director's Production Book, and oral examination) shall benefit both the student and Theatre Arts Department.

4. Procedure to be used: Three phases of study shall be included: 1. Pre-production research and thesis documentation: Chicago style, 2. Rehearsal and direction of the production, 3. Post-production evaluation documentation.

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ABSTRACT

THESIS PRODUCTION:
LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Directed by
Jon M. Kerr

November, 1998

This project entailed background research and documentation, casting, direction, and post-production evaluation of Central Washington University’s fall 1998 musical production of Little Shop of Horrors. The production thesis documentation includes research and analysis on the play and its literary origins, evaluation of the play as a production vehicle, and a discussion of the directorial vision for this production.
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LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS:
Research on the Play as Literature

Introduction

The stage version of Little Shop of Horrors is a retelling of the 1960 low budget movie entitled The Little Shop of Horrors. The story of Seymour’s bloodthirsty, man-eating plant, Audrey II, has evoked a kaleidoscope of responses from audiences, reviewers, and the theatre establishment as a whole. Since its appearance as the 1960 horror film, The Little Shop of Horrors has offended, delighted and addicted audiences of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Reincarnated from its original film form, it was rewritten and premiered off-Broadway as a musical on July 22, 1982. Due to its great success off-Broadway it was then produced as a musical film in 1989. Any effective approach to the stage version of Little Shop of Horrors from the viewpoint of dramatist and dramaturg clearly requires a penetrating look at its inspirational source, the original 1960 film version.

The Little Shop of Horrors: The Original 1960 Film

Despite its quirky and qualified critical success, The Little Shop of Horrors was very much a skid row film in production as well as in setting. If Gone with the Wind was a gem in the display case at Tiffany’s, The Little Shop of Horrors was a blue light special. Its depiction as a poverty-level film, however, crosses the process/product boundary in a most interesting way. Both the filmmakers themselves and the leading characters tried the quick-and-dirty route to success. Unlike director Roger Corman and company, however, the film’s characters are devoured by their desire for fame and fortune.

The original film The Little Shop of Horrors was created in two days and four nights for a mere $27,500 dollars. The script by Charles B. Griffith was written in less
than four days. It included an original score by noted jazzman Fred Kratz. Directed by Roger Corman, this B movie horror story has become a cult film. Mel Welles describes the film as “a funky little . . . project in which all the elements married so well it rode straight into the hearts of three generations of fans of the genre.” Welles not only rehearsed the actors but also originated the role of Gravis Mushnik, proprietor of the famous flower shop of terror. According to Welles, the script was

... quickly prepared to shoot in an existing set, the actors were rehearsed by myself [Welles] and ready to do ninety-eight pages of dialogue in two days! The exteriors were 'stolen.' All those wonderful locations, a twenty acre field of tires of all sizes, a yard full of toilets, a hearse complete with real corpse, Angel’s flight, various parks and tunnels, and, the Coup de Gras, the entire Southern Pacific Railway Yard, a train and a crew to back the train off of Bobby Coogan [the first victim fed to the plant] so that we could print in reverse and create the illusion of the train killing him, cost a couple of bottles of scotch and a lot of begging. We paid extras ten cents each on skid row, believe it or not, for which the unfortunate winos acted their hearts out.

This trenchant description of the locales, props and characters of the original film provides a fertile perspective for both director and designer when approaching Ashman’s stage version. There is an almost eerie correlation between the bargain basement process of making the film and the sleazy yet incisively satirical qualities of the film as final product. This correlation conceals a quintessential spirit that anyone mounting a stage production should aim to capture. It is about a sort of pre-camp tackiness coupled with sophisticated, ahead-of-its-time irony and satire that informs the film. These guys are making fun of Sgt. Joe Friday!

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2 Welles.
3 Welles.
The original film was created at the turn of the decade, 1960. A country still bouncing back from the depression and the Second World War was just barely beginning to get seriously post-modern and goofy. It was the atomic age. The Korean War and the iron curtain reminded Americans that science had not yet created the perfect world. Technicolor and stereophonic sound ranked proudly among modern wonders. The middle class was on the rise. Technology was rapidly opening new horizons, one of the most gripping of which to the popular imagination was outer space. This fact had been anticipated by the spate of mostly very cheesy science fiction movies produced in the 1950s.

Icons like Donna Reed, Betty Crocker and Father Knows Best still epitomized the American dream. Marginal enclaves of beatniks and hopheads from jazz subcultures in the hip spots on the coasts had penetrated public consciousness far enough to rate the occasional sitcom character. (What kid didn’t love Maynard G. Krebs?) Despite a fairly vicious subterranean history of union violence, organized crime and red baiting, there was still a widespread sense of wellbeing afoot. All this post-war optimism might have been predicated on ignorance as bliss, but rose-colored glasses were very much de rigueur in polite society. Radical chic was not yet a concept. A wave of assassinations and popular awareness of an ill-conceived war had not yet ushered in an era of grave national introspection. Americans for the most part still believed that everything was possible for anyone willing to work. Pop music still focussed on adolescent horniness; it wouldn’t move on to revolution for another three or four years.

Dick Lochte describes the era that he feels Ashman successfully captured in his 1982 stage version: "[Ashman] aptly indicates the era, that mysterious musical time of..."
do-wahs and ah-ooo-ahs that existed between the death of the Hit Parade and the birth of the Beatles.⁴ There were as yet no hippies storming the gates of America’s manifest destiny dreams, and popular films rarely touched at all on themes of social or economic injustice. While the characters of The Little Shop of Horrors are skid row down-and-outers waiting for a break and willing to sell their souls to get it, what they are willing to sell their souls for is just a shot at the middle-class American dream. This sentiment is nutshelled in Audrey’s number “Somewhere That’s Green.”

The original film was not what one would call a blockbuster, or even a mainstream success. The United States was only just entering the Camelot years and not yet thinking past the dream of life as a Leave it to Beaver episode. In a cultural milieu where “You Have To Be Taught” from South Pacific was banned from the Broadway stage and biblical epics starring Charleton Heston and a cast of thousands were high cinematic art, it is no wonder that the response to The Little Shop of Horrors was divided. Lochte describes the original movie as “... none-too-funny, dated bit of cinema Americana ... [with an] insipid, silly plot.”⁵ Yet this bit of turn-of-the-decade Americana is the essential key to the stage version of the story.


⁵ Lochte, 58.
Corliss describes the original film as "... one of the trashiest, cheapest B movies ever made ... using no-name actors ... on grungy sets ... filmed in an impossible two days." Yet he goes on to describe what is almost surely the reason for the film's continued success: "... Screenwriter Charles B. Griffith extracted 70 minutes of fast, daft humor from his bending of the horror and science-fiction genres."\(^7\)

As one reviewer of the stage version suggests, trash and treasure come together to form the unique personality of this show. "Fast, daft humor" and "bending of ... genres" were old hat by the 1980s when the stage version appeared, but in 1960 they were fresh and striking rarities, if not downright prescient of the later 1960s subculture. Herein lies the treasure in the trash — one could claim there is genius in the humorous subtext of the film. The film’s theme was an astoundingly insightful anticipation of the backlash against commercialism that was just around the corner. It is essential for a director to keep in mind this elusive juxtaposition of cinematic sleaze and hip, subtly acid, tongue-in-cheek cultural commentary when approaching the stage play. The original character of Mushnik sums up the long, strange history of this low-budget B movie. He says, The Little Shop of Horrors is

Most certainly one of the lowest budget films, if not THE lowest professional/commercial film, made in one of the shortest shooting schedules in the history of movie lore being seen by more than forty million people in theatres the world over, plus an inestimable number of millions who have seen it on television, revered and preserved in Cinematques both in Paris and New York, that gave birth to a theatrical musical of unprecedented success and universally superlative critical reviews, which in turn spawned some eighteen national and international companies, ending in a $30,000,000 film version. ... The saga is endless; as the musical play version has become for high schools, colleges and community theatre, one of the most popular productions and semi-professional

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\(^7\)Richard Corlis, "When Trash is a Treasure," review of Little Shop of Horrors, by Howard Ashman, as performed by Orpheum Theatre, New York, NY, Time, 23 August 1982, 59.
companies still pop up with short runs of the musical, while the original black and white film continues to play TV with regularity and to new generations of youngsters who still find it funny.

One might argue that either the stage version or the 1986 film is responsible for this great success, but as Welles is quick to point out "... in your TV Guide when the $30,000,000 film plays it gets one check and when the original $27,000 film plays it gets two and sometimes three checks." It is crucial, as a director of the production, to study the 1960 film in an attempt to identify what theatrical techniques have continued to draw audiences to this B movie in order to see if it is possible to transfer these effects to the stage.

The Little Shop of Horrors is often referred to as the first successful horror-comedy and thought of as a flagship film of the Roger Corman era. It is an updated version of the Faust legend—a man selling his soul for fortune and fame. (Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus, in fact, could be featured as being a similar melding of horror and comedy.) The plot of what’s now referred to as the 1960 B-movie classic revolves around the naïve and nerdy Seymour Krelborn, go-fer for the owner of a skid row flower shop. Seymour has tenderly grown what turns out to be a monstrous man-eating plant, which he has named Audrey Jr. after his co-worker and true love. In desperation Seymour presents this odd Venus Flytrap-like plant to his boss, Mr. Mushnik, in hopes of saving not only his job but the failing flower shop as well. Seymour discovers the plant’s need for human blood after pricking his finger on a thorn. This unusual specimen attracts an assortment of customers and brings much-needed attention to the flower shop. Seymour gains approval from

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8 Welles.
both his boss and Audrey. Seymour and his exotic plant become celebrities. To sustain his meteoric rise, Seymour is driven to supply the plant with human flesh. The plant is fed a drunken train yard detective accidentally run over in Seymour’s presence, Seymour’s sadistic dentist who is accidentally killed by a fall as Seymour struggles to get away from his chair of torture, a robber, and finally a prostitute killed when Seymour accidentally hits her on the head with a rock. Even though these victims are low-life types, Seymour must pay for his evil deeds. Our tragic protagonist is the final victim. He willingly climbs into the plant with a butcher knife thinking he will destroy it as he is devoured.

The movie satirizes the early TV cop shows of the 1950s as well as the Greek tragedy. It opens with a parody of the Dragnet detective show:

My name is sergeant Joe Fink working a twenty-four hour shift out of homicide and this is my workshop. The part of town that everybody knows about, but that nobody wants to see. Where tragedies are deeper, the ecstasies wilder, and the crime rate’s consistently higher than anywhere else. Skid row. My beat. The most terrifying period in the history of my beat began in a little run-down flower shop called Mushnik’s. This dry, tongue-in-cheek Dragnet narration is used to comment on the action in a Greek chorus style throughout the film. Like an actor from the Greek chorus, Sergeant Fink appears at the beginning of the film and remains until the end. Fink, however, does not express opinions or give advice, nor does he threaten to interfere with the events of the action as a Greek chorus might. The sergeant does however establish the ethical framework of the film, law and order. In keeping with the true function of the Greek chorus Fink sets the mood of the film--that of a cynical New York detective’s

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desire to elucidate “just the facts,” as absurd as they may be. In contrast with the Greek chorus, and adding to the wry wit of the film, Fink does anything but add color, mood and spectacle. He is instead the a-emotional Dragnet-inspired recorder of the facts concerning the fall of a basically good man – Seymour Krelborn. The original film’s cast of characters includes Seymour’s hypochondriac mother, adding to the comic effect of this new genre of horror film, but nothing to the plot itself. Also included are two sorority sisters who appear in various scenes throughout the film, adding much to the sarcastic subtextual hilarity if not to the plot. Audrey, Seymour’s girlfriend, is not having a relationship with the sadistic dentist as she is in the stage version and the 1989 film.

Among the millions of viewers of this campy, cult horror comedy film were the two people who are responsible for its 1980s fame and fortune. Mel Welles describes how the idea for the stage play was spawned:

“Martin Robinson and Howard Ashman each saw this film when they were 11 years old, were obsessed with making it a musical, met years later, Martin created the puppetry and Howard did his usual amazing lyrics to Mencken’s music. The result was unbelievably successful and an outstanding hallmark in musical theatre entertainment. 10

Roger Corman provided direction that inspired Howard Ashman, and Ashman followed Corman’s lead of fighting against the system in order to maintain artistic control of his production. Samuel Jackson of Dreamagic.com tells of Corman’s fight for artistic control: “Roger Corman, the king of ‘schlock’ horror films . . . began life in cinema as a script writer. But, after his first screenplay was altered by a film studio, he started producing, writing and directing his own films independently.” One has only to look to Corman’s The Little Shop of Horrors to see the influence this “schlock” king had on Ashman’s 1982 musical version. “Corman was not the usual low-budget filmmaker.

10 Welles.
Unlike the famed director of bad movies, Ed Wood Jr., Corman’s stories featured interestingly offbeat stories, bizarre characters and excellent use of cinematography and special effects.  

While the jury may never be in on the ultimate quality of the 1960 film, its value as a source of insight on the foundations of the stage version is indisputable.

**Little Shop of Horrors: the 1982 Musical Stage Version**

**Howard Ashman: The Playwright**

Howard Ashman was born May 17, 1950, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was a son of an ice cream cone manufacturer. After high school he attended Goddard College and received a BA in Fine Arts. He attended Boston University and Indiana University where he received his Master of Fine Arts degree. He moved to New York City in 1974 and worked for Grosset & Dunlap as an editor while writing plays.  

“These included *Cause Maggie’s Afraid of the Dark, The Confirmation,* and *Dreamstuff,* a musical version of *The Tempest* that began his association with the WPA Theatre.”

Howard Ashman was the Artistic Director of the WPA theatre in New York from 1977-1982. He worked as a director, playwright, lyricist, and librettist throughout his career.

His greatest success while Artistic Director at WPA was his musical version of Roger Corman’s 1960 horror film *The Little Shop of Horrors.* Ashman was not only the playwright and lyricist but directed the production as well. *Little Shop of Horrors* won Ashman numerous awards including The Outer Critics Circle awards for best lyrics and

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best Off-Broadway musical, Drama Desk Award for best lyrics, and New York Drama Critics Award for best musical. Howard again directed the play in London where it received the London Evening Standard award for best musical 1983-1984.14

Howard Ashman, like Corman in the cinema world, established what might be referred to as new sub-genres in the world of live theatre. Corman, “establishing sub-genres like woman-in-prison films, stewardess/nurse softcore sex romps, and hard-core action, gore, sci-fi and horror fare,”15 became an outcast with many of the more traditional film makers. Ashman with his stage version of Little Shop of Horrors as a horror/musical comedy and his musical Smile “which gently spoofed contestants, organizers, and audiences of beauty pageants,”16 can be looked on as developing his own “Ashman” genres in musical theatre. Ashman himself felt like an outcast in the theatre world. In Ashman’s obituary Ms. Blau refers to him as “A Director in Self-Defense.” She goes on to explain: “Despite his success, Mr. Ashman did not consider himself part of the theatre establishment. ‘Little Shop would never have been produced had I [Ashman] not had my own theatre,’ he said in 1986. ‘In order to reach the public, it had to get past the New York theatre establishment. And if that establishment had had its way, it also would have road blocked Smile.’”17 Ashman’s feelings of estrangement from the theatre community give an added importance to his feelings of how his stage version should, and I feel must, be approached.

17 Blau, A23.
It is essential to look to Ashman's notes to directors when approaching *Little Shop*. As both playwright and director Ashman had very strong feelings about his script and what he believes should be a director's approach to the production. In his author's notes, Ashman states:

*Little Shop of Horrors* satirizes many things: science fiction, 'B' movies, musical comedy itself, and even the Faust legend. There will, therefore, be a temptation to play it for camp and low-comedy. This is a great and potentially fatal mistake. The script keeps its tongue firmly in cheek, so the actors should not. Instead, they should play with simplicity, honesty, and sweetness — even when events are at their most outlandish. The show's individual 'style' will evolve naturally from the words themselves and an approach to acting and singing them that is almost childlike in its sincerity and intensity. By way of example, AUDREY poses like a Fay Wray from time to time. But she does this because she's in genuine fear and happens to see the world as her private 'B' movie — not because she's 'commenting' to the audience on the silliness of her situation. Having directed the original New York production of *Little Shop* myself, and subsequently having seen it in many versions and even many languages, I can vouch for the fact that when *Little Shop* is at its most honest, it is also at its funniest and most enjoyable.18

The success of many of the productions seems to hinge on these instructions. After looking at numerous reviews of both professional and amateur productions, it is easy to see that their success does indeed rest on the naiveté and honesty of the characters. (This will be clarified in the literary analysis of the script in a later section.) Howard Ashman never thought of himself as a director but did say: "I direct my own shows not because I like to, but out of self-defense."19 Like Corman, Ashman may not have been accepted by the establishment within his field, but he and his works have been widely successful in the theatre world.

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19 Blau, A23.
Howard Ashman has become well known for numerous contributions to the entertainment world since his first real success with *Little Shop of Horrors*. Little Shop not only became the hallmark of Ashman’s work, but also marked the beginning of his award winning association with composer Alan Menken. In Trosky’s *Contemporary Authors*, Ashman’s career is summed up:

In 1990 Ashman won, along with composer Alan Menken, the Academy Award for best original song for the song ‘Under the Sea’ from the Walt Disney animated film *The Little Mermaid*. Ashman wrote the lyrics for six of the film’s songs, and he produced the film with director John Musker. Ashman told CA: ‘The Little Mermaid went on to become the top-grossing animated film of all time.’

Howard Ashman died March 14, 1991, of AIDS. Evelyn Floret of *People* said Ashman’s death ended “one of entertainment’s most productive musical pairings” that of Ashman and Menken. In Floret’s article Menken describes the chemistry that existed between the duo: “‘We had a kind of shorthand,’ he says describing how they both recognized ‘moments’ where they felt it would be natural for the characters to burst into song. ‘Howard would have the basic idea of the number,’ Menken says, ‘then he would ask what the music might sound like.’” Even though Ashman, like Corman, felt he was not part of the theatre establishment, his works are rated among some of the most successful in musical theatre history.

**Alan Menken: Composer**

Alan Menken was born on July 22, 1949. He attended NYU where he received his degree in music. His career has included work as a composer, lyricist, music producer, song arranger, and writer of advertising jingles. Baseline’s *Encyclopedia of Film* describes Menken as:

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a bright light of the New York musical scene, prolific songwriter and composer, [who has] achieved his greatest recognition and acclaim in the movies. In collaboration with the late Howard Ashman, he helped resuscitate the American movie musical with two wildly popular Disney animated features, The Little Mermaid (1989) and Beauty and the Beast (1991). They brought their Broadway savvy to Hollywood and found, a huge, appreciative audience.

While Ashman had a childhood dream, there is no record of Menken having a desire to recreate Roger Corman’s original film The Little Shop of Horrors as a musical for stage. Baseline’s Encyclopedia of Film describes Ashman and Menken’s meeting:

After completing studies at NYU and BMI’s Engel Musical Workshop, Menken was chosen by the already experienced playwright Ashman . . . to collaborate with him on the stage musical of Kurt Vonnegut’s God Bless You Mr. Rosewater (1978). It was not, however until their Off-Broadway success, Little Shop of Horrors revamping of the 1960 Roger Corman cult film opened in 1982 that the duo received the popular and critical plaudits that their light, playful, witty compositions deserved.22

Although Menken is now thought of as one of the best composers in modern musical theatre for film, many reviewers found Menken’s early compositions weak and uninspiring. John Simon, in his review of the original stage production, describes Menken’s score as one of the horrors: “Yet whatever else a musical may or may not have, a decent score is a sine qua non, and that is precisely what this Little Shop lacks – unless we are meant to count the score as one of its horrors . . . . Alan Menken is remembered chiefly, if at all, for God Bless You Mr. Rosewater, which is best forgotten.” Simon goes on to say: “Knowledgeable sources tell me that any number of rock groups have been despoiled by Mr. Menken; my untutored ears caught only a fairly undifferentiated shuttling between cacophony and monotony.”23 Simon is not alone in his feelings toward Menken’s work. In the New Statesman Paul Allen states: “Howard Ashman’s book and

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23 Simon, 82.
Alan Menken's music are school of *Rocky Horror Show* camp, affection rather than genuine satire."\(^{24}\)

Edith Oliver, however, describes Menken's work as "... a spirited, witty rock-and-roll jazz score."\(^{25}\) Richard Corlis is more than complimentary in his review: "The tiny stage of off-Broadway's Orpheum Theatre is apulse with the engaging beat of Alan Menken's pastiche of infant rock 'n' roll."\(^{26}\) In a review of Seattle's Village Theatre's production, David Schultz also takes a positive view. Simon felt that, "The Ashman lyrics tend to self-destruct, inducing on the relatively rare occasions when neither their delivery nor the accompanying din obliterates them, instant oblivion."\(^{27}\) On the other hand Schultz finds the music to be comprised of "an up-beat score and witty lyrics [that] will keep you thoroughly amused, even as the story gets bloody. (You'll be toe tapping to such gruesome lyrics as 'the guy sure looks like plant food to me ...')."\(^{28}\)

Simon finds Ashman to have "done better by the book, ... which contains some genuinely funny ideas, ...",\(^{29}\) while Schultz feels "When the cast stops singing, however, the performance falters, mostly due to a flimsy book ..."\(^{30}\) For a director of the stage version it is essential to look at these reviews to evaluate the validity of both negative and positive comments in regard to the musicality of the production as written.


\(^{26}\) Corlis, 59.

\(^{27}\) Simon, 82.


\(^{29}\) Simon, 82.

\(^{30}\) Schultz.
As the director of the production, I feel it is interesting to note that the reviews of most professional productions find the book stronger than the score, while reviews of amateur and semi-professional companies find the music to be the strength of the show. I feel this supports the idea that the stage direction in the original production might have been of a higher quality. It is therefore essential to consider strongly Ashman's directorial notes.

Despite the varying reviews of Menken's work "...the eight-time Oscar winning composer..." has become "...one of the most talented, original and exciting composers of our generation and he has inspired us all with his music." 31

Martin P. Robinson: Original Puppet Designer and Manipulator

Martin P. Robinson is the creator responsible for perhaps the most famous puppet ever to hit the Broadway stage. The man-eating plant, Audrey II, which Robinson created for Ashman, has not only become as well known as the play itself but has received more kudos than any other aspect of the production. Robinson, like Ashman himself, saw Corman's original horror film when he was eleven. It was his dream from that first introduction to Audrey II to someday re-create the puppet himself.

People Weekly describes the young Robinson:

As a timid Wisconsin youngster, Robinson rediscovered his inspiration to become a performer each Halloween: 'The little voice in the back of my head said, "this is it, you've got to do this more than once a year."' After his 1974 graduation from New York's American Academy of Dramatic Arts, he knocked around as a mime, clown puppeteer and actor, eventually joining Jim Henson's Muppets.

Little Shop of Horrors' original Audrey II was Robinson's own design and creation. "He built all three of the models in existence [at that time]. (The first was for the 1982 off-off-Broadway production, another for the 1983 LA production, and a third for the . . . London run.)" 32

He not only designed and created the original puppets themselves, but was the manipulator as well. In the thousands of productions by various companies that followed, the manipulation and synchronization with the singer have been considered essential to the success of the play. In Simon's less than complimentary review of the original production he states: "The best performance comes expectably, from the plant itself: as it grows in size, viciousness, and lethal appetite; as it is designed, satanic bonhomie, by Martin P. Robinson; and as it is enacted kinetically by Robinson." 33 However according to many reviews of productions that have followed Ashman and Robinson's original work the manipulation of the puppet is often a problem. Of the MIT Musical Theatre Guild's production Adam Lindsey notes: "The synchronization between the animation and the voice is generally satisfactory, though sometimes spotty. . . . Many [of these] small imperfections mar MTG's production . . . . In a particularly memorable one, a technician was visible during an attempt to control the plant." 34 Because of these difficulties in manipulation and synchronization, it is essential that the director give special attention to the rehearsal of the plant. It seems that the puppeteer will be the most

33 Simon, 82.
34 Adam Lindsey, "Director Brings Comedy to the Little Shop of Horrors," The Tech 12 April 1994, vol. 114, on-line, available from Netscape @ http://the-tech.mit.edu/V114/N20/horrors.20a.html
successful by having as much time as possible to rehearse with the puppets themselves, as well as with the singer in order to assure believable synchronization. People Weekly describes some of what goes into the manipulation of this giant puppet: “Handling the nearly 70 pounds of Audrey II has, in fact, packed 12 pounds of muscle onto Robinson’s lithe 6’2” 175-pound frame, even though working within the eight-foot-tall puppet with its 20-foot tentacles is kind of like being in a sauna.” Not only is rehearsal essential, but casting of the puppeteer must be carefully handled as well. The manipulator must be approximately 6’ and be in good physical condition.

Martin P. Robinson’s Audrey II not only provides one of the most difficult challenges of the production, but provides one of its most remembered characterizations.

Little Shop of Horrors: The Original 1982 Production

The original production of Little Shop of Horrors, book and lyrics by Howard Ashman and music by Alan Menken, first opened off-Broadway on July 27, 1982. Based on the film by Roger Corman with screenplay by Charles Griffith, it was originally produced on the small Orpheum Theatre stage in New York’s Village District. It was later moved to the Westwood Playhouse in New York to accommodate the increasingly large audiences.

Dick Lochte, in his review of the production after the move, says:

“The show has been transfused to the Westwood Playhouse without a drop of ghoulish glee being spilled. Since it seemed to flourish in the somewhat dank and narrow and brooding Orpheum Theatre in the Village, I didn’t see how it could come to full bloom in a brighter newer, modern house. Not to worry, Edward T. Gianfrancesco’s inventive skid-row set fits neatly on The Westwood stage: Craig Evan’s lighting and Otts Munderloh’s

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35 People Weekly, 73.
sound design duplicate their original effectiveness: even the special surprises... work equally as well out west.36

It was presented by WPA Theatre (of which author Howard Ashman was Artistic Director), David Geffen, Cameron Mackintosh, and The Shubert Organization. Ashman wrote and directed. Sets were designed by Edward T. Gianfrancesco, lighting by Craig Evans, costumes by Sally Lesser, and sound by Otts Munderloh, with orchestrations by Robby Merkin. Vocal arrangements, musical supervision, and musical direction were by Robert Billig, with musical staging by Edie Cowan. Puppets were designed and manipulated by Martin P. Robinson.37 The original cast consisted of ten performers including Robinson. Little Shop of Horrors "... ran for five years in New York and has been produced worldwide. Ashman received two Outer Critics’ Circle Awards, a New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, a London Evening Standard Award, and a Drama Desk Award"38

The plot of Ashman’s musical comedy, Little Shop of Horrors, closely follows that of Corman’s 1960s B horror film The Little Shop of Horrors. Ashman, as stated above, intended this remake of the original film to satirize science fiction B movies, musical comedy, and the Faust legend.

Set in the same skid-row environment as the original film, Ashman’s story makes subtle but socially timely changes in the original plot. Ashman’s script lampoons social

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37 Little Shop, 5.
38 “Howard Ashman,” 19 March 1998, on-line, available from Netscape @ http://www2.disney.com/DisneyTheatrical/BeautyandtheBeast/people/howarda.html
changes that were taking place in the early 1980s in the United States. Materialism had become a way of life. An individual’s success was being measured in terms of what he owned, lived in, and drove rather than his human qualities. Americans had become the ideal consumers. The role of women in society had changed. Women were now a powerful and essential part of the professional class. The average woman had become much more than a homemaker and mother figure. With women’s new-found liberation the topic of domestic violence came to the forefront and was being dealt with legally as well as personally. Woman’s groups across the nation had begun to speak out strongly against violence toward women.

The music of the ‘50s had made a comeback, and The Supremes still reigned as the queens of the Motown sound. They were the ones that first featured the idea of women “Takin’ Care of Business.” Ashman had in mind the influence of modern horror films such as Jaws and the sadistic character in Marathon Man as inspirations for his approach. The eighties was an era of ethnic equality in the arts, and Ashman made use of this in updating the original plot. Ashman takes a comedian’s tongue-in-cheek approach in presenting social commentaries in his musical.

Replacing Corman’s Dragnet approach with Sergeant Fink functioning as the Greek chorus, Ashman takes the idea into a new dimension with the Supremes-like trio. Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronnette are the Greek chorus 1980s style. Like the ancient Greek chorus, the trio sings as a group with various members at times taking solo lines. Also like the Greek chorus, Ashman’s trio appears after a brief prologue and remains until the end of the play. These supreme beings, unlike Corman’s Fink, do much more than report just the facts. They express opinions:
Ronnette. Girl, I don’t know who this mess is you hangin’ out with, but he is hazardous to your health.

They give advice:

Crystal. So dump the chump, get another guy, and let him protect you.”⁴⁹

And they threaten to interfere in the events of the play:

Girls. “That’s him! That’s the one! Who do you think you are, treating her that way? Get outa here and don’t come back! Beat it! Get lost!”⁴⁰

Like any Greek chorus the trio is allied with the protagonists Seymour and Audrey.

The chorus is secondly responsible for setting up the ethical framework of the play and expressing the playwright's views. The trio states early on that those people who live uptown are in control. The lot in life of these skid row down-and-outers is to work “For the powers that have always been.”⁴¹ When Seymour tries to elevate his position and move up the ladder of success, he is literally devoured. Ashman’s warning, delivered by the trio, is that the capitalistic system, armed with the vast power of mass media and the public relations machine, offers success only with a hidden price that is much too high.

Girls. Hold your hat and hang onto your soul!
Somethin’s comin’ to eat the world whole!
If we fight it, we still got a chance.⁴²

Seymour’s dilemma encapsulates Ashman’s message. He finally has the possibility of a way out of skid row by becoming a cog in the great hype machine. The catch for Seymour, and as Ashman wishes to suggest, for all of us, is that such an opportunity may require a compromising of our values.

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⁴⁹ Little Shop, act 1, sc. 2, 33.
⁴⁰ Little Shop, 1.3, 40.
⁴¹ Little Shop, 1.1, 17.
⁴² Little Shop, 2.3, 95.
Perhaps one of the most important functions of the trio, as the chorus, is to react to the action in the way the author intends the audience to react. They celebrate Seymour’s success and encourage Audrey to:

*Crystal.* Dump the chump, get another guy, and let him protect you. 43

Throughout the play they empathize with the protagonists’ need to get out of skid row. It is clear that the trio models the responses Ashman wants the audience to have in the manner of the Greek chorus.

In addition the trio certainly is used effectively by Ashman to help set the mood and heighten the dramatic effect, as well as provide spectacle. In true Supremes fashion, they also function as an important rhythmical device. Ashman himself refers to the trio as a Greek style chorus in his character notes:

Crystal, Ronnette, and Chiffon—Three black female street urchins who function as participants in the action and a Greek chorus outside it. They’re young, hip smart, and the only people in the whole cast who *really* know what’s going on. In their Greek Chorus’ capacity, they occasionally sing to the audience directly. And when they do, it’s often with a ‘secret-smile that says: ‘we know something you don’t know.’ 44

Ashman successfully moves the 1960 plot into the ‘80s with his inclusion of the trio.

Here is an ethnically based, powerful female chorus with the only brains in the production. They are not fooled by the male, nor do they allow men to strong-arm women without confronting the issue directly.

Ashman’s most dramatic change to the original plot is the relationship between Audrey, the female protagonist, and Orin, the semi-sadist dentist. In the original Orin is merely a demented dentist who enjoys inflicting pain on his patients. He is not boyfriend

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43 *Little Shop,* 1.2, 34.
44 *Little Shop,* 9.
to the lovely Audrey. But in Ashman’s musical he is a woman-beating, sadomasochistic jerk. The bloodthirsty plant uses Audrey and Orin’s dysfunctionality to trick Seymour into providing him with the flesh he needs to survive. Seymour can find no rationale to kill for the plant, not even when tempted with fame and fortune:

Plant. Would you like a Cadillac car?  
Or guest spot on Jack Parr  
How about a date with Hedy Lamarr?  
You gonna get it!  
Seymour. No thanks, Twoey. Kind of you to offer, but . . .

However, when Seymour and Audrey II witness the mistreatment of Audrey by the dentist the plant easily convinces Seymour:

Seymour and Plant. If you want a rationale  
It isn’t very hard to see-  
Stop and think it over pal  
The guy sure looks like plant food to me!

Seymour is unable to shoot the dentist as planned but does fail to help Orin when his nitrous oxide mask gets stuck. This results in Orin’s death and the first meal served to the plant by Seymour. With this action Seymour begins his descent from basically good man to killer. He has begun to fulfill his role as tongue-in-cheek tragic protagonist. The dentist’s drug use as well as his sadomasochistic tendencies and violence toward women catapult Ashman’s plot into the 1980s. In Trosky’s Contemporary Authors she says: “Paul Attanasio, . . . of the Washington Post asserted that Ashman ‘has mastered the essence of the ‘80s humor . . . with a morbid outrageous edge.”

Ashman has removed the character of Seymour’s hypochondriac mother in his
musical version. In the 1960 film the character of the drunken mother added humor but nothing to the plot line itself. Ashman was astute in realizing this character added little if any humor for the 1980s audience. The story is improved and sympathy for Seymour heightened by his being an orphan in Ashman’s script.

In Ashman’s version Seymour is portrayed as even more responsible for his own downfall than in the original movie. When Mushnik, proprietor of the flower shop and adoptive dad, begins to get suspicious, Seymour reacts by deliberately sending him into the jaws of the vicious flytrap. Seymour sees his chance at success slipping away as the plant warns him of what he’ll lose if Mushnik turns him in:

\textit{Plant.} He’s got his facts all straight . . .
You know he’s on your trail . . .
He’s gonna turn you in! . . .
They’re gonna put you in jail . . .
He’s USDA prime . . .
For my suppertime!
Come on, come on
Think about all those offers!
Come on, come on
Your future with Audrey!
Come on, come on
I swear on all my spores-
When he’s gone the world will be yours.\textsuperscript{48}

Seymour is trapped, guilt-ridden and miserable. For Seymour to get his Harley, keep his woman, and hang on to his fortune and fame, Mushnik must be devoured. Seymour is a product not of the ‘60s but of the materialistic ‘80s. We can all see a bit of ourselves in this pathetic tragic protagonist. When Mushnik asks Seymour where the receipts for the day are, Seymour replies: “In the plant. . . . I . . . thought that’d be the safest place. . . . Just . . . knock.”\textsuperscript{49} With Mushnik’s death Seymour is aware that his pact with the devil is

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\textsuperscript{48} Little Shop, 2.1, 74 and 75.
\textsuperscript{49} Little Shop, 2.1, 76.
now sealed. He knows he must pay and pay dearly. Ashman chooses to have the plant
devour the only person who truly loves him - Audrey. Unlike in the original film, both
lovers are eaten by the now enormous plant. The Faust legend is complete.

Despite its incredible success, the original production of Ashman’s Little Shop of
Horrors was received by critics with highly mixed responses. Reviews ranged from raves
to outright condemnations of the play as the horror of off-Broadway.

As mentioned above, John Simon of New York had little positive to say about the
production. He describes it as: “Low camp . . . a sort of outrageous farce with few artistic
pretentions.” He does, however, go on to say that: “I would guess that the musical, such
as it is, is an improvement, the [original] film’s inadvertent humor probably falling short
of the show’s advertent kind.” In Simon’s review, as noted above, the musical score was
described as one of the horrors. Simon says: “The Ashman lyrics self-destruct . . . ,” but
goes on to say: “Mr. Ashman has done better by the book, though, which contains some
generally funny ideas . . . .” Like many reviewers, Simon finds that Franc Luz (the
dentist) makes his multiple roles “. . . pretty much identical [and] fails to satisfy.” The
general consensus among reviewers on the multiple roles played by the dentist must be
seriously considered when directing the production. Reviewers of productions where the
roles were played by different actors seemed to find the plot much less confusing and the
character of the dentist more effective.

Simon’s highest compliments go to the plant. He concludes his review: “. . . Edie
Cowan’s musical staging is lackluster. Ashman has directed competently; if only amid all
that low camp there were an occasional bit of pointed parody, pertinent satire, or more
offbeat wit!”  
Simon’s greatest complaint about the production highlights Ashman’s own warning to directors about how to approach the show. Simon trashed the humor as low camp, while Ashman himself explicitly cautions directors against playing for camp.

Like Simon, Walter Kerr, in his review in the New York Times, generally pans the production. Kerr says: “It so happens that I was not as enamored as many of my colleagues were of the new musical at the downtown Orpheum, Little Shop of Horrors. . . . the jazz-rock Alan Menken songs they sing are really quite spirited . . . But if we’re talking about credits (as indeed we were), if we want to get to the heart of the matter we’ve got to run a finger down the title page of the show-bill until we come to a line reading ‘Martin P. Robinson and Ron Taylor as Audrey II.’” Like Simon, Kerr’s Kudos go to plant, but he is kinder in his review of Menken’s score. Kerr, unlike Simon, finds little positive to say about Ashman’s script. He states: ‘Unfortunately, there’s nothing more interesting about the second or third or fourth demise than there is about the first, which leaves Little Shop of Horrors repeating itself. And counting upon its mechanical marvel Audrey II, to take up the slack.’ Walter Kerr sends a very pointed message that it would be wise for directors to heed: “In the theatre, special effects can be dandy on an incidental basis. Beware, however, the evening that depends upon them for its lifeblood.”

John Beaufort, in his review in The Christian Science Monitor, also pans the production: “. . . the WPA Theatre, [is] making comic little shock waves at the Orpheum on Second Avenue. According to a WPA higher-up, its initials stand for ‘We’ll produce

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50 Simon, 82.
anything.' Which may explain Little Shop of Horrors.” He goes on to say: “As a broad lampoon, Little Shop of Horrors is more mirthful than frightful. The cast directed by author Ashman enters into the mock macabre spirit of the occasion with the desperate seriousness required by such antics.” In Beaufort’s eyes, Ashman did accomplish something he feels is essential to the show’s success—honesty. Like many other reviews Beaufort’s describes Audrey II as the “... star attraction ...”\textsuperscript{52}

Critic Gerald Nachman describes Ashman’s production by saying: “In Little Shop of Horrors, or Beach Blanket Babylon Goes to Sesame Street, a man eating plant grows bigger as the show itself droops.” He adds: “... It wants to be whimsy, a leafy Jaws, but it stops at silly. So you won’t notice, it’s fast and noisy (I couldn’t catch the lyrics or the plot), and the idea vanishes while you watch it – like me, devoured by the show, a toothless Venus tourist trap.”\textsuperscript{53} Nachman’s review is the harshest that I have found in my research of the original production. It highlights a problem mentioned in many reviews of professional and amateur productions, that the sound becomes mere noise. This is an especially important note to consider as one approaches the jazz-rock score.

While critics like Kerr, Simon, Beaufort, and Nachman find little positive in Ashman’s original production, many other critics find it a “big hit.” Critic Norma McLain Stoop of Dance Magazine declares: ‘The shop may be little, but the show is a big winner. She describes Ashman’s script as: “... as a ferociously funny book.” She goes on to say: “Ashman also wrote the often, but not always, funny lyrics, and directed the show with unfailing levity which makes the characters, ... funnier than what they seem


\textsuperscript{53} Gerald Nachman, “Little Shop of Horrors,” a review of Little Shop of Horrors’ by Howard Ashman, as performed by Orpheum Theatre, New York, NY, San Francisco Chronicle, 8 April 1983, 60.
at first glance.” Like many other critics, Stoop finds Ellen Greene’s Audrey “scrumptious,” but finds “Frank Luz, overly burdened by multiple roles, [bringing] none to life.” An avid critic of dance, Stoop declares: “Robert Bilig’s musical direction, Robby Merkin’s orchestrations, and Edie Cowan’s lively musical staging (though the actual dancing is minimal, the show is graced with well-managed movement throughout) are first rate.”54 Common to nearly all reviews is the opinion that Ashman has indeed written a good script. It is therefore sensible for directors to rely on the book when lyrics seem weak. Again it is clear that the multiple roles played by Luz should be cast as separate parts to strengthen the production.

In the popular arts, these are the glory days of trash. The entertainment industry is staying alive by marketing the guilty secrets of its past . . . . Even Broadway, long thought immune to adolescent fancies, has jumped on the trash bandwagon - -At least in its musicals . . . . So why shouldn’t a musical comedy be spawned from one of the trashiest, cheapest B movies ever made? . . . Little Shop answers the question: Can trash material be transformed into a funny, classy night at the theatre? This trash can.

Richard Corliss, in his review of Ashman’s production, offers the above insight which may explain much of the extreme disparity in critical opinions. Those critics with a more traditional idea of what musical theatre has been or should be have few compliments, while others realize that Ashman captured what the audiences of the ‘80s were looking for. As Corliss points out, it is an adult view of adolescent fantasy.

Corliss is complimentary of Menken’s “engaging beat” and goes onto say: “Librettist-Lyricist Howard Ashman has adhered to Griffith’s [screenwriter of the 1960 film] plot with becoming fidelity, while sending it up by adding a funky chorus of observers: three black girl singers in tight skirts and tighter harmonies.” It is important to note that the

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quality of the trio’s harmony is essential to the vocal success of the production. Corliss, like numerous reviewers, gives high praise to Greene’s “Somewhere That’s Green” number: “In her solo Somewhere That’s Green, in which she dreams of a home with every consumer cliché the ‘50s could offer, and her second-act duet with Wilkof [Seymour] she proves that Ellen Greene not Audrey II, is the wildest force of nature on the Orpheum stage.” Both numbers are labeled show stoppers in many reviews. This could help a director balance what may seem to be a plant-driven show. Corliss’s opinion can be summed up by the headline of his review: “When Trash Is a Treasure.” 55

Critics Lochte and Oliver both cite reasons that might account for Little Shop of Horrors’ unprecedented success. Oliver saw the show as Ashman adamantly instructs directors and actors to play it -- camp free:

Little Shop of Horrors, which has been running for weeks at the Orpheum, and which I’ve mistakenly been avoiding (suspecting yet another piece of campy rubbish), is a musical comedy that is both musical and comic, and that hits just the right tone of mockery without slipping into camp.

Oliver reaffirms that: “The show [has] a witty book and witty lyrics . . . and a spirited, witty rock-and-jazz score . . . .” He also agrees with Corliss that the second-act duet “Suddenly Seymour” is the “high point of the show.” Oliver reminds us that Little Shop of Horrors was directed and staged as an off-Broadway production and points out that “. . . in its own way, [it is] A model show for Off-Broadway: every aspect of it, including the theatre, is scaled to exactly the right size, and nothing goes to waste.” 56

Lochte sums up his view: “[Little Shop of Horrors] is a deliciously woozy retelling by . . . Ashman, who also directed, of the 1960 Roger Corman poverty-budget ‘B’ movie . . . .” 57

55 Corliss, 59.
56 Oliver, 118.
57 Lochte, 58.
It is entirely possible that some of the amazingly wide divergence in critical responses to the show could be attributable in part to Ashman’s anti-establishment leanings. Whatever the reasons, some valuable conclusions can be drawn from these reviews. It can be generally agreed upon that most feel Ashman’s book is witty and strong. Menken’s score, although reviewed negatively in many instances, leaves the audience humming the tunes. It may be important to a director to look towards the score when cutting the script or perhaps to work closely with the musical director to find interesting ways to give the numbers more variety of sound. The addition of a chorus to the production will allow interesting harmonies to be incorporated into the score as well as providing a vocal power that can contrast more dramatically with soloists. The preponderance of opinion is clearly that the dentist playing multiple parts is not effective. Using one actor may have been more of a money-saving device than an artistic choice. In any case, it seems a wise choice to use the talents of several actors rather than relying on one.

The plant seems to offer the biggest challenge not only to designers and manipulators, but directors as well. It is essential to make it clear to the audience that the production is not a story about a plant. The director must instead find ways to make it the story of Seymour’s plight. This is the Faust legend and a tender love story as well. Ashman consciously included parodies of Greek tragedy for important reasons. For the director to succeed he must constantly bear in mind the fact that there is a tragic hero beneath the comedy. It must be made obvious to the audience that love, compassion, and self-respect are the real treasures of life and that they should not be seen to rely on fame and fortune. Whatever the director chooses to do to accomplish this, the honesty of the actors and
avoidance of camp, as Ashman points out, are essential to the production’s success. In keeping with this the musical numbers “Somewhere That’s Green” and “Suddenly Seymour” can be seen as powerful means to draw attention back to Audrey and Seymour as tragic protagonists.

*Little Shop of Horrors* is undoubtedly one of the most popular modern musicals with American audiences. It is clear that Howard Ashman has done a lot of things right both as playwright and director. Therefore a large part of directing the show is finding those elements of the production that are responsible for its continued success.

In summation, *Little Shop of Horrors* as literature is a parody of bad B-rated movies taken from Corman’s *The Little Shop of Horrors* and set to the formula of a Greek tragedy. The trio plays the 1980s ethnic version of the Greek chorus, with Audrey and Seymour as the tragic protagonists. Seymour is a basically good man whose desire for true love, fame, and fortune leads to his downfall. The end of *Little Shop of Horrors* is resolved in true Aristotelian form. Seymour gets what is coming to him when he is eaten by Audrey II. Then the trio delivers the moral:

*Girls.* But whatever they offer you-
Theo’ they’re sloppin’ the trough for you-
Don’t feed the plants . . .

The message is clear: don’t sell out for a life of fortune and fame if you have to pay with your soul; don’t be seduced by the powers that be; “Don’t feed the plants!” Ashman struggled throughout his career to do theatre the way he felt it should be done. He didn’t bend to the theatre establishment. He was able to refrain from feeding the plants.

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58 *Little Shop*, 2.3, 95.
**Little Shop of Horrors: Literary Analysis**

**Introduction:**

The literary analysis of *Little Shop of Horrors* will be dealt with in three sections: Plot Elements or Critical Dramatic Components, Parallels with the Structure of Greek Tragedy, and finally, An In Depth Play Analysis. The final section will be based on the play analysis outline presented in *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* by Francis Hodge, Pp. 63-64.

**Plot Elements or Critical Dramatic Components**

*Little Shop of Horrors'* exposition is primarily in the prologue and act one, scene one. In these scenes we find out what has happened before the play has begun; we are introduced to all major characters and informed of their relationships and exposed to their present situations. The prologue opens with “A voice not unlike God’s,” (or could it be the devil’s?). This ominously prophetic voice establishes the time and mood of the play *a la* Sergeant Fink as higher power:

*Voice.* On the twenty-first day of September, in an early year of a decade not too long before our own, the human race suddenly encountered a deadly threat to its very existence. And this terrifying enemy surfaced—as such enemies often do—in the seemingly most innocent and unlikely places.

The Trio of street urchins/prostitutes then breaks into song, establishing the locale as they bump and grind into a full scale Diana Ross and the Supremes routine:

[*... Crystal, Ronnette, and Chiffon, ... face us, laugh, and begin to sing:]*

*Girls.* Little shop
  * Little shoppa horrors
  * Little shop
  * Little shoppa terror
  * Call a cop
  * Little shoppa horrors
  * No!
Oh oh oh no-oh! 59

In these first moments of exposition it is essential that the audience understands that the trio is in the know and that the script is written with tongue firmly in cheek. It is vital that the imaginary fourth wall be broken prior to the moment when the trio sings their first lyrics. As the lights come up they look at the audience and laugh, and the style of direct delivery is established. This then allows further direct delivery and aside technique to be used throughout the production, establishing the trio as a true narrative element.

In act one, scene one we are introduced to the main characters of the plot. Mushnik is a failure of an East Side florist on skid row. Seymour is Mushnik’s insecure, naïve clerk—the tragic protagonist. Audrey is the bleached blonde, spiked-heeled Marilyn Monroe clone shop assistant, female tragic protagonist and Seymour’s love. The audience is informed quickly that all three are down on their luck. Audrey is sporting a black eye received from her sadomasochistic, Harley-riding dentist boyfriend. Seymour is about to lose his job and be cast back out onto the streets, as Mushnik informs them that unless business improves he is closing the shop. Seymour and Audrey’s present situation and the dreams that drive them are clearly expressed in the musical number Downtown (Skid Row):

All. Downtown
Audrey. Where the guys are drips.
All. Downtown
Audrey. Where they rip your slips.
Downtown
Where relationships are no-go . . .
Seymour. Poor!
All my life I’ve always been poor!
I keep asking God what I’m for,

59 Little Shop, prologue, 13.
And he tells me,
"Gee I’m not sure . . .
Sweep that floor, kid"
Oh!
I started life as an orphan,
A child of the street, here on Skid Row! . . . 60

Ashman’s lyrics clearly and effectively establish not only exposition but sympathy for the tragic protagonists. It is now the director’s job to see that the characters are played with simplicity and honesty—a childlike sincerity and intensity that Ashman says is essential. They are basically good, kind individuals who have worked hard to improve their lives. However, the desire to get out pushes Seymour to do anything to reach his dream and impress his girl. This desire for a better life is clearly stated in the same number:

_Seymour and Audrey._ Gee, it sure would
Be swell
To get outa here
Bid the gutter fare-
Well
And get outa here
I’d move heaven and
Hell
To get outa skid,
I’d do I-dunno-what
To get outa skid,
But a hell of a lot
To get outa skid,
People tell me
There’s
Not a way outa skid
But believe me I gotta get outa . . .

_All._ Skid row! 61

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60 _Little Shop_. 1.1, 19.
61 _Little Shop_. 1.1, 20.
Seymour is singing of dreams that won’t come true. His desire is clear and it is a clever bit of foreshadowing when he says he’d do “a hell of a lot” to get out. We are also introduced to Audrey II and the history of how Seymour happened onto this interesting new plant.

There are two possible initial incidents that a director could identify as the point of attack. Does the story actually begin when Seymour presents the plant to Mushnik for the first time or when the clumsy Seymour pricks his finger on a thorn and hence discovers that the plant needs blood to survive? In considering these two moments it is essential to look to what the director feels is the controlling theme.

If, indeed the initial incident is when Seymour, encouraged by Audrey, first presents the plant to Mushnik in hopes of saving the flower shop, the story becomes that of Seymour’s struggle to get out. The plant is then merely the vehicle through which Seymour believes his dreams can be achieved. Audrey II, the plant as the embodiment of the antagonistic force, intent on world conquest, becomes the devil sitting on Seymour’s shoulder, pushing him to do his devilish deeds. In this interpretation the key is to realize that the evil force in the play is not the man-eating plant itself. Rather than a literal biological terror, the plant symbolizes the negative potential of commercialism to create instant fame, fortune and celebrity and to use these to seduce people into violating their true values to achieve material success. Audrey II fiendishly pushes Seymour:

\begin{quote}
**Plant.** Come on, come on
   Think about all those offers!
   Come on, come on
   Your future with Audrey!
   Come on, come on
   Ain’t no time to turn squeamish!
   Come on, come on,
   I swear on all my spores—
\end{quote}
When he’s gone,
The world will be yours.  

Leading up to the plant’s entrance as the initial incident, Audrey states what has obviously been their plan before the play had begun:

*Audrey.* What Seymour’s trying to say, Mr. Mushnik, is . . . Well, we’ve talked about it and we both agree . . . You see, Mr. Mushnik, some of those exotic plants Seymour has been tinkering around with are really unusual and we were both thinking that maybe some of his strange and interesting plants—prominently displayed and advertised—would attract business.

Mushnik agrees to give it a try, and instantly all three of their lives begin to change. A customer enters and “zam, kazap” business is booming:

*Customer.* Well that’s an unusual . . . fascinating plant. Oh—I may as well take fifty dollars—worth of roses while I’m here. . . . Can you break a hundred?

*Mushnik.* A hundred. Er . . . no . . . I’m afraid we . . .

*Customer.* Well then, I’ll just have to take twice as many, won’t I?  

It is from this point that the rest of the story develops and the controlling theme of the play is established: Man is damned if he sacrifices his values in his quest for material success through the shallow type of instant celebrity made possible by modern media. Ashman is clear in stating that *Little Shop of Horrors* echoes the Faust legend, and this idea supports the directorial choice of this moment as the initial incident.

Directing the play using the moment when Seymour first discovers the plant’s thirst for blood as the initial incident inevitably results in a totally different story. It would then literally be a story about a vicious, conniving plant that eats people. Interestingly enough,
most negative reviews of the play seem to center around productions using this interpretation. Because of the special effects value of the plant, it, rather than Seymour, becomes the character around which the director allows the plot to revolve. It is clearly vital to the production to make the introduction of the plant as a means to success the point of initial attack, rather than the discovery that the plant needs blood to survive. This inciting incident leads directly to the major dramatic issue around which the play must be directed: the danger of confusing material success with one’s true values of love, compassion, and self-respect.

From the moment the plant attracts the first customer Seymour’s life begins to change:

*Ronnette.* All the world used to screw him
Bif wham pow, now they interview him
And they clamor to put his remarks on the air!
All the world used to hate him
Now they’re starting to ‘preciate him
All because of that strange little plant over there . . . 65

From the moment the plant is introduced to the audience a series of complications is introduced which comprise the rising action of the plot. The first major complication that changes the direction of the action is when Audrey II becomes sick and Seymour is unable to determine the cause or able to find a cure:

*Seymour.* Aw Twoey, I don’t know what else to do for you. Mr. Mushnik and Audrey, they just met you, but I’ve been going through this with you for weeks—grow and wilt, spurt and flop. Are you sickly, little plant, or just plain stubborn? What is it you want? What is it you need? 66

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65 Little Shop, 1.2, 31-32.
66 Little Shop, 1.1, 26.
Seymour’s concern for the plant is simple human compassion for a living thing. Suddenly he makes an accidental discovery that significantly alters the direction of the action. As Seymour is working he pricks his finger on a thorn. Audrey II consumes a drop of his blood and immediately becomes animated and appears healthier:

Seymour. Hey, you opened up! I wonder what made you do that? [Seymour moves toward the plant, unconsciously dropping his finger to his side as he does. As the finger disappears from its “view,” the plant closes. Seymour looks at the plant again, sees that it is closed, and shrugs. He lifts his finger to look at the wound. The plant opens. He begins to catch on. . . . Seymour turns away with an “uh oh” expression.] I think I know what made you do that. Well, I guess a few drops couldn’t hurt. 67

With this discovery Seymour is on the road to big-time success. The plant grows into a sensation that “. . . they’re talkin’ about on the news . . . ” and Seymour, Mushnik, and Audrey are feeling the results:

Mushnik. I can’t believe it
It couldn’t be happening.
Pinch me, girls
It couldn’t be happening
All of this sudden success
Coming outa the blue! 68

The next discovery, adding a new twist in the action, is Seymour’s meeting with his rival for Audrey—Orin the woman beating, sadomasochistic dentist and nitrous oxide addict. The plant’s need for human blood, Orin’s violent treatment of the sweet Audrey, and some clever manipulation by the plant, convince Seymour that the dental fiend “. . . sure looks like plant food . . . ” While unable to bring himself to shoot the dentist as per his plan, Seymour does manage to sit by and let him overdose on nitrous. Once Seymour

67 Little Shop, 1.1, 28.
68 Little Shop, 1.2, 29.
feeds the dentist bit by bit to the plant, he is on the road to destruction. His tragic flaw shows itself here—he is willing to do anything to get what he wants—Audrey.

Audrey’s admission of her love for Seymour (and her hope for a life with him wistfully set forth in “. . . her solo, *Somewhere That’s Green*, in which she dreams of a home with every consumer cliché the ‘50s could offer . . .”69) is the next major complication that affects the forward thrust of the play.

*Audrey.* The sweetest, greenest place—where everybody has the same little lawn out front and the same little flagstone patio out back. And all the houses are so neat and pretty . . . ‘Cause they all look just alike. Oh, I dream about this all the time. Just me. And the toaster. And a sweet little guy. Like Seymour— 70

The surprising revelation to Seymour that Audrey could actually love him provides a more powerful motivation to commit further atrocities to secure the fame and fortune he believes he must have to maintain Audrey’s love.

Seymour’s continued advancement in fame and fortune seems to cement his and Audrey’s future. However there is one problem. For Seymour to hold onto his fame, the plant must remain healthy, and human flesh is the only thing that satisfies its growing appetite. Seymour is desperate to find food for Twoey. Here Ashman introduces the next complication:

*Plant.* He’s got your number now.  
*Mushnik.* I saw it last week and didn’t think twice.  
*Plant.* He knows just what you’ve done.  
*Mushnik.* And the little red dots seemed innocent enough.  
*Plant.* You got no place to hide.  
*Mushnik.* But then I catch you kissing the Dentist’s girlfriend . . .  
Plant. You got nowhere to run!  
*Mushnik.* And it begins to look like a motive!

69 Corliss, 59.  
70 *Little Shop*, 1.2, 34.
Plant. He knows your life of crime!
Mushnik. Once he’s out of the way, you move in, right?
Plant. I think it’s suppertime! 71

Seymour becomes desperate. Threatened with exposure, he lets the plant push him into committing murder in order to hide his guilt. Seymour convinces Mushnik to climb into the plant and Mushnik is devoured. The plant grows and so does Seymour’s fame:

Crystal. Can we have your autograph?
Chiffon. We saw you on Channel Five News!
Crystal. You looked so handsome!
Chiffon. And you gonna be so rich! . . .
Ronnette. There’s another big hotshot lookin’ for you, Seymour. From uptown.
He’s been askin’ all over, where can he find you? You’re famous, Seymour. 72

These complications bring the story to a point where Seymour’s tragic flaw (his inability to control what actions he will take in order to attain success) leads him to forsake his finer qualities and make an irretrievable commitment to evil. The audience can still see the conscience of a basically good man when Seymour considers destroying the plant:

Seymour. Seymour old boy,
Though it means you’ll be broke again
And unemployed,
It’s the only solution,
It can’t be avoided
The vegetable must be destroyed! 73

However, Seymour’s inability to believe that Audrey loves him for who he is, not for his riches and fame, leads him directly to his downfall. Mistakenly convinced that he could

71 Little Shop, 2.1, 73.
72 Little Shop, 2.2, 77-78.
73 Little Shop, 2.2, 82.
not have Audrey without continued success, he decides against his true nature to continue on his evil path.

*Seymour.* But then . . .
There's Audrey,
Lovely Audrey.
If life were tawdry and impoverished as before
She might not like me
She might not want me
Without my plant, she might not love me anymore! 74

Ashman introduces the final complication very near the end of the play. Seymour finds Audrey in the jaws of the plant. This leads to a discovery of self. He realizes that he has been acting purely for selfish motives:

*Seymour.* I've done terrible things . . . 75

This series of complications culminates in the obligatory scene in act two, scene three and leads the action quickly to the climax. It is marketer Patrick Martin, another sleazy opportunist, who brings Seymour finally to a realization of his own true intentions and those of the plant:

*Seymour.* Every household in America . . . thousands of you . . . eating. That's what you've had in mind all along, isn't it?
*Plant.* No shit, Sherlock!
*Seymour.* We're not talking about one hungry plant here. We're talking about . . .
*World conquest!*
*Plant.* And I want to thank you!
*Seymour.* You're a monster and so am I! 76

The turning point comes when Seymour realizes that he is responsible for all that has happened and becomes the pursuer rather than the pursued. He jumps into the plant in an attempt to destroy it and is devoured.

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74 Little Shop, 2.2, 82.
75 Little Shop, 2.3, 89.
76 Little Shop, 2.3, 91-92.
In approaching the production as a director it is important to keep this series of complications in mind. If these major units of action are kept in the forefront there is much less chance of the production becoming just a story of a large man-eating plant. These complications instead become a powerful way to focus on Seymour, the protagonist, and the internal struggle between his ethical values and the antagonistic force of the uncontrollable need for success (represented by the plant). This is the essential conflict of the play. These complications motivate the forward thrust of the plot, which in turn brings the audience to a realization of the theme.

It is vital that the audience realizes throughout the unfolding of the plot the irony of Seymour’s struggle -- the fact that Audrey’s love for him was never in question. She loved him unconditionally from the beginning. It is the futility of Seymour’s ill-fated quest for fame and fortune that clearly insinuates tragic overtones into an outrageous comedy.

The falling action begins as Martin enters the shop and instructs the trio to start making cuttings of the now enormous Audrey II:

\textit{Martin}: Okay girls. All you have to do is snip some of the smaller leaves and replant them in these pots.\textsuperscript{77}

The final denouement of \textit{Little Shop of Horrors} is presented in true Greek chorus form as the trio, joined by the dead faces, ties up the sub-plot of the plant’s success and solidifies the theme:

\textit{Girls}. Thus the plants worked their terrible will,  
Finding jerks who would feed them their fill  
And the plants proceeded to grow . . .   
And grow . . .

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Little Shop}, 2.3, 93.
Dead Faces and Girls. They may offer you fortune and fame
Love and money and instant acclaim
But whatever they offer you,
Don’t feed the plants!...
Hold your hat and hang onto your soul!
Somethin’s comin’ to eat the world whole!
If we fight it, we still got a chance. . . .
Don’t feed the pla-a-a-ants!

[On the last word, The Plant opens wider than we have ever seen it! And as it does, vines suddenly come cascading down at the audience from the ceiling over their heads. The entire theatre, . . . stage and audience . . . has been taken over by the Audrey Two] 78

Parallels with the Structures of Greek Tragedy

Howard Ashman sees Little Shop of Horrors as satirizing many things. In addition to writing it as a satire of musical comedy, science fiction, and the Faust legend, Ashman does indeed feel he has written a script that satirizes Greek tragedy. Following the true definition of satire, Little Shop of Horrors is a literary work in which Ashman uses the vices, follies, stupidities, and abuses of his characters to parody this classical form of tragedy. Part of the hilarity is the fact that the characters themselves view it as a tragedy, while the absurdity of the plot, the attributes of the characters, the lyrics, the music and the timing itself perfectly fit the conventions of musical comedy.

Comedy as the Greeks knew it was based on some deviation from normality in action, character, or thought. This is certainly true in Little Shop of Horrors. A shy nerd feeding wicked humans to a gigantic “vegetable” bit by bit is certainly a deviation from what one considers normal. Yet Ashman couples these deviations, couched in a tongue-in-cheek script, with characters who must come across as having a genuinely serious perception of their own situations. Following Ashman’s own comments and a number of reviews cited

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78 Little Shop, 2.3, 95-96.
above, I strongly feel that the key to successfully staging the comedy is to be aware of the serious undertones suggested by the parallels to Greek tragic form.

As a true tragic protagonist Seymour (in the tongue-in-cheek sense) arouses in the audience a feeling of sympathy and admiration. After all an orphan willing to do anything to better himself and save his true love from the clutches of an evil villain is noble indeed. As is the case with a tragic protagonist, however, Seymour’s pursuit of his worthy goals is thwarted by his tragic flaw. Seymour like any good man strives for integrity and goodness, but his flaw is that he is unable to control what actions he will take to reach his goals -- to win his woman and get “outa skid row.”

Like Greek tragedy, Little Shop of Horrors can be divided into a prologue and five episodes. The prologue is devoted to exposition. As in Oedipus, the prologue of Little Shop of Horrors describes a plague that is destroying the city:

\[\text{Voice. . . the human race suddenly encountered a deadly threat to its very existence.}\] 79

In the Greek tragedy the prologue is always followed by the \textit{parodos} or entrance of the chorus. They deliver a choral song, which recapitulates the message of the prologue. Ashman’s Little Shop of Horrors is true to form as the trio appears after the prologue and sings of the plague that threatens to destroy mankind. Their delivery, like that of the Greek chorus, is done in unison with members of the chorus stepping out to deliver selected lines solo.

The first episode in Little Shop of Horrors as in Greek tragedy establishes the plight of the protagonist and the inhabitants of skid row. These down-and-outers are desperate to

\[\text{79 Little Shop, prologue, 13.}\]
get out of their situation. This scene has great dramatic power when Seymour, unaware of the foreshadowing, sings:

*Seymour and Audrey.* I'd move heaven and hell
To get out a skid
I'd do I-dunno-what
To get out a skid . . . row! ^80

Little does he know that he *is* going to move hell to try and accomplish his dream. He has cursed himself by declaring he will do anything to improve his position. The choral passage that follows reflects upon the previous scene when the chorus describes life Downtown on Skid Row. The plant is then introduced by Ashman as an answer to the characters’ woes—or so they think.

The second episode builds logically on the first in the same way a classical Greek tragedy would progress. Seymour finds out that the plant survives only when nourished with human blood. And in his true-to-tragic-protagonist form he nobly pricks his fingers to feed his newly realized chance for love, fame and fortune. The plant flourishes and so does the flower shop as well as Seymour’s notoriety. The chorus sings of Seymour’s success:

*Girls.* Observe him!
Here’s a chap
Everything is landin’
In his lap! ^81

This newfound success provides Seymour with a sense of importance, and this is compounded in the same episode when his love, Audrey, declares her true feelings for Seymour:

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^80 *Little Shop,* 1.1, 20.
^81 *Little Shop,* 1.2, 32.
Audrey: Still, that Seymour's a cutie. 
   Well, if not, he's got inner beauty, 
   And I dream of a place where we could be 
   together at last—

It is also in this episode that Seymour meets his foil, Orin the sadistic dentist, and it is here that Seymour has his first suspicion about how far he could go to acquire love, fame, and fortune. Orin's overdose provides Seymour with the food needed to keep the plant and his success growing. Thus a considerable change occurs within this scene—Seymour self-image as a good person is shaken and the possibility of being discovered creates additional suspense.

Seymour's fame and fortune continue to soar in the third episode. Mushnik confronts Seymour. Mushnik knows Seymour has fed the dentist to the plant and threatens to turn Seymour over to the police. Seymour, encouraged by the hungry plant, offers Mushnik to the gods, or devils. Seymour is:

*Macbeth.* . . . in blood/Stepp'd so far, that, should [he] wade no more,/Returning 
were as tedious as go o'er. \(^{83}\)

But this murder, rather than causing grief as one would expect, results in the plant flourishing and Seymour's fame soaring. This episode is followed by a choral song, which speculates on Seymour's future and suggests that Seymour is:

*Girls.* . . . gonna get 
   what's comin' to [him] 
   by and by. \(^{84}\)

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\(^{82}\) Little Shop, 1.1, 20.  
\(^{84}\) Little Shop, 2.2, 80.
The fourth episode is a very rapid scene. Everything is brought quickly to a climax.
Seymour finds Audrey in the jaws of the plant. Her final request is to be fed to the plant because she feels that:

_Audrey_. . . . if I’m in the plant, then I’m part of the plant,
So in a way . . . We’ll always be . . . together. \(^85\)

The climax is reached in Seymour’s cry of despair and disgust as he rushes into the jaws of the plant and is devoured.

The fifth and final episode is the view of the future. Martin, a huckster representative of the all-devouring opportunism of the celebrity creating public relations machine that has led Seymour to his destruction, orders the trio to snip cuttings to be distributed throughout the world. The chorus is then left to deliver the moral of the play:

*Girls.* Please whatever they offer you,
Don’t feed the plants! \(^86\)

As ridiculous as it may seem, approaching the direction of *Little Shop of Horrors* with a satirical eye on the structure of classical Greek tragedy could lend a very effective edge to the development of the comedy. If the actors can approach the characters as one might in playing a tragic character, with honesty and simplicity, the production might be able to refrain from the use of camp and low-comedy that Ashman himself warns will destroy the show. \(^87\)

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\(^85\) *Little Shop*, 2.3, 90.
\(^86\) *Little Shop*, 2.3, 95.
An In Depth Play Analysis

Introduction

This in-depth analysis is based on the outline presented in Francis Hodge's *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style* on pages 62 and 63. The goal of this section is to outline some crucial directorial considerations for this production. This section will deal with given circumstances, dialogue, characters, idea, and tone. Dramatic action, moods and tempos will be dealt with in the director’s production book.

**Given Circumstances: the Playwright’s Setting**

**Environmental Facts.** *Little Shop of Horrors* is set in a down-and-out flower shop and the surrounding skid row street. It takes place “On the twenty-first day of the month of September, in an early year of a decade not too long before our own.” 88 Various contextual references (Wolfman Jack, Leader of the Plaque, Donna Reed, Betty Crocker, Father Knows Best, Howdy Doody, Vitalis, hula hoops, and a reference to an enormous 12-inch TV screen) make it clear that the decade in question is the 1960s. The directorial choice is to set the locale as New York City and the opening on the 21st of September, 1960, in order to capitalize on the original film’s melding of cultural sensibilities of the faded 1950s with an anticipation of a later 1960s style of irony and biting satire.

It is noteworthy that September 21 usually marks the autumnal equinox, the beginning of the fall season, the time when darkness begins taking precedence over light. Symbolically the beginning of fall, like sunset—the daily as opposed to yearly onset of

88 *Little Shop*, prologue, 13.
darkness—can be taken as suggestive of decline or even death, a most appropriate atmospheric for the show. This seasonal setting also suggests cooler temperatures nights and mornings with warming later in the day. The opening scene begins at 9:00 a.m.

Of all the given circumstances, economic environment is clearly the most significant to the production. At the bottom of the scale we have the winos and street urchins. Next are impoverished employees represented by Seymour and Audrey. A slight step above them, in perceived status if not in actual financial wellbeing, is flower shop owner Mushnik: “Look, God, what an existence I got! Misfit employees, bums on the sidewalk, business is lousy.”  
89 Apart from these characters there is the class of financially successful people uptown, often cast in a negative light even though their non-poverty-stricken existence is the holy grail for the inhabitants of skid row.

Girls. Uptown you cater to a million jerks
Uptown you’re messengers and mailroom clerks
Eatin’ all your lunches at the hot-dog cart
The bosses take your money
And they break your hearts 90

The dramatic action of the play gains its main impetus from the desire of the characters at the lower end of the scale to move upward. Hence the prominence of the idea that we

Seymour and Audrey. . . . Gotta get outa . . .
Skid row! 91

Seymour, the pseudo-tragic protagonist, is enticed by the uptown public relations people as well as by the plant itself. With each step toward greater fame and fortune he becomes increasingly entangled in the hype of the public relations machine and increasingly troubled by the fact that he has to compromise his value system in order to maintain his

89 Little Shop, 1.1, 16.
90 Little Shop, 1.1, 18.
91 Little Shop, 1.1, 18.
success. This is the main theme of how seductively easy but ultimately costly it is to sell one’s soul for commercial success.

Although Little Shop is not an overtly political commentary, there are clear references to power relationships tied into the economic circumstances of the play. In a modern democratic setting, the political thrust of economics comes under the heading of capitalism. While the play is in no way a rant for socialism or leftist revolution, it certainly does take a vicious swipe at the bottom-line mentality so definitive of the modern capitalist system. The plant, which is really nothing more than a symbol of raw commercialism at its most vile, threatens Seymour:

Plant. Don’t get cute with me. I made you and I can break you. 92

The American dream, the essence of capitalism, is based on the creed that hard work will get you where you want to go. The plant tries to use this to motivate Seymour:

Plant. Show a little initiative, work up the guts
And you’ll get it! 93

The problem with the American dream is precisely that it is just a dream. Capitalism places value on money instead of people. The way it really works is that success stems from being a bankable commodity, not from any positive human qualities. Seymour was nothing until he suddenly acquired the potential to be exploited for profit.

Ronnette. All the world used to screw him
BIF WHAM POW, now they interview him. 94

92 Little Shop, 2.3, 84.
93 Little Shop, 1.3, 52.
94 Little Shop, 1.2, 31.
Like Roger Corman, who directed the original film, Ashman is somewhat of an outsider with anti-establishment sentiments. One criticism of capitalism is that it alienates the worker from the value of his labor. While Ashman doesn’t beat a dead horse like a Bertolt Brecht, he does inject one quite direct shot to the heart of the system in *Downtown*:

*Crystal.* Alarm goes off at seven  
And you start uptown.  
You put in your eight hours  
For the powers that have always been.\(^95\)

Little Shop is certainly not a soapbox for venting political sloganism, but like the original film it conceals some acidic commentary under the guise of a lighthearted, even frivolous entertainment.

The characters all live under a conventional set of typical American mores: men should not abuse women, people should be kind to one another, being a professional is a level of status deserving respect, professionals don’t drive motorcycles and wear leather jackets, men should protect women, women and men have properly prescribed roles and division of labor, a girl with a past doesn’t deserve a respectable boyfriend, clothes represent one’s position in society, you should take advantage of any opportunity to advance yourself no matter who you have to step on to do it, and it is wrong to kill people.

The most significant conventional belief for the action of the play is that the definition of success is the achievement of fame and fortune. This concept of success is the source of the main conflict, because it is at loggerheads with some of the characters’ other social beliefs. Seymour, as the protagonist, operates under the more that people

\(^{95}\) *Little Shop*, 1.1, 17.
deserve kind treatment and that killing another human being is wrong, yet he thinks he must provide human food for the plant in order to secure Audrey’s love. This is Seymour’s dilemma.

_Seymour._ My future’s starting
I’ve got to let it
Stick with that plant and gee,
My bank account will thrive.
What am I saying?
No way, forget it!
It’s much too dangerous to keep that plant alive!

I take these offers,
That means more killing
Who knew success would come with messy, nasty strings?
I sign these contracts,
That means I’m willing
To keep on doing bloody, awful, evil things! 96

While on the surface there is not an overt religious context to the play, a closer examination reveals a polarity between a conventional Judeo-Christian view and a paganistic appeal to luck, fate and magic. In fact the moment of the plant’s appearance during a total solar eclipse marks the advent of the magical element. Prior to the plant’s introduction we encounter some traditional religious references. Mushnik groused,

_Mushnik._ Look, God, what an existence I got! . . . My life is a living hell. 97

Later his desperation leads him to declare,

_Mushnik._ Kaput! Extinct! I’m closing this God and customer forsaken place. 98

Unspoken in this last utterance is the implication that given a choice of one or the other,

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96 Little Shop, 2.2, 81.
97 Little Shop, 1.1, 16.
98 Little Shop, 1.1, 21.
Mushnik would probably prefer being forsaken by God if the customers would come. The shop, of course, does become literally God-forsaken in the sense that it houses the demonic presence of the plant. "Extinct" is a rather unusual choice of words for a business going under, but suggests the evolution side of the now rampant (and rabid) debate on creationism.

Seymour has some even more explicit religious references.

_Seymour._ All my life, I’ve always been poor!
I keep asking God what I’m for,
And He tells me,
“Gee, I’m not sure . . .
Sweep that floor, kid”
. . . Cause I constantly pray I’ll get outa here . . .
I’d move heaven and hell
To get outa skid,
I’d do I-dunno-what
To get outa skid,
But a hell of a lot
To get outa skid
But believe me I
Gotta get outa
Skid Row! 99

It would appear that God hasn’t come up with any workable means of escape for Seymour, and we see a foreshadowing of his coming Faustian arrangement with darker powers. The religious axis of the play pivots around the moment of the plant’s appearance, as recounted in the number “Da Doo.” At this point major tenets of a more traditional Wiccan or paganistic religion would seem to take hold.

It was noted above that the autumnal equinox is an inauspicious setting inasmuch as the waxing and waning of light and darkness played a crucial role in pre-Christian belief. The first day of fall marks the beginning of a six-month period in which the powers of

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99 Little Shop, 1.1, 20.
darkness take precedence over the powers of light. Amplifying this theme, the plant mysteriously appears during a total eclipse of the sun, a magically significant time when darkness abruptly destroys the light, albeit temporarily. In addition to this central imagery of the interplay of light and darkness, the dialogue is full of further allusions to such pre-Christian notions as fate, fortune, luck, superstition and magic. The shop address is 1313 Skid Row. Mushnik’s most important funereal account is with a large family named Shiva—the Hindu god of destruction and reproduction—who are dropping like flies.

Upon realizing that some kind of harm has befallen her basher boyfriend the sadistic dentist, Audrey has a guilt attack because she believes her thoughts have power:

_Audrey._ I feel guilty, I guess. I mean, if he met with foul play or some terrible accident of some kind . . . then it’s partly my fault, you see. Because secretly . . . I wished it. 100

When the plant is cajoling Seymour to feed it, it explicitly says it has the power to grant all his wishes.

_Plant._ You think this is all coincidence, baby? The sudden success around here? Your adoption papers? . . . If I can talk and I can move, who’s to say I can’t do anything I want? . . . Like see you get everything your greasy heart desires. 101

At the end of act two, scene two, the trio returns to the Christian concept of punishment for evil deeds. As he signs his contract they declare that retribution is in store for Seymour.

_Girls._ They say the meek shall inherit . . . You know the book doesn’t lie . . . You know the meek are gonna get What’s comin’ to ‘em! 102

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100 Little Shop, 2.1, 68.
101 Little Shop, 1.3, 51.
102 Little Shop, 2.2, 83.
In epilogue fashion the trio delivers the moral, warning mankind not to enter the Faustian pact and sell their souls for fortune and fame.

*Girls.* Hold your hat and hang onto your soul!
Somethin’ comin’ to eat the world whole!
If we fight it, we still got a chance. ¹⁰³

Despite Seymour’s punishment for his evil deeds, the magical power of the plant prevails; cuttings are taken to be transplanted throughout the country.

**Previous Action:** What Has Happened Before the Play Began. As Hodge points out in *Play Directing: Analysis, Communication and Style.*

... to the director, there is never a dull exposition but only a recalling of the past under the excitement and tension of active engagement with other characters in the present. ... If you list these previous actions on one-half of a sheet of paper as they are introduced and put down the present actions [of the characters], you will see their direct relationship. ¹⁰⁴

The previous action recounted in *Little Shop of Horrors* is minimal, but it is essential to the telling of the story. Ashman has done quite an effective job of taking these previous actions and giving the characters dramatically strong present actions through which to recount the past. These actions are as follows:

**Previous Actions:**
- Audrey receives a black eye from Orin
- Audrey has been beat up by Orin again

**Present Actions:**
- Mushnik grills Audrey on how she came to get the black eye
- Mushnik pushes Audrey to explain

¹⁰³ *Little Shop,* 2.3, 95.
-trio quit school by the fifth grade
-Seymour has been poor and an orphan all his life
-Seymour was taken in by Mushnik and given a job, food, and shelter
-Audrey and Seymour have been planning on suggesting to Mushnik that the shop should PR some of Seymour’s exotic plants to attract customers
-Seymour has been buying and growing interesting and exotic plants which he purchases from an old Chinese man
-Seymour acquired Audrey II
-there has been a total eclipse in which Audrey II just appeared
-Audrey II has been wilting and not very healthy
-Seymour has tried everything to make the plant healthy
-the world used to hate Seymour and take advantage of him
-Mushnik runs the trio off his stoop chastising them as ragamuffins
-Seymour sings of his desairs in a dreamlike verse in “Downtown”
-Seymour sings of his fortunes in a dreamlike verse in “Downtown”
-Audrey and Seymour suggest their plan to Mushnik when he announces that he’s quitting business so they no longer have jobs
-Audrey explains this as part of their plan to save the flower shop and their jobs
-Seymour and the trio tell the story of the eerie acquisition of Audrey II in the song “Da Doo”
-Seymour describes the happening in “Da Doo” to Audrey, Mushnik, and the customer
-Seymour informs Mushnik of this after Audrey II wilts and Mushnik proudly informs Seymour that he is counting on him to cure the plant and save the business
-Seymour talks, pleads, and comforts the plant desperately trying to find out what’s wrong in the song “Grow for Me”
-this is recounted during the celebration of his success in the song “Ya Never Know”
- Seymour never knew his mother
- Seymour has never been anything more than a clerk in a flower shop
- Seymour was taken out of the Skid Row Home for Boys by Mushnik
- Audrey used to work in cheap outfits at The Gutter
- Seymour has always thought of Audrey as a good person and a girl he respected
- Audrey has always loved Seymour

-Seymour divulges this information when explaining to the trio his feelings at being an overnight success
- the trio recounts this as they sing of his success in “Ya Never Know”
- Seymour recounts this in a scene as Audrey tries to comfort him after Mushnik has fired him
- She tearfully tells Seymour this when she explains why she does not deserve a nice guy like Seymour
- Seymour tells Audrey his ongoing feelings for her as a lead in to the love duet “Suddenly Seymour”
- Audrey tells Seymour this as she dies in his arms

It can be clearly seen that Ashman has provided significant expository information to the audience via powerful present actions. It is essential that the actors are continually aware of the importance of communicating this information through the present actions the playwright has provided.

**Polar Attitudes.** Hodge defines polar attitudes as: “... the ‘emotional environment’ of a character, the stresses and strains under which he lives. Modern slang would call them his ‘hang-ups.’” He goes on to say: “In the course of a play a principal character does not change in character, but his attitudes change under pressures from forces outside of his control. The other characters serve as specific instruments to these changes.” \(^{105}\) In Ashman’s *Little Shop of Horrors* Seymour and Audrey, as the protagonists and principal

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\(^{105}\) Hodge, 22.
characters, are the only characters that demonstrate polar attitudes:

**Beginning Polar Attitudes:**

**Seymour Krelborn:** All that is needed to get what you want in life is fame and fortune.

**Audrey:** A woman with a past does not deserve happiness.

**Final Polar Attitudes:**

**Seymour Krelborn:** Selling out for fame and fortune destroys all that is good in the world.

**Audrey:** A woman with a past can be purified and can find true love and happiness.

The additional characters in the script are instruments through which these characters move from ignorance to knowledge.

**Significance of the Environmental Facts.** The desperate quest for fame and fortune allows man to be controlled, and eventually devoured, through participation in the media extravaganza of the American capitalistic system.

**Dialogue**

**Choice of Words.** In *Little Shop of Horrors* Howard Ashman has masterfully used words to clarify the characters’ positions in society and educational levels as well as to connote cultural overtones. Ashman’s use of speech decorum successfully enables the director to develop a sound concept of character decorum. Ashman’s word choices divide characters into four socio-economic groups: the skid row down-and-outers, the skid row working class, the skid row merchant class, and the uptown characters.

Of these four groups, the skid row down-and-outers are the most vividly defined. Both dialogue and lyrics are skillfully written to generate the character decorum of this group. The trio is the most prominent representative of this class. Their hip urban street
lingo clearly establishes them as economically, educationally, and culturally embedded in skid row:

_Ronnette_. Girl, I don't know who this mess is you hangin' out with, but he is hazardous to your health. 106

_Girls_. You better
Tellin' you, you better
Tell your mama
Somethin's gonna get 'er 107

Further, such word choices as "shoppa," "ain't," "who'da," "mothah," "punk," "chump," "outa," "yo," "wanna," "hop-heads," and "you gonna be" paint a colorful picture of the characters who use them. It is easy to get a feel for these characters merely by reading these words, even out of context.

The characters of Seymour and Audrey are representative of the working class on skid row. Ashman uses words effectively to connote a slightly more educated background and to give the characters a naïve level of social awareness. Seymour's higher level of education is apparent in his words:

_Seymour_. Mr. Mushnik, excuse me for saying so, but has it ever occurred to you that maybe what the firm needs is to move in a new direction? 108

Even though Seymour is clearly of a more educated class, many of the words Ashman chooses for him mark him as naïve and gullible, making him easy prey to the capitalistic PR hype. Again Ashman's word choices like: "gee," "are you sickly little plant," "just plain stubborn," "clumsy me," "tyke," "here we go again," and "beg your pardon"

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106 _Little Shop_, 1.2, 33.
107 _Little Shop_, prologue, 14.
108 _Little Shop_, 1.1, 2.
clearly delineate a character decorum for the part of Seymour. As with the character of Seymour, Audrey’s words mark her as slightly more educated than the down-and-outers:

Audrey. You see Mr. Mushnik, some of those exotic plants Seymour has been tinkering around with are really unusual and we were both thinking that maybe some of his strange and interesting plants -- prominently displayed -- would attract business.109

Ashman also establishes Audrey’s innocence with word choices like: “nice boy,” “fella,” “Seymour’s girl,” “guy,” “sweetest,” and “sweet little guy.”

Word choices Ashman makes for Gravis Mushnik as a representative of the merchant class tend to draw him as a character judgmental of those lower than himself: “misfit employees,” “bums,” “urchins,” “winos,” “worthless ragamuffins,” “greasy,” and “nogoodnik.” Yet when he is talking with someone from the “uptown” class who might contribute to his success, his words are complimentary: “Yessir,” “right away sir,” “my darling,” “kindly fetch,” and “will be right with you.” The word decorum of Mushnik in relating to different classes provides a clear insight into his character decorum.

The “uptown” class is clearly identifiable by the slick, fast lingo of the commercially successful: “you prince,” “sweetheart,” “dollface,” “bubbelah,” “my precious,” “cutie,” “sweetness” and “babydoll.” These words spoken by Bernstein, Luce, and Snip clearly place them in the superficial glittery world of high level PR hucksters. Ashman includes the dentist in this “uptown” class. Yet while he is showing the phoniness of the class with the PR people, the dentist’s words are representative of the cruel reality of the class: “stupid woman,” “dizzy cow,” “friggin’” “scatterbrain,” and “your mouth is a mess kid.” It can easily be seen that the word choices of both the PR hucksters and the dentist are manipulative techniques used for their personal gain.

109 Little Shop, 1.1, 21.
Choice of Phrases and Sentence Structure. Hodge points out that the “examination of any good play will show that the author has usually arranged his sentence structure to throw the important phrase—the actual point of each line—to the end of the line. This placement makes it climactic.”\(^{110}\) Ashman uses this sentence structure effectively throughout Little Shop of Horrors, perhaps in part explaining why, as earlier noted, many critics gave high marks to Ashman’s book. A good example of this sentence structure technique is Audrey’s line:

*Audrey.* I feel guilty, I guess. I mean, if he met with foul play or some terrible accident of some kind . . . then it’s partly my fault, you see. Because secretly . . . I wished it.\(^{111}\)

By placing the emphasis on the end phrases in each line of this speech, Ashman emphasizes the intended meaning of the line. Hodge goes on to say, “Speeches made up of several sentences are carefully constructed in the same way.”\(^{112}\) The aforementioned speech of Audrey’s is a prime example of this as well. The climatic phrase of the speech is clearly “I wished it.” Ashman uses this sentence structure technique throughout the play. It is an essential element to be aware of when working with actors on line readings.

Choice of Images. Ashman is a master of using dialogue to create images in the minds of the audience. A mere listing of some key words conjures up vivid images: “chain link,” “tract house,” “Betty Crocker,” “Donna Reed,” “Lucy,” “big, enormous twelve-inch-screen,” “Better Homes and Gardens,” “hula hoops,” “Cadillac car,” “Jack Parr,” “Heddy Lamarr,” and “a room at the Ritz.” These words are strongly reminiscent

\(^{110}\) Hodge, 28.
\(^{111}\) *Little Shop*, 2.2, 68.
\(^{112}\) Hodge, 28.
of the American way of life in 1960; they can create very vivid images and thus more emotional connection between audience and characters.

**Choice of Peculiar Characteristics of the Dialogue.** Some of Ashman’s peculiar use of dialogue can be seen in the speeches of the plant, Mushnik, and Audrey. The plant is certainly clearly created as an ethnic “jive-ass” sort whose pimp-like dialogue is the perfect representation of hip American street parlance.

*Plant.* You think this is coincidence, baby? . . . Does this look inanimate to you, punk? If I can talk and I can move, who’s to say I can’t do anything I want? . . . Like deliver, pal. Like see you get everything your greasy heart desires.113

Mushnik’s accent is noticeably Jewish New York middle class. Ashman uses this dialect to establish the New York locale as well as the stereotypical Jewish shop owner.

Mushnik’s accent is easily “heard” in his lines:

*Mushnik.* Not that we had a customer. Who has customers when you run a flower shop on Skid Row? . . . Look, I know it’s none of my business, but I’m beginning to think he’s maybe not such a nice boy . . . Aron g’vorn g’voxen, akebebble, mit tzibeleh.114

Ashman describes Audrey as “. . . Judy Holiday, Carol Channing, Marilyn Monroe and Goldie Hawn . . . shook . . . up in a test tube to extract what’s sweetest and most vulnerable . . .”115 Audrey, because of this, has a very peculiar way of speaking. Although she does not have an accent, her dialogue is suggestive of the Bronx but with an innocence and sweetness all its own. Audrey’s speech prior to her singing “Somewhere That’s Geen” is certainly an effective example of what Ashman intended:

*Audrey.* Just a little street in a suburb, far far from urban Skid Row. The sweetest, greenest place-where everybody has the same little lawn out front . . .”116

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113 [Little Shop](#), 1.3, 51.
114 [Little Shop](#), 1.1, 15 and 16.
115 [Little Shop](#), 8.
116 [Little Shop](#), 1.2, 34.
Being aware of how carefully Ashman has chosen these peculiarities of dialogue is essential in finding the vocal decorum of these characters.

**The Sound of the Dialogue.** Hodge points out that “Directors must . . . learn to hear dialogue in their mind’s ear: not only the literal reproduction of sound as they hear it in everyday life, but the reproduction of word-feeling as playwrights set them out in characters.” \(^{117}\) The sound of the dialogue is essential in matching speech decorum with that of character decorum.

The sound of the dialogue is of course different for each character. Ashman’s use of sound is representative of the four socioeconomic groups mentioned in the word choice section. An African American ethnic jive sound is very evident in the dialogue and lyrics of the trio.

*Ronnette.* Girl, I don’t know who this mess is you hangin’ out with, but he is hazardous to your health. \(^{118}\)

This sound certainly implies a streetwise decorum. On the other hand, Audrey and Seymour’s dialogue provides a sound of innocence, simplicity, and naivete:

*Audrey.* Oh no. It’s just a daydream of mine. A little development I dream of. Just off the Interstate . . . Just a little street in a little suburb . . . \(^{119}\)

*Seymour.* Audrey, . . . Underneath the bruises and the handcuffs, you know What I saw? A girl I respected. I still do. \(^{120}\)

\(^{117}\) Hodge, 28.

\(^{118}\) Little Shop, 1.2, 33.

\(^{119}\) Little Shop, 1.2, 35.

\(^{120}\) Little Shop, 2.1, 68.
Mushnik as representative of the merchant class and the PR characters representative of the “uptown” establishment both have a wheeler-dealer sound to their dialogue. The difference lies in the fact that Mushnik’s is a sound of the old time New York shopkeeper, while the others represent the slick, modern PR type. Mushnik’s sales approach is that of an earlier era, polite and mannered,

_Mushnik_. A hundred dollars-worth? Yessir. Right away, sir.\(^{121}\)

while the uptown approach has a slick, fast-paced modern sound:

_Mrs. Luce_. My darling, my precious, my sweet, sweet thing. So delighted to make your acquaintance. Cutie... sweetness, ... Seymour... babydoll...

I’d like a word with you, lover... \(^{122}\)

Ashman has chosen an interesting sound for the character of the plant. He has taken the jive sound of skid row populations and combined it with the slick commercialistic sound of the uptown hype. Thus the plant is representative of where Seymour is trapped, sandwiched between the two extremes.

_Plant_. You didn’t have nothin’ til you met me. C’mon, kid what’ll it be?

Money? Girls? One particular girl? How ‘bout that Audrey? \(^{123}\)

The sound of Ashman’s dialogue clearly helps establish character decorum. In the case of the plant’s dialogue, we seem to have more of an ‘80s sound than a true-to-the-period ‘60s sound. The jive-influenced sound of the plant in the stage play was not evident at all in the original film. Ashman’s updated version increases the play’s appeal to contemporary audiences.

\(^{121}\) Little Shop, 1.1, 24.

\(^{122}\) Little Shop, 2.2, 79.

\(^{123}\) Little Shop, 1.3, 52.
Characters

Seymour Krelborn:

Desire: Seymour wants Audrey’s love and a feeling that he is a successful provider.
Will: He has the strength of will to do anything to get what he wants — even murder.
Moral Stance: Seymour is an honest, kind person of conventional morality who believes men should behave as responsible moral agents.
Decorum: Seymour is 24. He is a short, slightly balding bespectacled man with a child-like desire to please. He is mild-mannered. His physical movements often show his lack of self-confidence. He walks with brisk, short steps.
Summary List of Adjectives: insecure, naïve, eager, fawning, kind, respectful, honest, hard-working, child-like, sensitive, nerdy, shy,
Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
   Heart beat: slightly above normal
   Perspiration: medium
   Stomach condition: hungry
   Muscle tension: moderately tight/stiff
   Breathing: slightly panting

Audrey:

Desire: Audrey wants someone to love and take care of her so that she can be purged of her past.
Will: She is a weak-willed soul who depends on others to give her strength.
Moral Stance: Audrey is honest with a belief that a girl who has a “past” deserves a terrible life.
Decorum: Audrey is a bleached blonde, tall, thin, well shaped young woman of 22. She is always dressed in what she believes to be a modest fashion for a girl like her. Her clothes are tight-fitting with plunging necklines. High heels are a must as well as a small evening bag. She is slightly pigeon-toed but moves with a seductive, cheap wiggle. She has a breathy, whiney sound to her voice with what might be a tinge of a Bronx accent. She wears too much make-up.
Summary List of Adjectives: kind, out-going, sincere, frightened, sad, strangely beautiful, naïve, innocent, caring, dependable, scatterbrained, wide-eyed, energetic, efficient, tender
Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
   Heart beat: fast
   Perspiration: slight
   Stomach condition: normal
   Muscle tension: average-relaxed
   Breathing: rapid/out of breath

Gravis Mushnik:

Desire: Mushnik wants to be successful in business at any cost.
Will: He is willing to do anything to be a successful, money-making shop owner as long as he doesn’t get into trouble.

Moral Stance: He is willing to sacrifice loyalty to others or even use them to make a buck. Laws he can bend but not break. He has a conventional respect for women.

Decorum: He is a short, balding, heavy-set man in his early fifties. He has a New York middle class Jewish accent. He wears a suit that has seen better days but at one time was quite expensive and stylish. He waddles more than walks and snaps more than talks, except when sucking up to uptown clients.

Summary List of Adjectives: serious, nervous, short-tempered, boisterous, dramatic, smarmy, suffering martyr-like

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: fast
- Perspiration: profuse
- Stomach condition: acid
- Muscle tension: tight (about to explode)
- Breathing: labored

Orin Scrivelli:

Desire: Orin wants power and dominance over all things in his life.

Will: He is willing to go to any extreme to get control and gain dominance.

Moral Stance: He believes it is his right to inflict pain and suffering on others. Whatever brings him pleasure is ok. He is an opportunist who thinks anyone is a fool for not taking advantage of anything they can to get ahead.

Decorum: He is tall, dark, well built, and handsome with an evil/crazy look in his eyes. He doesn’t walk he struts. His hair is meticulously greased. He has quick, fast movements, and stands in practiced pretty-boy poses. He is dressed meticulously and sports a leather jacket.

Summary List of Adjectives: egotistical, sadistic, vain, erratic, unfeeling, angry, slippery, sleazy, moody

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: slow
- Perspiration: none
- Stomach condition: normal
- Muscle tension: relaxed
- Breathing: deep and relaxed

Audrey II:

Desire: Audrey II wants total power and world dominance.

Will: Nothing can stop him. He is determined.

Moral Stance: He has no morals. He is greed incarnate and intends to destroy mankind for his own gain.

Decorum: He is a gigantic Venus flytrap with human characteristics and the look of a “badass” avocado. He is made up of a huge, nasty-looking pod, which is Jaws-like in
many respects, and long climbing vines that extend in every direction. His voice is that of a sleazy but hip “jive-ass” salesman.

**Summary List of Adjectives:** hungry, greedy, cool, calm, clever, manipulative, slick, vicious, unfeeling, wicked, demanding, creepy

**Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:**
- **Heart beat:** slow and weak
- **Perspiration:** none
- **Stomach condition:** empty
- **Muscle tension:** relaxed
- **Breathing:** shallow

**Crystal:**

**Desire:** Crystal, along with the other two members of the trio, wants to be an all-knowing member of the skid row community, both as narrator of the story and a character in the neighborhood. She wants to be included in everyone’s success.

**Will:** She is persistent and has the strength to attain her desires.

**Moral Stance:** She is honest, and wants good to prevail over evil, but at times reflects the morals of all the characters in turn.

**Decorum:** Crystal is a striking street urchin/prostitute. She is well-built, sleek and smooth, and moves with a practiced seductive sway. She poses seductively. She is young and smiles knowingly. Her make-up is heavy as appropriate to her position. She is dressed cheaply as the play opens but her dress improves with the success of the shop.

**Summary List of Adjectives:** hip, street-smart, tough, energetic, sly, cool

**Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:**
- **Heart beat:** normal
- **Perspiration:** none
- **Stomach condition:** butterflies
- **Muscle tension:** relaxed
- **Breathing:** controlled

**Ronnette:**

**Desire:** Ronnette is the leader of the trio. Like the other two members of the trio, she wants to be one of the all-knowing members of the skid row community, both as the a narrator of the story and character in the neighborhood. She wants to be included in everyone’s success.

**Will:** She is persistent and has the strength to attain her desires

**Moral Stance:** She is honest, and wants good to prevail over evil, but at times reflects the morals of all the characters in turn.

**Decorum:** She is a beautiful young woman of 25. She is the leader of the trio and makes her living as a prostitute. She walks with a self-assured strut that magnifies her shapely, buxom figure. She is rounder than the others. Her hair is dark. Her stances are well-tuned poses that have become natural with time. She wears heavy make-up and like the others dresses cheaply, but her glittered dress improves with the shop’s success.
Summary List of Adjectives: hip, street-smart, intelligent, conniving, humorous, energetic, warm

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: normal
- Perspiration: none
- Stomach condition: butterflies
- Muscle tension: relaxed
- Breathing: controlled

Chiffon:

Desire: Chiffon, along with the other two members of the trio, wants to be an all-knowing member of the skid row community, both as narrator of the story and a character in the neighborhood. She wants to be included in everyone's success.
Will: She is persistent and has the strength to attain her desires
Moral Stance: She is honest, and wants good to prevail over evil, but at times reflects the morals of all the characters in turn.
Decorum: Chiffon is the youngest of the trio, 19. She is pretty in a tough sort of way. She is cool but with a bit more of a child-like attitude than the others. Like the others she is a prostitute but quite a class act for the neighborhood. She wears heavy make-up and her dress improves with the success of the shop.
Summary List of Adjectives: soft, hip, street-smart, clever, sarcastic, eager, energetic
Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: normal
- Perspiration: none
- Stomach condition: butterflies
- Muscle tension: relaxed
- Breathing: controlled

The Customer:

Desire: She wants excitement out of life.
Will: She is strong-willed and is willing to search out excitement and even pay for it.
Moral Stance: She has high moral standards. She is honest.
Decorum: She is not a regular to skid row. She is middle-aged, slim, and wears glasses. She wears a hat, coat and gloves. If she works she is most likely a librarian.
Summary List of Adjectives: sharp, controlled, intelligent, wiry, demanding, nosey, frigid
Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: rapid
- Perspiration: slight
- Stomach condition: butterflies
- Muscle tension: tight/keyed up
- Breathing: rapid
Mr. Bernstein:

Desire: He wants to find the story that will make him the most famous TV reporter of all time.
Will: He is willing to do whatever it takes to get the story.
Moral Stance: He has no real morals. It is a dog-eat-dog world and he will do anything to be top dog.
Decorum: He is a slick talking reporter. He is average in every way — looks, build, and intelligence. He is in his early thirties and balding slightly. He talks with the voice of a trained announcer. He moves fast and never stays in one spot.
Summary List of Adjectives: fast-talking, phony, sleazy, lying, hyperactive, loud, obnoxious, slick, unfeeling, showy, tacky
Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
   Heart beat: rapid
   Perspiration: normal
   Stomach condition: acid
   Muscle tension: extremely tight
   Breathing: shallow and fast

Mrs. Luce:

Desire: She wants to find the story that will make her the most famous magazine reporter of all time.
Will: She is willing to do whatever it takes to get the story.
Moral Stance: She has no real morals. It is a dog-eat-dog world and she will do anything to be top bitch.
Decorum: She is sturdily built. She is not what one would call pretty. She is dressed in a no-nonsense business suit, fox fur, a hat with a veil and gloves. She wears glasses and carries a large bag. She promenades rather than walks.
Summary List of Adjectives: eccentric, lavish, energetic, fake, overly motherly, nauseating, touchy
Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
   Heart beat: rapid
   Perspiration: medium
   Stomach condition: acid
   Muscle tension: extremely tight
   Breathing: deep, rapid and breathy

Skip Snip:

Desire: He wants to find the person that will make him the most famous and successful agent of all time.
Will: He is willing to do whatever it takes to get the contract.
Moral Stance: He has no real morals. It is a dog-eat-dog world and he will do anything to be top dog.
Decorum: He is a smooth-talking agent. He wears a trench coat and is obviously East Coast. He is tall, 36 and good looking in a TV commercial sort of way. His movements are planned, definite, and rehearsed. He gives one a feeling that he has done this numerous times before.

Summary List of Adjectives: cool, calm, collected, firm, controlled, commanding

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: normal
- Perspiration: none
- Stomach condition: acid
- Muscle tension: relaxed

Patrick Martin:

Desire: He wants to find the person that will make him the most famous and successful licensing and marketing tycoon of all time.
Will: He is willing to do whatever it takes to make the deal.
Moral Stance: He has no real morals. It is a dog-eat-dog world and he will do anything to be top dog.

Decorum: He is a man in his late forties. He is dressed expensively in a business suit and smokes a large cigar. He is reminiscent of a '40s movie director. He has a touch of the silver screen about him with a big dose of sleaze. He poses.

Summary List of Adjectives: firm, controlled, efficient, theatrical, commanding, rich, powerful

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: normal
- Perspiration: none
- Stomach condition: acid
- Muscle tension: relaxed

The Voice Like That of God:

Desire: The voice wants to warn the world against the demise of man.
Will: He is determined to provide just the facts and leave the choices to man.
Moral Stance: God-like.

Decorum: A serious, prophetic, deep, booming voice

Summary List of Adjectives: serious, God-like, prophetic, ominous

Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:
- Heart beat: slow
- Perspiration: none
- Stomach condition: calm
- Muscle tension: relaxed
- Breathing: deep and slow
**Voice of Radio Announcer:**

*Desire:* He wants to find the story that will make him the most famous radio announcer of all time.

*Will:* He is willing to do whatever it takes to get the story.

*Moral Stance:* He has no real morals. It is a dog-eat-dog world and he will do anything to be top dog.

*Decorum:* A professionally trained announcer voice, which is just a bit too friendly

**Summary List of Adjectives:** smooth, smarmy, clear, articulate, too cheery, energetic, falsely sincere

*Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:*

- **Heart beat:** rapid
- **Perspiration:** heavy
- **Stomach condition:** acid
- **Muscle tension:** extremely tight
- **Breathing:** shallow and fast

**Chorus (Six Women and Eight Men Including Wino # 1& 2):**

*Desire:* They want to stay alive.

*Will:* They will do anything it takes to survive on skid row.

*Moral Stance:* They live by the morals of skid row. If it is needed to survive take it, find it, or beg for it.

*Decorum:* Various sizes and physical types. All are characters in themselves. As well as part of the daily scenery on skid row.

**Summary List of Adjectives:** poor, dirty, depressed, derelict, clever,

*Initial Character-Mood-Intensity Expressed As:*

- **Heart beat:** slow
- **Perspiration:** dried
- **Stomach condition:** empty
- **Muscle tension:** relaxed

- **Breathing:** shallow and easy

**Idea**

*Meaning of the Title.* The title *Little Shop of Horrors* is indicative of the atrocities that take place in the environment of the skid row flower shop. Significant to the idea of a little shop is the incongruity of the notion that a sweeping threat to the existence of all mankind could arise out of the most inconsequential of places. There is, of course, the obvious horror of a plant that devours human flesh. However, it is important to note that
the word “horrors” in the title is plural. The most disturbing and terrifying horror is man’s willingness to sell his soul for the mere promise of fame and fortune. Seymour is so taken with the promise of success that he realizes only too late he had already had the thing he really desired -- Audrey’s love. This in itself is one of the most tragic horrors.

Seymour is so mesmerized by the lure of commercialism that he sacrifices his only parent figure, his true love, and ultimately his life for a chance at fame and fortune. Seymour, as part of the public relations food chain, was merely a single meal for the media moguls—they would have devoured his soul if the plant hadn’t devoured him first. The eagerness of the slick media characters to exploit Seymour for their own profit—a cannibalizing of human value by a bottom line-obsessed system—is the horror perhaps most directly symbolized by the plant.

**Philosophical Statements in the Play.** Hodge says that “Philosophical statements, although occasionally pinpointed in specific speeches, are not very common in plays because most playwrights in their desire to remain on the poetic level shun obvious statements of meaning.” 124 This is certainly true with Ashman; however, there are several statements in the dialogue that speak to some pertinent philosophical issues. In act one, scene one Seymour and the chorus sing:

\[
\text{Others. Downtown} \\
\text{Seymour. That’s your home address, ya live} \\
\text{Others. Downtown} \\
\text{Seymour. When your life’s a mess, ya live} \\
\text{Others. Downtown} \\
\text{Seymour. Where depression’s jes’ status quo!} 125
\]

This suggests a view in which contentment is dependent on economic well-being, tying

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124 Hodge, 49.
125 Little Shop, 1.1, 19.
into the typically American notion that money equates with happiness.

Ashman establishes a philosophical context of a sort of cynical pragmatism. The dentist berates Seymour for showing loyalty to Mushnik, arguing that he could make a fortune in a higher-class location:

*Orin.* Well if I were you I sure as hell wouldn’t keep it under a barrel down in a Skid Row dump like this. This avocado here could be your ticket to the stars. You could take it to any florist shop in town and name your price. 126

The American philosophy of pragmatism holds that the ultimate meaning of anything derives only from its practical results; this philosophy lies, perhaps unconsciously, beneath the motivation of all the public relations hucksters who later try to exploit Seymour as well.

Audrey II overtly uses philosophy in his attempt to get Seymour to feed him:

*Plant.* If you wanna be profound
And you really gotta justify
Take a breath and look around
Alotta folks deserve to die! 127

This is obviously an extremely serious, if not very popular, philosophical question to consider. Seymour in fact seems to be swayed by the plant’s logic here, as he soon heads to the dentist’s office with a gun. There circumstances arise which present a different philosophical question.

*Seymour.* What we have here is an ethical dilemma.
‘less I help him get the mask removed,
He doesn’t have a prayer
True the gun was never fired,
But the way events transpired,
I can finish him with simple

126 Little Shop, 1.3, 44.
127 Little Shop, 1.3, 53.
Laissez faire.  

A subtle moral question: is Seymour guilty of murder if the dentist’s death results from inaction rather than action, a sin of omission rather than commission?

Audrey and Seymour seem to operate under two different philosophical beliefs. Audrey subscribes to a traditional view of sin and retribution in which she doesn’t deserve a nice guy like Seymour because she has a past. Seymour, on the other hand, assures Audrey,

*Seymour.* Underneath the bruises and handcuffs, you know what I saw? A girl I respected. I still do.

In his view, past sins do not cloud the present or the future. In addition Seymour’s own fate is a reminder to humanity that our actions must be consistent with our moral values. Ashman’s dialogue does raise a number of interesting philosophical questions.

**How the Action Leads Directly to the Idea.** Little Shop of Horrors is about how a naïve, mild-mannered, and essentially innocent skid row florist shop helper is seduced by the possibility of immediate fame and fortune into facilitating and committing a series of atrocious acts because he mistakenly believes this is necessary to secure the affection of the girl he loves.

**Tone**

The tone is a paradoxical blend of hilarity and darkness held together by a common thread of mockery.

128 Little Shop, 1.4, 59.
129 Little Shop, 2.1, 68.
Introduction

This section will be divided according to the following headings: Relevance of the Play as Literature to the Specific Contemporary Audience, The Play As Part of the University Theatre Season, Evaluation of the Play in Terms of Its Appropriateness to the Educational Setting, The University Audience – Appreciation of the Play, The Play’s Appropriateness as a Learning Vehicle for University Actors, and Educational Goals and Objectives.

Relevance of the Play as Literature to the Specific Contemporary Audience

Spectators of this production will be generally divided into two groups -- university-educated baby-boomers and undergraduate college students who came of age in the era of junk bonds and late twentieth-century materialism. These are the generations of love and greed, reflecting the central polarity of the show. As a child of the ‘60s, I have always been strongly aware of the process through which public opinion often seems to be manipulated rather than informed by the breathtaking power of mass communications media to create celebrity.

Since the ‘60s the situation has only become worse. Sound bites have replaced logic, and reasoned discussion of crucial issues has been replaced by open warfare between opposing camps. On the political front, formation of public opinion has become distorted by a host of single-issue fanatics operating in a public forum where willingness to compromise has become a sign of weakness. The death of a princess, the birth of quintuplets, the massacre of a 15-year-old’s high school contemporaries become media events that we drool over for weeks but from which we fail to learn.
Little Shop of Horrors is a vehicle *par excellence* to subtly and humorously remind the audience of the absurdity and power of this media landscape. The hope is that the show’s unique melding of comedy and horror will bring this point home.

**The Play As Part of the University Theatre Season**

Central’s theatre season opens with The Baby Dance, a serious contemporary piece dealing with surrogate parenthood and differing social classes in America. It is followed by Little Shop of Horrors, student productions, The Odyssey (a children’s theatre piece for touring), True West; (another serious drama), and Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Little Shop is the only musical of the 1989 – 1990 season.

Dr. Van Tassel, of Central’s theatre faculty, offers perhaps the most significant insights on Little Shop of Horrors as a choice for the season and its purpose and importance:

... any good theatre program offers musicals together with plays to assist in the training of its students – that [is] reason number one. A second reason is revenue. To have the opportunity to produce some less ‘attractive’ plays that might not draw audiences but are meaningful for training, the season must include something that generates revenue. Our program receives no financial support of any kind for the production program - - so revenue is a consideration.  

Little Shop of Horrors, in the second slot of Central’s season, certainly offers a different experience for audiences as well. Its kinky plot along with its rock-jazz score provides a very different perspective on the differing social classes than does The Baby Dance. As a musical comedy it has the audience appeal to draw crowds and generate revenue, while offering some very valid training for students as well.

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Dr. Wesley Van Tassel, at Central Washington University, Theatre Arts Department, 23 June 1998, on-line, available E-mail @ vantass@cwu.EDU
Evaluation of the Play in Terms of Appropriateness to the Educational Setting

In addition to the usual study of the play in terms of style, plot, character, theme, etc., Little Shop of Horrors provides ample opportunity for further interesting and unique pedagogical applications. The play’s unique inspirational source, the 1960 film The Little Shop of Horrors, provides a vital point of comparison with the stage play and musical film version. The original film contains a wealth of satirical social commentary, the understanding of which is an important key to approaching the purpose of the stage version. A study of plot similarities and differences in the three forms Little Shop has taken could set a context for interesting classroom discussion and writing projects. Additionally, there is a fascinating opportunity to explore Ashman’s incorporation of satirical commentary on Greek tragedy, the Faust legend, science fiction films, and musical theatre.

From the perspective of a musical production, the play offers a rich opportunity for students to critique the success of various levels of collaboration. Was there a clear directorial vision that actors and designers could illuminate? Did the work of designers, director, choreographer and musical director come together to present a unified whole creating a consistent theme and tone? Were appropriate musical stage conventions effectively utilized? Did the placement of songs and dances effectively contribute to the production? The use of the director’s concept statement could be an effective springboard for such a critique.

Another valuable area of study is the function of song and music in the play. What are the purposes of each song—does it provide a climax, set mood, give exposition, advance the plot, reveal character relationships, state the theme or idea, add humor, add variety or
spectacle? How skillfully are the musical numbers woven into the dialogue of the play? After seeing the production students could critique the success of the songs in attaining these purposes.

Finally there is perhaps the most unique element of this show as a musical comedy—the immensely popular puppets. Were the manipulation of the puppets and synchronization with the vocalist successful? Many reviews claim that the puppet overpowers the show. Did this production achieve an effective balance?

As a unique musical with references to nearly everything imaginable from Greek theatre to cheap science fiction films, Little Shop of Horrors presents a wealth of valuable and entertaining pedagogical opportunities.

**Evaluation of the Play in Terms of Training Appropriateness for University Actors**

Little Shop of Horrors will function as an effective tool for training university actors. First and foremost as a musical comedy it provides theatre students with experience in one of the most lucrative and successful forms of live theatre in the United States. Whether they plan careers as actors, technicians, or educational theatre directors they will find that it is the musical that tends to be the moneymaker.

Student actors will gain experience and training from a variety of theatre artists. In addition to the director they will be working with a choreographer, a vocal coach, a music director, and design and technical staff that will give them experiences in areas that are not usually addressed in a straight show. Musical theatre provides young actors with many basic techniques that can be transferred to the worlds of ballet and opera as well. In the world of theatre an actor that is well-trained and has performance experience in
acting, music, and dance will have a much better chance of making it and having a career in theatre.

Little Shop of Horrors entails a script, score, and technical demands that will certainly challenge the abilities of university actors, but at the same time enable them to attain a high level of success with hard work and rehearsal. Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges to a young actor when approaching Little Shop is the issue of acting integrity. I have found that learning to keep their acting honest while working with comic characters can be a major obstacle for young actors. Success in overcoming this obstacle, on the other hand, is a significant stride forward in their development.

A great hindrance to an honest approach to comedy for this particular production will be the 1986 musical film version, which portrays many characters as exaggerated and unrealistic. If students have seen the film, they may come into rehearsal with a preconceived idea of character that is campy and silly. The actor who is cast as the dentist might be especially prone to a Steve Martin approach that is fatal to the interpretation of the character for Central’s production. It will therefore be essential that the actors understand the concept of the production and the action of the play as the director envisions them from the first read through.

Another challenge actors face is the difficult three, five and seven part harmonies that are required by the score. This will require carefully scheduled rehearsal time for the music and also require the vocal coach to provide more intensive training that would not be necessary with a simpler score. Some of the more difficult vocal demands will be compensated for by adding more voices to parts where the score calls for a single singer and at times reducing the number of harmonic parts.
Voices in training are prone to fatigue and injury. Actors will therefore be trained in proper care, warm-up techniques, and breath support by the vocal coach to help reduce this danger. These vocal techniques are valuable skills in all vocal work for stage. In addition the production will be miked in order to add support for the voices which must sing over a rock/jazz accompaniment. The musical director is confident that we will have much greater control of the volume of the five-piece electronic pit band, as opposed to an orchestra, because the volume can literally be turned down. In addition the chorus will be expanded in order to provide more sound and give opportunities to additional actors.

*Little Shop of Horrors* provides another interesting challenge to the actors as well as technicians. The use of the four puppets in the physical role of Audrey II creates additional considerations that aren’t usually a part of a musical comedy. The synchronization of manipulator and singer is perhaps the biggest challenge these two actors face. The setup and change to the various puppets by the crew also becomes a major difficulty. These can be addressed by incorporating the puppets into the rehearsals as soon as possible. It will also require some rehearsal time for just the manipulator and voice to work unhindered by the rest of the cast.

A final concern is the actor playing the part of the dentist. The script calls for this actor to play six additional roles, in many cases changing roles in a matter of seconds. As director I have chosen to cast these parts as separate roles using actors from the chorus. This has two benefits: it allows the actor the ability to focus on just the one character and it provides roles for more student actors.

*Little Shop of Horrors* provides a series of challenges for university actors, but at the same time offers some unique learning opportunities.
Little Shop of Horrors: Student Learning Goals

As a result of being a cast member of Central’s Little Shop of Horrors, students will gain a knowledge of the following learning objectives set forth by the director (Jon Kerr) and vocal coach (Terri Brown).

All Members of the Company Will Be Provided With Experiences that Will Enable Them to:

➢ Demonstrate a basic commitment to theatre by being present and on time and giving full attention and creative input at all rehearsals.

➢ Demonstrate the ability to function as a positive, cooperative and effective member of the ensemble throughout the duration of the production schedule.

Actors Will Be Provided With Experiences that Will Enable Them to:

➢ Demonstrate the use of character objectives in motivating the dramatic action of the play.

➢ Demonstrate an understanding of subtext (the thought behind the words) as the foundation of reciprocal acting.

➢ Demonstrate a knowledge of reciprocation between characters and an understanding that the acting process is one of subtle adjustment.

➢ Demonstrate an understanding that performance is both an aural and visual experience for the audience.

➢ Demonstrate the commitment and ability to memorize lines and lyrics in a timely fashion meeting all deadlines.

➢ Demonstrate the ability to record and memorize blocking.

➢ Demonstrate the ability to use both projection and articulation safely and effectively in delivery of both lines and lyrics.

➢ Demonstrate an understanding of honesty in acting.

➢ Demonstrate an understanding of endowing the environment from the character’s point of view.
Demonstrate a knowledge of the importance of smooth transitions from dialogue to song.

Singers Will Demonstrate an Understanding of:

- The importance of breath control.
- Relaxation and openness of the throat.
- The diaphragm and body muscles used for singing.
- The placement of the tone in the face, head and chest resonators.
- The interpretation of the music while sustaining correct vocal technique.
- Basic musical notation.
- How to protect the voice from fatigue.
- Sustaining vocal integrity during physical movement.
- Basic mic techniques.

**Little Shop of Horrors**

"The Kerr Vision"

**Introduction**

This section will be divided into four sub-sections: What I as an Artist Bring to the Production: a Subjective Discussion, Personal Strengths as a Director and Canon of Work, and The Concept Statement.

**What I as an Artist Bring to the Production: a Subjective Discussion**

The most significant contribution I can make to Central’s production of Little Shop of Horrors is the passion I have for the general beauty of the story. It is a show that I have wanted to direct for a number of years because it delivers a message I feel very strongly about, concerning the hyper-commercialism of modern society. In a very unique and creative way the bargain basement film produced in just four days almost forty years ago
encapsulated a wicked, insightful critique of commercialism in its wacky story of a man-eating plant and a naive, caring soul who succumbed to the lure of fame and fortune. I feel that this story carries a warning to us all to cherish the successes that can’t be bought such as love, self-respect, and compassion for mankind.

Little Shop of Horrors is a creative vehicle which I can use to awaken people’s consciousness to values that I feel are essential to a happy and fulfilling life. It allows me a rebel’s avenue of attack against the materialistic hype that is a driving force in the country. The theme provides a message that is more relevant today than it was in the ‘60s or the ‘80s and a moral that is a much-needed lesson to the audiences of the 1990s:

*Girls.* Hold your hat and hang onto your soul! Somethin’s comin’ to eat the world whole!
If we fight it, we still got a chance.

As William Ball explains in *A Sense of Direction,* “We are makers of belief. The director is the one who believes first. . . . He has to believe that he could stand on the corner and sell it, that he could market it, that he could convince people of the beauty . . .” This belief in the power of theatre and the beauty of the play are the personal strengths I bring to Central’s production as the director.

**Personal Strengths as a Director and Canon of Work**

The most significant personal strength I have as a director is all I have learned in the fourteen years’ experience I have had in directing mainstage productions in various high schools. During those fourteen years I have directed over 40 mainstage productions, of which 12 have been musical comedies. Because of this I have extensive experience in

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131 Little Shop, 2.3, 95.
teaching and directing student actors in an educational theatre setting. In most instances I have had to function as designer and technical director as well as the production director. This has given me a very real understanding of not only the significance of these positions, but of the process of combining all the creative elements into a single unified production.

As technical director at a performing arts high school, I had the experience of designing sets and lights for other directors. This has given me an understanding of how a director’s abstract vision is realized on the stage. As a director it has also given me a strong sensitivity to the creative work of other artists and everyone’s need to function as part of a team in creating the look of the production.

My organizational and planning processes prior to rehearsing actors have also strengthened my work as a director. I feel I have a strong visual sense of stage picture and how to use this to enhance the telling of the story. Motivating actors and leading them to their character’s part in the message is another strength I have developed. Another significant strength is my ability to unite all of the elements into a unified whole in a timely fashion. Whatever strengths I may possess as a director certainly are motivated by the passion and love I have for theatre.

This production of Little Shop of Horrors, as a culmination of my Master’s, is the logical next step in my canon of work as a theatre artist. I began working as a high school director, then as an artistic director for a touring ESL theatre company in Lisbon, Portugal, and finally returned to the states to continue my career as a high school director. Working in these two different settings has allowed me to put into perspective my future goals as a theatre artist.
After fourteen years of high school theatre, I am ready to move into a college or university setting where I will have the opportunity to direct more challenging productions that would not be appropriate for the high school level. In addition I have found that I enjoy the process more when I am part of a creative team, rather than the sole survivor. I think theatre is a collaborative art and that collaboration is essential to my continued growth as a director and artist.

Directing at Central is a stepping stone which provides the transitional experience for my career to move from high school into the college setting.

The Concept Statement

Howard Ashman’s Little Shop of Horrors is a musical comedy satire. It lampoons cheesy 1950s B science fiction movies, Greek tragedy, the Faust legend and musical comedy. The production’s controlling theme is: man is damned if he sacrifices his values in his quest for material success through the shallow type of instant celebrity made possible by modern media. The tone is a paradoxical blend of hilarity and darkness held together by a common thread of mockery.

It portrays a suffocating, dirty, poverty-riddled skid row environment whose inhabitants are trapped in an economic web of despair. Their futile world is opportunistically penetrated by preying inhabitants of the slick, glitzy, fast-paced world of uptown commercialistic hype. Metaphorically the environment is a dark, dank, cold, filthy prison cell with a single shaft of sunlight piercing through to the center of the darkness. There the sun’s rays nourish a patch of sprouting vegetative life. Dust particles dance like flecks of gold under the light, but then disappear when they float into the darkness, unattainable, fool’s gold.
Little Shop of Horrors' setting is New York City's skid row. The action of the play begins on September 21, 1960. September 21 marks the autumnal equinox, the beginning of the fall season, the time when darkness begins taking precedence over light. Symbolically the beginning of fall can be taken as suggestive of decline or even death, like sunset—the daily as opposed to yearly onset of darkness. This provides a most appropriate atmospheric for the show. The waxing and waning of good fortune occupy the characters throughout and should be constantly paralleled by shifts in the visual elements. The opening scene begins in the early morning.

The set is stylized realism. The flower shop is encapsulated in the skid row environment giving a feeling of being centralized on a dead end road at the end of the universe. The street environment is a cold, hard, dark, filthy, unchanging amalgam of decaying brick and cement, rusting iron, and trash. The flower shop is reflective of its surroundings, but offers a bit of a respite to the eye. It suggests vegetation and earth. It finally turns into a jungle that chokes the life from the inhabitants.

Being the center of the environment, the shop is bathed in the shaft of sunlight. The light fluctuates in intensity, reflecting alternations in Seymour's fortunes. The appointments of the shop interior are upgraded as Seymour's success builds, but the impression should be that the sun's energy is actually the source of the improvements, because these are really results of the plant's occult manipulations. The shop gradually takes on some of the glitz and glitter of the uptown environment. Contrasting slick, smooth visual elements of uptown glitz -- light, sterility, chrome, glitter, and plastic -- penetrate the hard, rough, depressing skid row environment. I envision the central
structure of the flower shop as revolving to provide both the exterior and interior. It would be most effective if this rotation could be done by the chorus as part of the action.

The color palate should reflect the contrast between skid row and uptown. Brick red, cement gray, burnt umber, ochres, chlorophyll green, with touches of tans, purples and, burgundies bathed in a wash of raw umber contrasted with primary red, blue and yellow and their complementaries, accented with shimmering metallic golds and silvers.

The costumes should be stylized realistic representations of the late 1950s and early 1960s America. The contrast between the two social groups should be evident. The skid row down-and-outs layered with ill-fitting, rough textured fabrics of wool, tweeds, and corduroy, in dirty, earthy tones contrasted with the smooth, tailored, sleek look of silks, gabardines, satins, polyesters, leather, and plastic for the uptown media hucksters.

Seymour, Mushnik, and Audrey are costumed somewhere between these two extremes. Both Seymour and Mushnik initially wear well-worn clothes in the earthy tones and textures of the down-and-outs, but as business improves so does their dress. Hints of uptown class creep into their look. However, in the final scene Seymour should appear in his original costume. Audrey’s costumes reflect that she is being kept. Her costumes are tight-fitting, low neckline sleazy imitations of what might be worn by an uptown call girl. She wears only high heels for shoes and always sports a cheap evening bag. In the last scene she should appear in flowing spirit-angel attire. The trio, although never mentioned as prostitutes, certainly give that impression in their dress. At the opening of the show they are costumed as skid row whores, but their costumes increase in glitz with Seymour’s fame until they are identically dressed in sequined gowns reminiscent of the Supremes.
The lighting should also support this idea of contrasts with the light in the street at lower intensities making use of chocolates, grays, frosts, and deep ambers with touches of red, while the light in the shop is brighter and more natural, perhaps making use of steel blue, violets, and pinks. It would be effective to have some eerie lighting effects within the shop when the plant is feeding or about to. I envision the lighting of the show to follow Seymour’s success as well, with intensities growing as Seymour’s fame increases. Special effects are needed to create the total eclipse during Seymour’s telling of how he got the plant. Fog (as steam from manholes), thunder, lightening, and street lamps would be effective additions to the environment.

As the director I intend this concept statement as only a beginning point for design collaboration.
Works Consulted


Little Shop of Horrors:
Thesis Documents Created During the Production Process
and
Elements Created After the Production

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Little Shop of Horrors
Production Journal

Thursday, September 24:

Auditions have been a great surprise. The musical abilities of students auditioning turned out to be of a much higher quality than either Terri or I had expected. The vocal requirements of the score pushed me to consider actors not physically appropriate for various parts. This resulted in some interesting casting.

It is obvious that the acting training that advanced students have had here at Central is paying off – auditions by these students while both comedic and energetic showed an honesty that is essential to the production. It was clear that students are in need of more training and guidance in selecting musical audition pieces. Many of the pieces chosen were out of the actor’s vocal range, too difficult for them, or they had never heard the accompaniment which they submitted for the pianist to play. At times this made it difficult to access whether the actor was a weak singer or if they had just chosen an inappropriate piece. Work in introducing and ending their audition pieces should be included in the first year acting class.

In the callbacks tonight I was able to really motivate actors to work, take risks, and try a variety of approaches to various characters. This seemed to raise the stakes and the quality of the auditions improved a great deal. The casting incorporated the actors that were able to show a variety of approaches to characterizations and a willingness to take and incorporate direction into their work. I feel the overall casting is very strong. Robb Padget gave an outstanding audition for all male characters. And although he had the qualities needed for the dentist he was the only actor really capable of singing the part of Seymour. That meant that the dentist needed to be cast from the remaining pool of male actors. Although none of the actors were able to grasp the characterization of the dentist, Simon was the most open to direction and so was cast. This will be a stretch for him. The part of Audrey was a very difficult choice. There were four women all of whom could have done a very fine job. Christina Cox, however, was the best at taking direction, showed the most growth, and had a strength and toughness that I liked – especially when playing opposite Robb.

There is a real enjoyment in casting when all of the actors are unknown to the director. And now it all begins!

Saturday, September 26:

Well, today it all started. I arrived at the theatre about 11:00 AM to finalize furniture placement. I have really begun to enjoy working with Cheri as a designer. She is very willing to work collaboratively and help solve problems and concerns. Today when considering blocking I realized that I had nothing to anchor the DR corner of the flower shop. On Cheri’s advice we added a rolling cart that could be used as an additional
workspace for the characters. It worked very effectively when blocking the first shop scene. I also realized the extent to which the fire escape unit blocked the audience’s view. Here again Cheri and I spent a lot of time measuring the space and discussing the possible solution. This resulted in Cheri redesigning that section of the set. These were major concerns and worries of mine and instead of them being a disaster and having to beg for solutions, the process of change was exhilarating and very creative. Cheri can be highly commended for her abilities.

The first blocking rehearsal went very well. Although the space in the flower shop is cramped, it worked well. The combination of some pre-blocking and the use of action verbs, unit titles, sense adjectives and metaphors worked wonderfully. The formal use of planned verbs and adjectives is new for me—I like it. The actors were very hardworking and creative. A good first night!

**Sunday, September 27:**

(Memo to Brenda)

I just wanted to take a minute to make you aware of what a fine job Cheri has been doing as the set designer for Little Shop. She has diligently been working with both the crew and me to ensure that the design works effectively for the production both functionally and aesthetically. Cheri spent many hours this weekend assisting Chad in spiking out the set and helping set furniture prior to our first blocking rehearsal. Because of her willingness to be part of the process, our work has been able to move ahead on schedule. Saturday I realized that the down right area of the shop itself was not anchored making it very difficult to motivate action into that area. Cheri readily solved the problem by providing an additional workspace for Seymour. She was also instrumental in redesigning the fire escape so that sight lines were not blocked. These types of complications often become a source of frustration and hostility for both directors and designers; however because of Cheri’s willingness to really make this a collaborative effort these changes were not only challenging but fun as well. Students were amazed that Cheri wasn’t “pissed” but instead worked with us to make improvements. This provided a valuable learning experience. Throughout the process, Cheri has been open to suggestions and available for advice. I am thrilled to have her creative talents and design expertise available. She truly understands the meaning of teamwork!

**Thursday, October 1:**

The choreographer is presenting the biggest frustration for me thus far in the production. She prefers that I block each number first, then she adds dance steps. Under the circumstances I feel this is the best way for us to work. However when it comes time for her to work with the actors her directions are extremely sketchy. She does not work the number in any sequence, but instead tries various steps never...
giving actors any indication of where the steps go, how many counts it is, or what foot to begin with when executing the step. Tonight we spent the allotted two hours for “Renovation” working with just three actors and did not set a single step. The actors were hard working and seemed only confused. They were certainly good sports. At this point I see no real solution for getting adequate work from the choreographer.

Sunday, October 4:

Today the choreographer was out ill. As she was not able to contact me until five minutes into rehearsal we shortened our afternoon rehearsal. Today was set aside both in the afternoon and evening for dance rehearsal. In the afternoon I set the blocking for “Ya Never Know,” so it is now ready for the dance to be added.

In the evening with the help of the actors I choreographed “Renovation.” It was a forty-five minute process with good results. I am concerned about the remaining two large dance numbers—I am not certain that the choreographer has the ability to set these numbers in a timely fashion. Music and blocking are ahead of schedule—dance is behind and holding up the process.

I am going to move ahead with blocking and plan to try and find additional time for choreography work. The choreographer doesn’t seem to mind me changing things (in fact she doesn’t notice)—so I will continue to modify what she does.

On a happier note the plants arrived Friday and they are wonderful. We spent this afternoon learning to set them up and practicing the manipulation. We need to increase the number of puppeteers from 1 to 4. We also spent the afternoon redesigning the stage left wall of the shop in order to accommodate plant #4. It is amazing to me that others were not as concerned about getting the plants early—they of course now realize the benefit of knowing the size and manipulation requirements of the plants. Cheri was again instrumental in helping solve the set problems. I am thankful that she is the one I need to work with to accomplish these changes.

Monday, October 12:

Blocking rehearsals have been going quite well. Originally we were scheduled to be blocking pages 49 – 54 tonight -- in actuality we will be blocking pages 77 – 83. Act two raises some difficult challenges in terms of pacing, sound, and effective use of the chorus so any extra time is needed.

The opening of act 2 is described as a “cacophony of sound” and it is. The difficulty is trying to get the effect without making it unbearable for the audience to listen to for the duration of the first number. In working this number it will be important to try and eliminate any incidental sound such as feet on platforms, stools scrapping, etc. I have discussed the problem with the designer and she has had some good ideas on how to solve many of the problems. Her plan is to pad as many surfaces as possible to cut...
down on excess sound. This should help a great deal. If this can be accomplished it
then becomes my problem to find definite moments of focus to help direct the
audience’s eye. The scene will definitely be a challenge!

The addition of the chorus has added a great deal to the production. Without a Trio
that can provide an ethnic sound it is nice to have the power of the chorus vocally
to provide interest, volume, and variety to the sound. However, having fifteen
additional bodies on stage, on a very shallow set, has created some very difficult focal
challenges. At times there is a need for the chorus to become part of the scenery and
“disappear” becoming part of the environment rather than actors. Not having any idea
of the lighting plans for the production, I am hoping that the lights will in fact be
instrumental in helping to solve this problem. The costumer has been very helpful in
planning for colors in the costuming for the bums to aid in the camouflaging of the
chorus. In act 2 I have moved the chorus to the extreme up right and up left positions
of the stage in order to give full focus to leads at times and to create a new depth that
was not incorporated in act 1. Finding action for the chorus has also provided a
challenge. The chorus has been very cooperative and is willing to experiment and that
has made the process much more successful. The chorus will continue to be the most
challenging aspect of the production.

Choreography is still a problem. Our first blocking rehearsal for “Ya Never Know”
proved to be a real drudge for all involved. After two hours the choreographer had set
only one step repeated for eight counts of eight with the Trio parading back and forth
across the down center apron. I then decided to offer my help to block some patterns
of movement (the number had already been blocked for area). This at least got us
through the number. At the end of three and a half hours of rehearsal the number still
had numerous sections without any definite steps. The actors were patient!

Sunday afternoon’s rehearsal was another dance rehearsal. The choreographer did
come in with some ideas. I was able to convince her to teach the various steps to the
actors and then together we could pick and choose how to incorporate them into the
number. This seemed to work quite well. I also found that in parts where she was
unable to create any workable movement that I could offer to block that section and
she was more than agreeable. However she continues to try and work various parts of
the number out of sequence and then is unable to create transitional movements that
connect her choreography. This was an extremely frustrating experience for the two
actors. They remained good sports, but I am sure she could read their feelings of
anger at times.

She felt as if the process of us working side by side is the most effective—I agree! I
have decided to block movement for all of the remaining numbers and not use the
choreographer. This will give her time to focus on the three sections already partially
completed. She is ecstatic about this plan!! Thank you Dionysus!!

The vocal coach and music director continue to be a treat to work with. Both are
highly competent, willing to make any needed changes, and just plain fun. They teach
valuable skills as well as rehearsing the vocal parts. David is so willing to create any additional transitional music that I never have to worry! They know their stuff!

Technically the production continues to move forward. My biggest technical concern remains sound. Not only is the equipment in poor repair, but the student designers seem to need more advisory support to get their work done. We have abandoned the in-house system and will be using the road system, which will provide a much “smaller” sound. In addition we have gone from 23 mics being available to only 15. Had I known that we would only have 15 mics I would have chosen to cast a smaller chorus, which would have greatly reduced blocking problems. In the last week the sound crew has begun to set up so that is encouraging.

The set and costumes seem to be on schedule. The tech crews are working hard.

**Sunday, October 18:**

Today’s afternoon rehearsal was another choreography rehearsal. They continue to be a disaster. We worked on “Ya Never Know” for an additional three hours. The result was horrific -- the number is still not completed and in fact it is worse than when it was just blocked movement. The only answer is to eliminate the choreographer from rehearsals. She is unable to think on her feet and give any semblance of clear directions to the actors. I am sure the company senses my frustration, for I certainly can see theirs. She decided to video tape the numbers so that she can “overlay steps” in the studio. My plan is to work the movement of the numbers myself and then schedule her for one more Sunday to give her yet another chance to add some dance. I will continue to schedule her for run throughs so she will still feel part of the action.

One of the Trio members slipped on the waxed masonite and severely smashed the soft tissue in her right foot. She finished the scene saying she was fine. After finishing she was in pain so we had her not walk on it and sent her to the emergency room. It is not broken and all should be fine in a few days. I need to remind the company and make sure it is policy that whenever anyone has an accident that they stay down until they really know if the are injured. I will set that tonight.

Today was the beginning of working rehearsals. I started with a brief “lecture/discussion” on how I like to work, my goals, and notes on terms I’d be using – objectives, beats, etc. The mini lesson was a great idea – it was a good review for students studying acting and essential for the non-theatre students. The lecture put us all on the same page. I am certainly glad I waited until after the first run through – it definitely made more sense to the actors once they really understood the direction of the production. This is certainly an element I will always use whether working with beginning actors or seasoned performers.
Our first blocking run through last Friday was quite good. All actors were off book with virtually no line problems. The initial blocking looked good – I will be able to keep much of what is done. The transitions when moving/turning the flower shop are definite problems. Because it takes the entire chorus to move the platform, it becomes a scene change rather than part of the action. During the working process it will have to be a major focus. I think carefully motivating the chorus into shift positions and trying to get some of them up to the platform prior to the shift may help solve the problem. I doubt that the problem will ever be fully solved.

**Friday, October 23:**

Last night was our second run through. Musically the show is very solid now. We took time to run all of the musical numbers prior to beginning and it helped a great deal. Tonight was the first night the video camera was available for the music director and it certainly helped the coordination of the run. We also had a monitor from the piano for the first time and this made it possible for actors to actually hear the music – a real benefit.

The work by the principals showed a great deal of progress. They are incorporating the work we’ve accomplished in working rehearsals and it is moving ahead nicely.

The chorus, however, has not done their homework. We have worked the first 40 pages and I’ve seen all of the chorus scenes well motivated and thought of them as real assets to the forward thrust of the action. The majority of chorus members have failed to mark changes or review the work we’ve accomplished. This failure resulted in a real setback in terms of the transitional and scene change work that we’ve accomplished over the past week. In order to get back on track tonight’s rehearsal is being changed to run-throughs and repairs to the first 40 pages. I am going to have to not only provide time for actors to mark working changes but I will also have to check that they are actually recording the work we do.

I know that the adjustment from working in Hebler to stage is difficult and provides some real timing problems for the chorus. However the timing problems were not what got in the way of their work last night. The problems stemmed from a lack of review practices by the chorus. They have run the scenes numerous times in working rehearsals – there is no excuse for them not knowing what they do next!!!

The set is progressing. We are still having problems with the rotating platform. Either there is something stuck under the platform or some of the casters have actually fallen off causing numerous problems when it comes to scene changes. This of course did not add to the chorus’s work. I am hoping for the fire escape unit in the near future. This will modify the blocking on stage right a great deal. The designer is hoping that it will be in place by the end of next week. The brick
texturing goes on the wall units today. The texturing pieces are very nice – I only worry that they will be too heavy for canvas flats. We’ll see!

I am extremely happy with the process we have used in rehearsing. The formal use of objective verbs has been a great technique. It is something I will always use. The production itself is quite far behind where I like a production to be at this point -- I am not sure why. Perhaps it is the use of the verb technique that has slowed the work—but it is the answer to young actors finding motivations and playing objectives.

“Ya Never Know” is finally blocked. I have taken all of the attempted choreography out and substituted movement. It still is not what I want it to be, but I want to let it set for a week in order to allow the company to feel secure with it before making any additional changes.

Monday, October 26:

The show has begun to work faster. The character of the dentist is a stretch for the actor both vocally and in terms of acting. However, he is working hard and progresses continually. He enjoys being pushed and seems to be growing into the part. The chorus is understanding their function and have begun to really be an asset to both the stage picture and the action of the story.

Projection and articulation continue to be a concern. We have worked on both from day one, but the cast continues to be very inconsistent with both. I had the company sit in the house and watch various scenes so they could hear how difficult it is to hear and understand at times. This seemed to help.

The transitions (rotating the platform) continue to be the real challenge. Finding a variety of ways to enhance the telling of the story as well as getting that hunk of wood turned is not an easy task. The cast continues to be great sports as we drag that thing around. Several of the transitions are now quite nice.

The set is progressing. The brick texturing is wonderful and is going to be a real asset to the environment. It is quite a time consuming technique so it is great to see it being done prior to the walls going up. I am still anxious to get the fire escape unit and florist shop walls up. These two elements will mean a great deal of adjustment for actors, and the timing of music and scene changes. The plan is to have the fire escape unit completed by Wednesday – I hope it’s possible.

Thursday, October 29:

The show is working quickly now and we are able to achieve a higher quality in less time. The chorus has really begun to work as a unit, and it is a great accomplishment. I am anxious to see a run-through to see where we are.
I had a productive talk with the chair of the department yesterday. She has had a student mention that the rehearsal schedule has been too intensive. Although it is not a new issue to educational theatre, I think that it is an issue that needs to be addressed by the department as a whole. I chose to follow the suggested rehearsal schedule and was under the impression that it was a relatively easy schedule (if that exists in theatre). It seems that an additional week of rehearsal may need to be added if the department intends to produce full-scale musicals with such challenging scores as Little Shop. It would also help if some guidelines could be provided for guest directors so that they could develop schedules that adhere to a set policy.

She also mentioned that I was described as being a perfectionist and intense when directing – it is interesting to me because I just did not read that feeling from the cast. It certainly is not a surprise. I believe that as an educator, even more than a director, those are appropriate and desirable traits to model at this point in rehearsal. The time will come when those traits are relaxed – but not yet.

When I was described as intimidating, that did however shock me a bit. It is certainly not, nor has it ever been, a trait I work to have. It is a great benefit to have the chair share that perspective – it is a modeling that I certainly do not want to exist in my directing and one I need to be sensitive to in future work at the college level.

It is so easy to feel defensive when these comments are made by actors, and yet they are all valid views of my working process. What strange beings we humans are. I also need to remember to balance them with the positive comments I have had from actors. It is so easy to listen to valid criticism and ignore the valid compliments. I need to remind myself of the good stuff as well. Many students have been extremely complimentary. The comments I want to remember are: “You are the most insightful director I have ever worked with” – “Please keep pushing me – I love how you can get me to go further” – “This is the hardest I’ve ever worked. It feels good.” Food for thought! And what foods these morsels be!

The rolling platform continues to be a real problem in rehearsals. It has now been rebuilt three times. At the beginning of rehearsals it was moving like a “Cadillac” but then stopped cold and wouldn’t budge. I hope we can solve the problem. The set is a bit behind schedule but promises to be a real asset to the production. I am hopeful that sound will be added soon.
Tuesday, November 03:

LITTLE SHOP MEMORANDUM

TO: MARK, CHERI, DAVE BARNETT, AND DAVE BROWN
FROM: JON
SUBJECT: RECAP OF 11/03/98 PRODUCTION MEETING
DATE: 11/14/98
CC: BRENDA AND JIM

I would first like to thank you all for the input, control, and problem solving strategies that were exhibited at this morning's meeting. I think we were able to come up with some solutions that will work for the production.

As we all agreed, our most immediate need is to complete all sound work that was originally scheduled to be completed by October 5, 1998. The decision was to have the following items in place, tested, and ready for use by the company by Thursday, November 5, 1998 at 6:00 PM:

- 15 body mics and two working spares
- six monitor speakers
- all hanging and floor area mics
- two video cameras and monitors
- two stand mics for the voice of the plant and the radio announcer
- four mics needed for the percussionist
- a sound script marked with warnings, cues, and a place to record all levels as they are set during rehearsals

In addition, the mics that are in need of repair were to be sent out as soon as a purchase order can be obtained. I suggested that an open purchase order be established so repairs to mics can be made as needed throughout the run of the production. Mark asked that this purchase order be dealt with through Suzy. It was also agreed that all the members of the sound crew would be released from other duties until the sound work is completed and functioning properly.

I would like to recap my priorities as the director of the production. My only needs are the following in order of importance:

- sound as listed above
- the fire escape
- masking
If only our sound needs are met, I will be satisfied.

In terms of the set, it was decided that Dave Barnett would complete the following in the order listed below:

- the fire escape
- flower shop walls

It was decided that Cheri would be responsible for any additional work completed on the set. Chad and I agreed to complete the counter and to find cube replacements for the crates. Chad and I completed both of these tasks this morning.

I know that everyone is working hard and I certainly appreciate your talents and effort. I hope that we now have some priorities set that will also let us enjoy the work that we do. I would especially like to thank Mark for his dedication to solving our problems.

**Saturday, November 7:**

Last night marked the final phase of rehearsal. The cue to cue was done without actors and went very smoothly. The lights work wonderfully for the production and support the overall concept very well. The work of the lighting designer has been exceptional. The paper tech was organized, well prepared, and even fun. The entire process working with the lighting designer has been a pleasure. When he didn’t have crew he did the work himself without complaint. His work is meticulous. He has been open to suggestions and changes, although there have been few because he does his homework.

The set continues to be a real hindrance to the actors. The flower shop rotation is extremely difficult. I am planning on changing the rotation to moving the platform in only one direction so that casters do not have to change direction. While rotating the platform it often times is uncontrollable and careens off the front of the stage. This causes the audience to panic along with the actors. In addition the amount of energy it takes for actors to move the platform is extreme and depletes their energy for acting. If the platform had been castered with four-inch casters as I suggested at an early design meeting, I feel the problem could have been solved. The walls were completed yesterday for the shop, so it will require yet another major adjustment for the cast when moving the platform. The handles attached to the platform are breaking off, so the cast has nothing to hang onto when moving it. I have asked for new handles but have been told they will be fabricated—when??

The fire escape is finally in place and works well for the action. Actors adapted very quickly. I am certainly pleased with the dedication and problem-solving abilities of the cast. We are still waiting for doors, doorway curtains, and windows. These additions are going to add a great deal of adjustment for actors at
a very late date. The renovation of the shop is virtually non-existent, making the musical number a bit ridiculous. Originally we planned to have a refrigeration unit installed, new curtains, new windows, new coat racks, a new awning, and a new flower box. None of these are going to be possible.

I am certainly aware that there must be adjustments made throughout the creation of a production. I think what has made the process difficult for me are the negative attitudes of the advisors responsible for the set and sound. I resent becoming a pawn in the process. I am usually able to refrain from becoming part of the negativity and bitching, but it has been impossible to stay out of the loop. I continue to try. My advisor has been incredible. He is always encouraging, positive, and ready to listen.

The costumes have been completed ahead of schedule. We have already added the majority of them to the production so actors are already feeling secure with fast changes. We have had virtually all costume props since the first week of rehearsal, and this made the transition to the actual costume props easy for all involved.

I am excited about the tech run-through today. The actors are ready. I have asked that we tech act 1 and then run it and tech act 2 tomorrow. The lighting designer has agreed to this schedule, and I am sure it will result in a much tighter production technically.

The action of the chorus is my chief concern at this time. Because of the number of actors on stage the physical movement can appear unmotivated and unfocused unless very clean and precise. This is especially true in the opening two numbers. I have seen the scenes work extremely well when working the scenes and during one run-through. Blocking must be very tight and groupings separate. I am confident that the cast can regain what is needed. Without a clean crisp opening the production feels over blocked and the chorus appears to be in the way of the action rather than supporting the forward thrust. I may need to eliminate some of the action and make use of some freezes to control focus in the first few chorus scenes. The opening to act 2 also appears a bit frantic. It is a poorly written scene. I hope to have time to work the timing of the scene once more.

The work by the entire cast and crew has been exceptional. They have been a dedicated and fun group of people to work with throughout the rehearsal process.

**Sunday, November 8:**

Yesterday’s tech went extremely well. The lights were easily incorporated and supported both the action and concept. Costumes are now complete and also work wonderfully for the show. It has been very helpful to be able to incorporate costumes prior to the first dress. The costume designer has been a real team player from the onset of the production. She is organized, insightful, and full of positive energy—a real delight.
The actor’s rose to the occasion. The blocking and motivation in the two opening numbers were very sharp and clear in both run-throughs of act 1. If they are able to be consistent I will be satisfied with their work. The vocal coach took the time to help adjust mic quality between the first and second run-throughs and the difference was amazing. We also added sixteen bars of music and lyrics to the first number in order to get the platform turned in time. This is the only time the platform turns in a number and because of the difficulty in turning it, actors needed more time.

Throughout the rehearsal period the work done by both the vocal coach and music director has been consistently exceptional. They are organized, creative, and fun to work with as well. The process has been very difficult for them due to the difficulties with sound. Central needs to involve the music people into the setting of quality levels in productions using amplified sound.

I really believe in teching just one act each day and then running it. This worked well. Today we will tech and run act 2.

**Monday, November 9:**

Sunday’s tech. was not as successful. The lighting system went out and has been sent to San Francisco for repair. The lighting designer is hoping to have it back in time to tech act 2 before opening. There is a possibility of postponing the opening—I certainly hope this doesn’t happen—the actors are ready. The lighting designer is very encouraging. It is extremely lucky that he is ahead of schedule and competent.

The first run-through of act 2 was lacking focus and clarity. I am sure that the lights going out affected the actors’ work. When the production is not clean there is a real problem with blocking appearing unmotivated. Mushnik continues to have some serious problems with articulation and separation. I am hoping that performance will give him the incentive to correct it. We have worked diligently on the problem and he is able to correct it if he keeps the accent consistent and does a very thorough warm-up. It is difficult to convince him that it is as real a problem as it is.

The set continues to give the actors new challenges. The two doors that have been added have caused some real timing problems. I am glad I have insisted on them miming doors—this has helped. The shop door is still not hung. This is the door that is the most crucial. It will cause some real problems when installed. I have asked that it be the highest priority.

The second run-through of act 2 was much improved. Transitional moves by the chorus were much more energetic and cut about seven minutes off of the running time. It is amazing how essential it is for the chorus to be aware of the pacing of...
their changes. The platform rotation no longer really affects the transitions. Perhaps I have just become accustomed to it. It does however affect the pacing of the actors. When it isn’t turning well the actors’ pacing in scene changes seems to adapt to its speed. I think the chorus feels that it is awkward to move at a different pace than the platform turn. They are a bright group and I am sure this can be easily corrected.

Sound continues to be a stumbling block. At times it is quite good and then becomes unbearable. I think there isn’t anyone who really understands the system. The student crew keeps trying but needs some advisory assistance.

**Tuesday, November 10:**

Last night’s run-through went well. I continue to remind actors to hold for laughs and to be true to what has been rehearsed. Mushnik’s articulation is improving. He is able to be understood more clearly when his accent is strong and his vocal energy is high. He tends to be a lazy actor and this transfers to his voice. The pacing of the show was good, although the chorus continues to drag scene changes.

Costumes are complete and working very well for the show. We have had absolutely no problems with quick changes. The lights are still not operable. I am encouraged though; the lighting designer has sent the board and firing cards out for repair and plans on installing them tomorrow. We may run opening night without having teched act 2, but the cast is bright. It will work.

The set is moving along. All doors are now complete. I am hoping shop windows go in today and all base coating is complete so I can see the costumes on a completed background. Props have been running smoothly—we’re ready to open.

**Wednesday, November 11:**

Tuesday’s rehearsal went well. Pacing is improving. The actors have adjusted to running with the portable work lights. If opening night matches Tuesday’s run-through I will be satisfied.

Tonight’s rehearsal was poor. Timing and transitions were off and the actors seemed extremely unfocused. All movement seemed unmotivated. The lights are back and work well for the show. Kudos to the lighting designer. All major set units are complete. I think the re-adjustment to lights and the final set pieces may have been a bit unsettling for actors. Today is the first time they have run with lights in act 2.
Because of the ensemble nature of the show, when something or someone is “off” it tends to be absorbed by the entire cast. I have to remember that the opposite is true—when they’re working together their work is good.

Tomorrow afternoon we plan on teching act 2. We are still having some ghosting problems with the lights. I am confident all will be solved. I am glad we are teching act 2 tomorrow. Many of the act 2 transitions are awkward, unmotivated, and slow now that lights have been added. It is essential to find time to work timing with actors and lights.

Friday, November 13:

Thursday’s afternoon tech went well in terms of a run-through with actors. However the lights were ghosting throughout and the designer was unable to attend the tech because he was on the phone trying to get the problem fixed. We opened without ever teching act 2—a frightening beginning.

Opening night was good in terms of the actors making it through. Act 1 flowed quite well and blocking seemed motivated. Act two was horribly paced, and big pauses due to the actors’ unfamiliarity with how the lights and music work together created some long moments. The lighting designer took notes and I think our problems will be solved tonight.

I was proud of the actors. They kept the show together and delivered a fair performance. My only frustration comes in the fact that the show is much stronger than what the audience saw last night. I hope the audience will see in performance what I have seen in working rehearsals.

Saturday, November 14:

Last night’s performance was much stronger. Actors cut seven minutes off of the play and all scene changes were smooth and fast paced. They were at the level they were when working the scenes—a very admirable accomplishment.

Lights went extremely well and now really support the transitions. Excellent work by the lighting designer. He has been a real asset to making the run of the production clean. Sound was absolutely the best it’s been. I sat down with the board operator and told her what was working and what needed to be improved and she did nearly all that was requested. I was relaxed during the performance and pleased with the company’s work. It now seems like the show I directed.
Central Washington University
Department of Theatre Arts
presents

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken

November 12-15, and 18-21 1999
McConnell Auditorium

Produced by arrangement with Music Theatre International
Central Washington University Department of Theatre Arts presents

**LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS**

by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken

Vocal Coach: Terri Brown  
Music Director: David Brown  
Props Master: Erik Flak
Scenic Designer: Cheri Vasek  
Technical Director: David Barnett
Lighting Designer: Mark C. Zetterberg  
Make-Up Designer: Shawna Longmire
Costume Designer: Anita Carlson  
Stage Manager: Chad Gross
Choreographer: Lana Jo Sharpe  
Sound Designers: Seth Chandler and Kristie Gehlman

**Directed by Jon M. Kerr**

CAST

Chiffon .......................................... Jaclyn Meline
Crystal ................................... Annie DiMartino
Ronnette ....................................... Allison Tigard
Mushnik ....................................... Kevin Salcedo
Audrey .......................................... Christina Cox
Seymour ....................................... Robb Padgett
Audrey II(vocal) .......................... Carson Lueck
Audrey II (manipulation) .......... Joshua Schultz
Audrey II (manipulation) .......... Jeff Ouradnik
Voice of God ............................... Carson Lueck
Radio Announcer ......................... Tobias Dycus

Orin/Skid Row Inhabitant .. Simon Burzynski
Berstein/Skid Row Inhabitant .. Ryan D. Scott
Skip Snip/Skid Row Inhabitant ...... Karl Edie
P.Martin/Skid Row Inhabitant . Tobias Dycus
Customer/Skid Row Inhabitant ... Gina Scala
Luce/Skid Row Inhabitant ............ Sara Siler
The Inhabitants of Skid Row: Vince Gordon, Annie Jantzer, Carmen K. Lehman, Jason Montgomery, Jeremy Randall, Rachel Sadler, Danielle Schepman, Isaac McKenzie-Sullivan and Rebecca Wren

**Director's Note**—Long before a quirky little 1982 off-Broadway production caught the New York theatre world off guard, and the thirty-million dollar 1989 film hit gave muppets an attitude, *The Little Shop of Horrors* had already carved itself a very special niche in cinematic history. A world that had not yet heard of the Beatles or Monty Python was not quite ready for Roger Corman’s 1960 sendup of all those exquisitely cheesy 1950’s sci-fi movies. *Gone With the Wind* was a gleaming gem in Tiffany’s showcase, *The Little Shop of Horrors* was a blue light special. Yet, filmed in less than a week for under $30,000, this queen mother of all cult films managed to lampoon almost everything from sadomasochism to vintage TV cop shows, sororities, and a still pubescent American public relations machine. It was the genius of Ashman and Menken to fast-forward Corman’s disturbing blend of off-beat humor and wicked satire into a funky, streetwise morality play of the 80’s.

In order to appreciate this dark but gentle reminder that selling your soul is never worth the thirty pieces of silver, we need only to trust that those suspect feelings of love and self-worth we work so hard to hide under our practicality and realism have been right all along. For every Seymour there’s an Audrey who loves him just as he is, and we’ll all do just fine if we don’t feed the plants.

**A Special Note of Thanks**

I would like to thank Dr. Wesley Van Tassel for creating the opportunity for me to direct this production. My thanks also to Jim Hawkins for special endurance over nearly three decades of mentoring, guidance and great desserts. There are no friends like old friends, and I am especially grateful for the happenstance that brought about a reunion with Terri and Dave Brown. *When you work with a song, time goes along and suddenly a melody helps ya through the work that you have to do.* I appreciate the hard work and support of the CWU Drama faculty and the dedication and professionalism of the entire production staff, cast, and crew of *Little Shop.*

-Jon M. Kerr

*Audrey II design copyright Lisa Shaftel, 1997. The plants were originally designed for the Village Theatre production of “Little Shop of Horrors.”*
ACT I

"Prologue (Little Shop of Horrors)" ................................................................. Chiffon, Ronnette, Crystal and Chorus
"Skid Row (Downtown)" .................................................................................. The Company
"Grow for Me" .................................................................................................. Seymour
"Don’t It Go to Show Ya Never Know” ......................................................... Mushnik, Chiffon, Ronnette, Crystal, Seymour and Chorus
"Somewhere That’s Green” ............................................................................... Audrey
"Closed for Renovations" ................................................................................ Seymour, Mushnik and Audrey
"Dentist” ........................................................................................................... Orin, Chiffon, Ronnette, Crystal and Chorus
"Mushnik and Son” .......................................................................................... Mushnik and Seymour
"Feed Me (Get It)” .......................................................................................... Seymour, Audrey II, Chiffon, Ronnette, Crystal and Chorus
"Now (It’s Just the Gas)” .................................................................................. Seymour, Orin and Chorus
"Little Shop of Horrors (Reprise-The Coda)” .................................................. Chiffon, Ronnette and Crystal

ACT II

"Callback in the Morning” ............................................................................... Seymour and Audrey
"Suddenly Seymour” ....................................................................................... Seymour and Audrey
"Suppertime” ................................................................................................... Audrey II, Chiffon, Ronnette, Crystal and Chorus
"The Meek Shall Inherit!” ................................................................................ The Company
"Sominex/Suppertime (Reprise)” ...................................................................... Audrey and Audrey II
"Somewhere That’s Green (Reprise)” ............................................................. Audrey
"Finale” ........................................................................................................... The Company

Musicians

David Brown ........................................................................... Keyboards and Synthesizer
Brian Dean ........................................................................... Keyboards and Synthesizer
Scott Sousa ............................................................................... Bass
Bob Crow .................................................................................. Percussion
Ryan Phelps ................................................................................ Percussion

Production Crews

Assistant Stage Manager .......... Sarah Tollefson
Assistant Stage Manager .......... Ellicia Mertens
Assist.Stage Manager (plant) . Jeff Ourandnik
Assistant Costume Designer .... Heidi Humrich
Scenic Artist .................. Patricia Sweesy
House Manager ................. Ruth Hull
Sound Op. (tape) .............. Justin Walters
Sound Board ................. Kristie Gehlman
Sound Op. (misc.) .............. Josh Madera
Sound Floor Person .......... Seth Chandler
Prop Const. ............. Erik Flak, Rhianna Peterson
Props Runner ............. Rhianna Peterson
Make-Up Assistant .......... Ian Bishop
Hair Assistant .............. Ann Lafferty
Costume Cutter/Draper ..... Ellen Hess
Costume Cutter/Draper ..... Donna Thorne
Costume Runner ............ Carla Era
Costume Runner ............. Regan Stupey
Costume Runner .......... Boanna Peterson
Costume Runner .......... Jessica Stewart
Costume Runner ........... Christy Larson
Master Electrician ........... Jason Montgomery
Light Board Op. ................ Scott Rosenboom
Shift Crew .................. Jennifer Williams
Scenic Construction ......... Brad Batten
Seth Chandler, Jason Montgomery, Boanna Petersen, Jared Vallejo, Justin Walters, Simon Burzynski, Karl Edie, Carolyn Hiatt, Rhianna Peterson, Elizabeth Skindlov
Costume Construction .... Daryl Duell, Heidi Humrich, Dorothy Menzel, Linda Morgan, Jessica Schenck, Patricia Sweesy, Patricia Wald, Ryan Luiten, Clara Prothoer, Kelly Rosenboom, Rachel Sadler, Scott Sands, Gina Scala, Michelle Skindrick
Lighting Crew .................... Jason Montgomery
and members of the Stage Lighting Class
Publicity Crew ............... Susanna Schmidt, Ellicia Mertens, Annie DiMartino, Allison Tigard, Sean Begley, Christina Cox, Tanya Ihlen, Jessica Stewart
Box Office .......... Athena McElrath, Zack Nause, Mark Alkofer
Special thanks to the following:
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Torina Smith, The Village Theatre,
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Standard Paint

Theatre Arts Department
Dave Barnett .............................................. T.D., McConnell Stage Manager
Jennifer Bennett ................................................ Adjunct Instructor
Anita Carlson ................................................ Graduate Teaching Assistant
Leslee Caul ................................................ Sales Director
James Hawkins .............................................. Children’s Theatre, Drama Education
Ellen Hess .................................................. Costume Shop Manager
Brenda Hubbard .............................................. Chair, Dramatic Lit., Voice, Acting, Directing
Athena McElrath ............................................... Adjunct Instructor
Susy Morrison .............................................. Department Secretary
Harris D. Smith .............................................. Intro. to Theatre, Acting, Movement, Combat
Michael J. Smith ............................................... Acting, Voice, Directing
Milo L. Smith (Emeritus) ................................ Literature, History
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An Observation Of The Production
by James Hawkins

Central Washington University’s production of *Little Shop of Horrors* by Ashman and Menken, is directed by Jon Kerr in partial satisfaction of his Master’s Thesis in Theatre Production.

It is an admirable reflection of his advanced training, for the production represents the work of a unified and cohesive ensemble of players, under the strong leadership of a sensitive director.

Many of the positive results of the play are due to the orchestral completeness of the direction. From casting to curtain call, the strong hand of a vivid directorial image is clearly in place. Kerr plies all the tricks of his trade in creating a play that moves deliberately forward through character action, use of deliciously baroque crowd movement, and a slight of hand in guiding the actors to broad characterizations that engage and please. Additionally, the music direction of the production by Terry and David Brown, is brilliant - creating a sound that is precise, powerful and with a clarity and maturity far beyond the average university production.

But while the music and lyrics nudge the audience into both pathos and nostalgic delight, the script itself does not rise to the energy and devotion of the players. Convoluted in plot, confused in structure, bald in its thematic aspirations, the story is a catch-all of inflated Faustian preaching and self-indulgent moralistic necrophilia. Yet in spite of this bargain-basement “something-for-everyone” structure, it does present a collection of complex characters: simpletons who we learn to love and hate with glee.

If there are moments when the repetition of a character bit is too extended, or an ensemble moody movement is repeated once or thrice too often, Kerr is to be forgiven for the mis-step in his desire to make a point, sometimes valiantly, against the confusion of the text.

Where Kerr succeeds most is in the telling of a love story through the yearnings of Seymor and Audry. Star-crossed and cursed, they are doomed from the first and destined to remain in a mud-luscious skid row environment that would squelch the most ardent of lovers. The remaining characters seldom reach the depth or humanity of Seymor or Audry. On the villainy side of the aisle is the voracious plant, Audry II, well played vocally as a chilling foe.
Beyond the sweethearts and the "puppet," one must surmise that Kerr interprets the text to have the other characters as caricatures or cartoons. That decision serves the play well, for we have enough emotion to deal with in one night loving the lovers, hating the haters, and soaking up a certain measure of pity for the chorus of have-nots.

For this is not the case of nobility rising from the down-trodden, only briefly do the "denizens of the gutter" rise above disgruntled grumbling... as in the case of "Somewhere that's green" and the finale where more than a suggestion of Candide or Les Miz urges us to rise to take action against gluttonous evil.

Lighting design provides the artistic glue that warms the play with lavish color and a sculptural depth. Costumes create a chorus who are textural elements of the environment yet represent touches of individuality within muddy shapes. Jewels against the background are the "ladies of the company" who spring out appropriately. Character costuming is in fact the primary vehicle for defining many of the small characters who race through the play like messengers from the front lines, each with a new missive of another offstage plot development.

It is apparent that all elements of design have been created with an eye for harmony that supports the premise of the play. The setting for the first act creates spires of textured austerity and grime. The chorus of skid row characters have a scenic component in providing the crumpled world of derelicts that portray this doom... and are nonetheless as one in their yearning and their resignation.

The potential for scenic storytelling is largely ignored in the second half of the play. The transformation of the environment referred to as proof of the "devil bargain" never happens. When the story demands that the flower shop bloom, grow, and become a resplendent character in itself... nothing happens. The same bleak world is joyously praised by the characters who must be blind to the unchanged world. Cinderella never gets her dress nor her pumpkin.

Nevertheless, we find ourselves at the end of the evening, knowing that even at the extremities of our world, at the bottom of the barrel, in the most comically unfathomable turn of events, goodness exists... but then, before our eyes, it is swallowed up before avarice and greed.

An old story, an old temptation, a familiar phantom that is strangely current.

James Hawkins

Please note:
This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.
Evaluation of Thesis Production in Performance

Student: Jon Kerr

Direction of: Little Shop of Horrors

Evaluator's Name: Cheri Vasek, Assistant Professor

Place of Performance: McConnell Auditorium, Central Washington University

Dates of viewing:

Monday, November 16, 1998 (performance for TH101 class)
Saturday, November 21, 1998 (public performance, closing night)

Description of performance venue:

Proscenium theatre space with audience on 2 levels; approximately 800 seats.

Description of concept:

The director's concept statement indicates an emphasis on the dark aspects of the play: "a dead-end road at the end of the universe". Skid row's futureless decline and decay was intended to contrast with the opportunistic commercialism of "uptown hucksters".

In analyzing his research of the original production of the play, Jon identified a concern for finding an acting style that emphasized honesty and did not become excessively "campy". In reviews of many early productions and in warnings by the playwright, an exaggerated "campy" approach was identified as destroying the tongue-in-cheek satire of the text.

Description of the actual production direction or that of the visual elements. How did the production direction or design implement the ideas expressed in the concept statement?

The visual style selected was a heightened realism. There seemed to be some stylistic inconsistency with visual design elements.

The set design was incomplete: the transformation of the florist shop to its "successful" state never happened. There was no evidence of the "occult manipulations" of the plant, so necessary to the telling of the story. Thus, there was no sense of contrast between skid row and "uptown". This incompleteness was a missed opportunity visually.

The lighting was beautiful, sculptural, and successfully helped differentiate for us the moments of occult eeriness and evil.
Costumes were inconsistent in their allegiance to period and style. This left us with an odd and confusing blend that sometimes seemed to be 1998-contemporary: appropriate foundation undergarments (girdles, especially) were missing; hairstyles were softer, limper and more natural-looking than the period (1960). Skirt lengths seemed more typical of 1970 than 1960.

The choice to use the chorus as an integral part of the storytelling was splendid. Their movement was beautifully incorporated and advanced the story effectively, especially during the early exposition. The chorus faded into the background when that was necessary, so they did not pull focus from the primary action. Particularly effective use of chorus occurred in the prologue, "Downtown/Skid Row", “Ya Never Know” and “It’s Just the Gas” (death of the dentist).

Use of stage space was interesting and varied, especially in the exterior street scenes. Levels (fire escape, boxes, trash cans) were used effectively. I saw wonderful groupings and beautiful stage pictures throughout. Actors (especially the derelict chorus) inhabited their environment believably.

The director’s intent for characterization and acting style were well-realized. The main characters were charming and honest. Audrey and Seymour’s naïveté was endearing. Robb Pagett’s performance as Seymour was particularly noteworthy for filling every moment honestly. Mushnik was delightful, especially in “Sudden Success”.

Orin the sadistic dentist was the one character who seemed one-dimensional to me, and hence inconsistent with the overall acting style of the production. This actor needed a wider repertoire of physical movements, and needed to motivate those movements from within. His movements seemed to be applied in a formulaic manner.

The voice of the plant lacked the resonance needed to properly convey its power and evil.

The vocal quality of the production was greatly enhanced by the choice of casting a large supportive chorus. Vocal direction and musical direction were excellent.

The most significant successes of this production had to do with people and process. The director’s approach to the making of theatre had many positive results, among them: the inclusive collaborative design development process; the ensemble feeling of cast and crew during the production run; the sense of shared ownership; the growth experienced by performers during the rehearsal process. In light of these tremendous accomplishments, I applaud Jon’s work in Little Shop of Horrors.

Cheri Vasek
Evaluation of Thesis Production in Performance

Student - Jon Kerr
Under consideration is the directing of: Little Shop of Horrors

Evaluator's name: Brenda Hubbard, Chair
Place of performance: McConnell Auditorium
Date of viewing: 11/11 & 11/12

Description of performance venue: 800 seat proscenium theatre

Description of the concept:
The concept seemed to focus on the play's dark and sinister elements. The lights and set were dark, dreary and intense. The use of the street people/chorus highlighted the decadence of a world of "have not"s who all seemed willing to do whatever it took to get a buck. In this world, that the director magnified in his interpretation, no one except Seymour, has any sense of right or wrong and, very quickly, even he is led to do evil.

I would say the acting style is that of a kind of heightened realism and the musical staging was done in a very simple and direct way with the focus on character and development of plot. Any comedy that came through in the script was developed through honest characterization rather than employing elements of spoof, heightened style or caricature. The chorus provides a kind of jaded and ironic commentary on the dilemma of the main characters. In the final number after all have "sinned" and participated in evil, the chorus turns and warns the audience that such evil occurs everywhere, even in our own hometown.

In essence Kerr's interpretation chose to highlight the sinister and macabre script elements in a realistic and straightforward style.

How did the production direction or design implement the ideas expressed in the concept statement.

Jon alludes to the "musical comedy satire....lampoon[ing] cheesy 1950s B science fiction movies," in the introductory comment of his concept statement. Coupled with "The tone is a paradoxical blend of hilarity and darkness held together by a common thread of mockery," indicate to me that he was aware of and wanted to highlight the humorous and satirical tone of the play. However, in the acting style chosen and in the design execution for set, lights, and costumes I did not always feel that the satire came through.

First of all, the period, as illustrated in the costumes, did not accurately
reflect the 1950s. In his concept statement he chose 1960 which seems to be a period choice when fashion was in transition. I wonder if a slightly earlier period choice would have given the audience a quicker and more accessible visual period reference. The hair styles of the women might also have been exaggerated to create both satire and period reference. The hair and makeup of the women seemed contemporary and since the large theatre requires exaggeration anyway, more could have been done with period and style of the piece.

Secondly, there was a visual style inconsistency between the cartoon-like look of the plant in comparison with the other visual elements. Possibly a more stylized design view would have brought the audience more quickly into the world of satire. The setting, while not complete, succeeded in creating the “dark, dank, cold, filthy prison cell” metaphor that Jon alluded to in this concept statement. The lights also enhanced the dark, foreboding quality of the play. I find, however, that the world of comedy and satire, often requires a brighter and more visual approach with guide posts for the audience.

Again, had the styling of the plant been reflected more clearly in the other design elements, there might have been greater stylistic consistency. Since the plant is a major focal point for the play, this strikes me of as a short coming of the production’s unity of design and directing concept choices.

I am also aware that the plant came later in the process than the director had requested, which is always a challenge for a director. It seems that directorially, Jon might have looked for ways to tie it together with the other visual elements in overall “look” of the play.

The costumes in fit and design emphasized the actor’s natural bodies and tended toward realism. By this I mean that the women, in particular, were shown without girdles, corsets, bust enhancement or wigs. Again, this choice lent itself to realism rather than the heightened caricature one might expect from satire. This was an element that distracted from my comprehension of the stylistic world of the play. In addition, the choice to have Audrey in high, high heels limited the actor’s range of motion and meant that all of her quick steps to make long crosses prevented her from the movement/character development and variety that would have been more desirable.

The storytelling through the set design was missing. The shop’s growth in its commercial success was not reflected in the set design. Since Jon included this as a requirement of his concept, one can conclude that the design fell short of the director’s mark. The set design was successful in creating the
dark, dank, sinister world ambience but seemed to fall short of enough visual
details to keep the eye entertained. I am aware of the problems with
completion of the set, but feel that this is another area when the design let
the director’s concept down.

Appropriateness of choice of script for abilities of performers, audience, academic setting.
While the choice was made for this director, it was appropriate to the
abilities of the performers, and the academic setting.

In Conclusion:
I believe there were many strengths in the direction of the production.
Focus was very clean. I always knew where to look and who was in primary
focus.

The beginnings and endings of scenes were clearly delineated. There was
excellent use of stage picture. His use of the chorus for group picturization
and story telling was superb. The handling of the cumbersome shifts was
excellent because he gave blocking and character support to a technical
problem which helped it to flow, even through it was entirely too long(not
due to any shortcoming on the part of the director) Casting was very strong.
All of the actors fit their roles vocally, physically and in their level of talent
and execution of acting choices The performances were grounded in truth and
honesty and there was consistency in technical accomplishment throughout

I quibble with Jon’s choice not to stylize or spoof some elements or humor
in the play. I believe the script is shallow and does not really ask us to buy
into the angst of the characters but rather to enjoy the absurdity of the
situation. I would have preferred a clearer sense from the director of what
the audience had permission to laugh at. I did not know, for example, that
the actor playing Audrey knew what was funny about her role.

Then there were times that I felt the humor was pushed inappropriately.
The repetitive crouch grabbing of the dentist got old and while a justifiable
choice, I wished for more variety in expression of his deviance.

Also in terms of directing style, I wished that the actors had employed a
slightly more presentational feeling to the show. I was troubled by watching
the actors in profile so often during the scenes. In a theatre as large as
McConnell, I find that realism is rarely as successful as a more
presentational approach. I think such an approach would have blended well
with playing it straight and true. I do think that Jon’s choice to err on the
side of realism is preferable to joking it up. To me the next step would be to
heighten the overall period and satiric style of the direction.

The pacing within the scenes was slow to me. I am not commenting on the technical intrusions here but more on the internal crafting of each scene. Scenes lacked builds and also sometimes dribbled off at the end. A clearer button on the end of the scene with pace, picture, and coordination with lights and shifts would have been more helpful.

Story telling was mostly good, however, I disagree with the repetitive choice after the “Somewhere where its green” sequence when the street people continued to employ the “grabbing at the dream” gesture. I loved the echoing of the gesture but thought that the 8 or so times it was employed did nothing to move the story forward. There was no new information at that moment and I thought it should have been used more judiciously. This is also true for the many long crosses that the actors made when leaving the shop and entering the world of the street. I loved the idea of this which was cinematic in nature, but felt the reality of the choice slowed down the advancement of the pacing.

Blocking was quite lateral at times, particularly in the shop scenes. I would suggest more use of the diagonal when possible. There were also times the actors seemed to be hidden behind the two counter spaces. Perhaps a more presentational staging would have opened them up?

These criticisms aside, I must add that the strongest elements of this director’s work lay in his incredible teaching and communication ability. Jon had to deal with a problematic situation in which tech, design and choreography were fraught with difficulty. I seriously doubt that any of our faculty could have handled the challenge with as much patience, humor, professionalism and dignity as Jon. In spite of difficulties, he turned in a highly polished, skilled product for which I am extremely grateful. The mark of a great leader/director is keeping a cool head and maintaining an upbeat but demanding energy. Jon did this with flying colors. The student’s have never worked harder, sounded better, performed with more energy and focus and enjoyed it more. Since ultimately our goal is training, this production far exceeds any criticisms one might have of stylistic choices or directing techniques. I would rate this an unqualified success. Congratulations Jon on an excellent thesis project.

Brenda Hubbard

Please note:
This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.
On the “Little Shop of Horrors”

Imagine, for a moment, the guy from the children’s show “Blue’s Clues” singing and dancing around on a stage. Now add twenty more of him singing in key with each other (and a live band) and dancing in time. Now imagine all of the actors on ER, and use only four of them to put on a drama twice as long as ER and just as captivating. This was the difference between the acting requirements of LSH and BD. One is a musical requiring musical and rhythmic talents of several people, capable of blending together into a unified ensemble; and the other is a drama requiring four people to develop a deep connection with each of their characters’ thoughts and fears, and then share those thoughts and fears, through blocking and subtext, with the audience. I’ll give you two guesses which one’s which, but the first two don’t count. Little Shop of Horrors, the most recent production of CWU’s Theatre department was the musical, requiring the actors to train rigorously on not only lines, blocking, intentions, objectives, and character analysis, but also song, rhythm, and choreography. The last three made the difference, plus the much larger cast made for a great deal more interaction between all the characters. One such example
of such chaotic goings on was the renovation scene where brooms are flying, lines are being spoken and sung simultaneously, and a little dance number is happening all at the same time.

Another difference between BD and LSOH was the space they were played in. LSOH was produced in McConnel auditorium set up in a proscenium format (the only format available on that stage). This sets the audience a little farther back, causing a little less intimacy with the scene before them. It also allows for much bigger sets and more spectacle, things which our current target market loves. BD on the other hand, was produced in the Tower theatre in an arena format. This brought the audience much closer to the action (four feet away to be exact) and made them feel like a part of the scene.

If Aristotle had been brought forth from the pits of death to watch this show, he would have immediately recognized people, there were actors interacting with each other on stage for half and hour before the show began. He also would have noticed conflict. There was Mushnik’s conflict with Seymour, the bum’s many conflicts with each other, Seymour’s internal conflict over Audrey, Audrey’s internal conflict over Seymour, Audrey’s conflict with Orin, Seymour’s conflict with Orin, Seymour’s ongoing conflict with the plant, and Seymour’s conflict with his own conscience.

I truly enjoyed this production, all fourteen times that I saw it. The action was diverse enough that I could look and see different piece of it every night. I loved the directors take on this show, where all lines pointed to Seymour and not to the big foam puppet. I thought the set might have been a little over-designed for the budget and manpower available, but other than that I loved the show, and recommended it to everyone I met. Even people I didn’t know.
Report on Central Washington University's Production of

Little Shop Of Horrors

Intro to Theatre
9:00 a.m.

November 23, 1998
I first became involved with Central Washington University’s Theatre Arts Department production of *Little Shop of Horrors* on the first day of school of this year. That was the day auditions were held for the play. Eighty-five people, including myself, auditioned for a cast of twenty-five. I was one of the lucky ones chosen to be called back the next day, but I did not make it into the cast. Instead, about two weeks after rehearsals began for the play, I was called by the stage manager for the show and was asked if I would consider being assistant stage manager (ASM) for the show. I went over to the rehearsal to talk to Chad, the stage manager, and to watch the actors before I decided whether to dedicate a large portion of my time to this production. I had never worked on the technical aspect of a show before, but once I talked with Chad and saw Jon Kerr, the director, and all of the actors at work, I knew I couldn’t say no. I realized this was going to be an experience I had never had before, and one I could learn from enormously.

I began to attend rehearsals nightly; as ASM, I was required to show up an hour before the actors were called, and I usually had to stay about an hour afterwards to clean everything up. During rehearsals, I would set up parts of the set and the necessary props needed for the actors, I would take director’s notes for Jon, I would take line notes for the actors, and I was in charge of cueing the music. As I watched the play take form more and more
each time we had a rehearsal, I started noticing a lot of specific things about the way Jon was creating the show.

The first thing that I noticed was how Jon really centered on ensemble work. *Little Shop Of Horrors* is usually performed with a cast of eight to ten actors; there is usually no chorus. However, Jon had added a chorus, and now that I have seen this show with an ensemble, I can’t imagine a performance without it. Jon would work the chorus and the leads **hard**; making them repeat every single line, every single action until they got it to the level Jon wanted it. A major emphasis for Jon was everyone working as one unit; everyone’s role was important, and no one was more important than another was. Jon not only emphasized on the cast working as one, but the crew working as one with the cast as well. I was very impressed on how much of an emphasis this was for the director; most plays I had been in before were separated into two “groups”, the actors and the techies. This show had something different—we as cast and crew worked together as one, supported each other, and accomplished things together. There was no attitude of on group being better or worse than the other was.

The second thing that I noticed was how much detail was put into every aspect of the play. The costumes, the set, the lighting, the acting, the movement, the music; all were dissected by the production crew to fit Jon’s
visionary statement of how he wanted the show produced. He did not want this production of *Little Shop* to be just another story of a plant eating people. He wanted a message to get sent to the audience, and it did.

The third thing that I was very impressed with about the show was the final picture. During the performances, I was not able to watch from an audience’s point of view; I was backstage making sure everything was kept under control, and helping the actors whenever I could. But the few lucky times I was able to view the show from an audience’s point of view during rehearsals, I was amazed. Pictures formed on stage that were so powerful words did not need to be used. The acting, movement, and all other aspects fit together perfectly to tell a wonderful story up on the stage. We, as a cast, crew, and audience were not in McConnell auditorium any more. We were on Skid Row. That was the goal for Jon and everyone else involved.

So much was learned from this experience. I have a much deeper respect and admiration for all the aspects of theatre, because now I realize how much of a group effort it really is. And I know we reached the point where we wanted to be. All I need to do is ask someone who saw the show what they thought about it, and I know we did our job the best we could.
22 Nov. 1998

Little Shop Report

The Central Washington Universities' Theater Department did an excellent job in the production of "Little Shop of Horrors." I enjoyed every aspect of the play, from the acting, to the costumes and everything else.

The actors did a great job in the play. The actors were very believable in their roles, you actually thought that it was the late 1950's early 1960's on stage. It was like looking it to a mirror of the past. The actors move the way I believe their characters would have in real life and I didn't see anything fake about what was going on, they used everything they had to make you believe they were who they were. Also, I could hear and understand all the words to the songs and the dialogue setting all the way in the back of the theater.

The director used very good judgment in the production of this play. The actors he chose fit the parts that he wanted them to and he helped bring out the best in them. I especially liked how he had Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronnette be part of skidrow, but at the same time they were the narrators, stopping action when they thought that something needed to be explained better, or just because they could. You really so the different sides of having money and not. One moment, the three girls are dressed in rags, being yelled at by Mushnik. And the next they are dressed in these beautiful green gowns stopping all the action on stage, holding all the power. I also found it interesting how the
director used the bums to move the stage around between sets, it made the play that more fun.

Howard Ashman and Alan Menken did a wonderful job of writing this musical. I liked the way the play showed what some people would do to get money, power and fame. How Symour traded his soul and humanity for Audrey’s love, when it was his soul and humanity that Audrey loved in him. How if you are rich and famous, those who didn’t like you before all of a sudden are your friends and that you should watch out for those people. All in all, the showed in a very entertaining way the money is the root of all evil.

One of the best elements of this production was the set. I extremely liked the way the front of the shop and the inside of the shop were on the same platform and that all that you had to do was turn it around, instead of bringing on flats or having it on a side view. A production like this would never have worked in the tower because of that factor. You wouldn’t be able to get a good feel for the play if it was done on a smaller stage. The play was meant to be grand, and that is exactly what the set made it.

I really enjoyed this whole experience. Even though this isn’t the first play I have been too, it was one of the best. It was fun and there was always something going on one stage, something always held your attention. I told some of my friends to go and see the play, because it was really fun and you came away with something.
The director's messages for the Little shop of Horrors musical satire are historically interesting and morally compelling. The morality message was believing in your true self and not letting yourself be influenced by others; for if you did lose sight of your inner self and exploited others, there was a price to pay. This play deals with the concept that people are predators. The predatory nature of humans comes through loud and clear during the exposition when the skid row bums prey on each other, i.e. taking food and drink from one another and pushing and shoving. Their survival is the basic necessity that they are fighting about. The message also came across in the relationship between Audrey and sadist, Orin, the dentist. She allowed him to prey on her physically and he overpowered her, leaving her a victim with little self-esteem. Mushnik, the shop owner, also preyed on Seymour through intimidation and manipulation. He bullied poor Seymour. Of course, the most obvious one was the anthropomorphic plant named Audrey II. This clever plant preyed on all the characters who sought to improve their lives through greed and victimizing. The relationship between Seymour and Audrey II had some of the same characteristics as the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles in the opera, "Faust". Both Faust and Seymour sold their souls for the opportunity of success and achieving 'true love'.
The other message that appeared in the play was the satire about Americans' lifestyle in the 1950's. The play was a historical satire portraying the consuming desire of Americans to surround themselves with material possessions. Conformity and uniformity was the answer to acceptance and success. The songs sung tell the story. "Somewhere That's Green" even mentioned Leavittown as the ideal place to live. "Grow for Me" showed Seymour's need to improve his present station in life. The song, "Dentist" told the story of Orin's sadistic rise up the social ladder. "Feed Me (Get it)" showed how Audrey II was more than happy to help Seymour achieve his dreams even at the cost of sacrificing his soul. The corporate contracts given to Seymour to sign demonstrated well that this was a consumer's society and pretty horrifying in itself. The character, Audrey II, brought the message home - 'human greed will gobble you up so don't feed this immoral act as it will lead to propagation throughout society'. This is what happened to American society, according to the playwrights, in the 1950's.

The picture that stuck in my mind are the plant, Audrey II, as you watch him grow as he was 'fed' human greed. The other visual was the costumes the characters wore. They were believable and changed with the advancement in social status of the characters, Mushnik, Seymour and Audrey. But for me, the real picture came from the music. The stories told through the singing sent the message home. Particularly the "Dentist" song.

The audience was focused by the body positioning of the characters on the stage, and the staging levels of all the characters as they performed at different times. An example was the dentist standing while performing while the other characters are still and lying down on the stage. The use of the fingers snapping to get your attention focused on what was going to happen next. The skid row bums were used also as a focusing element through their movements or 'freeze' positions. The ticking of the clock and the lighting techniques also contributed to setting the pace and mood of the scenes.
Acting

The acting requirements contrasted in Little Shop of Horrors and The Baby Dance in a couple of ways. The Baby Dance was a serious drama requiring the actors to communicate with the audience through speech, movements and often raw emotion. There was very little humor, and the setting was purposely confined which focused your attention on the intimate group of actors. There was no singing or a large cast of performers. In the Little Shop of Horrors the actors were required to have singing ability, physical agility, some slapstick movements, speech, and there was more exaggerated movements used because the play was a musical.

Aristotle

Aristotle's elements of drama which stand out are diction and melody. Audrey demonstrated a great poor New York dialect when she spoke. All the characters used the 1950's slang in their songs and speech. The melody element was the story put to music using the be-bop beat of the 50's. It was cool with an element of sleaze.

My Experience

I loved the play! I felt the actors did an incredible job. The scenery, costumes and choreography was well done. I have great admiration for the director, cast and crew as a production of this magnitude takes a great deal of coordination and professional skill. Good job! There was nothing I disliked about the play. I am glad that Seymour and Audrey did not live - good choice for their character ending. I also liked the ending of Audrey II asking the audience to "feed me". It was perfect and humorous, reminding us that we are vulnerable also. I did recommend to my friends to see the play and some of them did.
Little Shop Of Horrors

Aristotle’s element of plot in *Little Shop of Horrors* demonstrates to the audience that when you get what you want, it doesn’t always turn out the way you originally wanted it to. An example of this in *Little Shop* is Seymour’s quest for fame and fortune. He thought that if he could gain these things then his life would be complete. Being successful would attract Audrey, the woman he has loved from afar. Seymour thinks that Audrey could never want a man like him because he has nothing and isn’t successful. Audrey on the other hand, is dating the men she thinks she should and is extremely unhappy. She thinks that having a successful man will ensure her dreams of the white house with the picket fence and children. As for the spectacle in *Little Shop*, there was lots to see. The set was very realistic, having the look and feel of skid row. The bums in the play also helped to achieve the “look” of skid row. The way the set was put together made the buildings look condemned and shabby, much like bad parts of town. The way the middle of the set was flipped so that the audience could see the inside and outside of the flower shop was interesting also.

The acting requirements needed for *Little Shop* and those needed for *The Baby Dance* differ greatly. The time periods that these two plays were supposed to take place were completely different. *Baby Dance* takes place in this time period where *Little Shop* takes place in the late 50’s, early 60’s. The mind set is completely different in both plays.
Baby Dance is more serious than Little Shop deals with current issues of everyday life. Little Shop may be more difficult to perform though because it is a musical and has more conflicts and characters to deal with as an actor or actress.

Experiencing a production in the Tower Theater is as different as night and day compared to McConnel Auditorium. In my opinion, after watching both fall productions, there is no way that they could have switched stages. Seeing Little Shop in the Tower just wouldn’t have worked. The in-the-round style would have showed sides of the show that weren’t meant to be seen by the audience. As for seeing Baby Dance in McConnel, it might work but I doubt it. It would’ve seemed very two dimensional. Showing this production in the Tower made it seem more real. Having it shown three dimensional allows the audience to feel as though they are right in the middle of the story and are indirectly involved in what is happening on stage.

I enjoyed this performance very much. It was fun to watch and there was always something going on with the characters and music on stage. I liked most everything about the play and the costumes were great. The bums looked like bums and the Do-Wop girls looked like they walked right out of that time period. The only thing that didn’t work for me was the constant flipping of the stage. It was a little hard to understand at first, then later it seemed as if that was the only reason that the bums were there, to move the stage around. After awhile though I got used to it. The other thing that did not work for me was that the words that Audrey II was singing were hard to understand. You could tell that the plant was singing, but as for the words, they weren’t always so easy to decipher. The same went for the dentist. He wasn’t so understandable all the time either. I would
definitely recommend this play to my friends and did so on several occasions. They went and loved it too! I liked it because the music was great and most of the actors were great also! Audrey had the coolest talking and singing voice of the whole production!
Little Shop of Horrors

Little Shop of Horrors is undoubtedly one of the best performances I have seen come out of this department. I can only imagine the total group effort it took to pull something like that off. There are several pictures that stick out in my mind. The most prominent is probably when Seymour has just signed the contracts or sold his soul. The bums are following him in to flower shop all pointing their fingers at him in an accusing manner. This is a perfect example of manipulating the focus of the audience. Seymour was put at the highest point on stage. The bums formed a triangle around him putting him at the point. The fact that the bums were pointing at him helped to convey the feeling of accusation.

Another scene that stands out to me is when we first meet Orin. In all of Orin’s scenes he is slightly upstaging or taking a dominant position over the other characters on stage. The director uses this technique to show the dominance of character. In every scene with Orin and Audrey Orin was always on a higher plain of up stage of Audrey. This shows the audience that Audrey is subservient to Orin.

The acting requirements for this show were much different than those of Baby Dance. The Type of acting needed for baby dance was very emotional, not a lot of spectacle. Baby Dance was a very realistic play that did not require singing
and dancing. Little Shop was a very big show with a lot of spectacle. This changes the requirements put on the actors by leaps and bounds. The actors have to be able to sing and dance in a sense they had to be able to pull off a bigger than life performance. Baby Dance was not a bigger than life performance, it was a very personal play. The actors in Little Shop did have to be able pull out aspects of their personality that many of them probably didn’t even know was there. The actors had to pull much more personal parts of themselves out on to stage.

This type of show could not have been done in the tower it is simply too big. Where as Baby Dance is a much smaller show and requires a more intimate setting. I cannot say that I enjoyed one space more than the other. I feel that Baby Dance was an appropriate show for the smaller more intimate setting in the tower, while Little Shop would have been too much in your face in such a small space.

Over all I loved the show. The singing and choreography was wonderful, the costumes were exquisite. The costumes did a wonderful job of expressing the mood of the play. As times got happier the costumes got brighter, when times were sad the colors were darker. The only thing I was not to fond of was the dentist. I felt that Simon did an excellent job with the character I just wish he had gone a bit further with it. I would definitely recommend this show to my friends. The plant puppet alone is enough for anyone to come and see. The entire show was awe-inspiring. It is the kind of show I would be proud to say came from my department.
Little Shop of Horrors Review

While watching Little Shop of Horrors by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, the audience will see the spectacle of the man eating plant, the elaborate costumes and the characters as they burst into song. However, the average theater member may not get the theme that lies deep within the story line. The characters portray the moral message that success and riches can be corrupting in a fun and entertaining way.

The scene that was most effective in portraying the theme of Little Shop of Horrors was in act two when Semour, played by Robb Padgett, received television and magazine offers that would make him rich. In order to fulfill his dreams he would have to keep Audrey II alive and that required him to kill more people. He made the decision that his financial happiness and Audrey’s love was worth murder. This scene clearly showed that Semour’s morals and mind were corrupted by his popularity and newly found success. The casting seemed to be done well. All the character’s could dance, sing and act efficiently. After seeing the movie of Little Shop of Horrors I had a set image of what the characters should be like. Semour was just as I imagined him, Robb Padgett “looked” the part perfectly. His movement portrayed an self-conscious, insecure individual through his slumping shoulders and clumsiness. Audrey, played by Christina Cox, was not as senseless as I had pictured. Cox played the part well but in act one seemed a lot more self-assertive then in act two. It was hard to believe that she could be in an abusive relationship for the first part of the play. I enjoyed her performance in the second act much more. The most touching part was when she performed “Somewhere That is Green” because her true insecurity are revealed. A scene that sticks out in my mind is “Suddenly Semour”, this is when the two emotionally lowest characters become stronger because of each other. The two actors related to each other nicely, therefore being very believable. All of the characters had good projection and
articulation, this was especially important because not only the words but the songs were telling the story.

The director did a good job of portraying an effective stage picture. The stage had many levels, creating an interesting picture. Before the play started the bums were already out on the stage acting. This was a very good way of getting the audience involved in the setting and atmosphere of the play. Through out all of Little Shop of Horrors there are many actors on stage, however the director was successful in blocking so the audience’s focus was on the right character. The actor seemed to be “open” to the audience and usually placed center stage. Levels were used so that the speaking character was higher than the others, examples of this were Chiffon, Ronnette and Crystal were often on the stairs or the bums would be crouched down while the main character was standing.

The cast required in Little Shop of Horrors was completely different than in Baby Dance. The genre of the plays was opposite. The Baby Dance was more intimate and required the actor to portray a very serious person. The play was more realistic and demanded more emotion. The cast of Little Shop of Horrors had to be able to sing, dance and act. They had to use their imagination to play the characters and be open to anything.

Little Shop of Horrors was performed in McConnel Auditorium. This required the actors to project and articulate much more than the Tower Theater. The cast performed for an audience almost triple in size, so they needed to make their movements big and detectable. McConnel is much less personal and the performance does not effect the audience on the same level as one in the Tower. It is harder for the audience member to get involved with the characters when they are so far away. The playing spaces reflect the style of the show. Little Shop of Horrors was less personal due to the huge cast and
comedic genre, in comparison to The Baby Dance, where emotions really needed to be felt.

The melody in Little Shop of Horrors was very helpful to the overall production. The singing helped the show’s entertainment value and gave it a light, fun feeling. Audrey’s dictation added to her senseless, naive character. The misuse of English showed that these were not well educated characters. The background music added to the suspense or excitement of the scenes.

The spectacle of Little Shop of Horrors was vital to the production. The puppet plant was amazing and made the show. It was wonderfully made and added enormous humor to all the scenes. It was great that the plant had a personality of its own. The customs were realistic and fit the scene nicely. The costumes helped the story in progressively getting nicer as the characters got richer. A ironic scene that sticks out is when Audrey says, “I had trashy clothes not nice ones like these”. The stage picture was done well, using accurate props and scenes. I liked how the shop got more lighter and detailed as the characters became more prosperous.

Overall the show was great. I thought that it was a little long, but the second half moved along nicely. There was never a dull moment. The characters, props and music all blended together to create a action packed show.
Above everything, the word to describe "Little Shop" was extremely entertaining. I could not believe all of the excitement constantly going on stage. Probably one of the main things that added to all of the spectacle was the color choices for the set, the costumes, and the lighting. For instance the main focus (a lot of the time) was the man eating plant! This plant was not your average shade of green, or yellow, or anything else. This plant had many varied and bright colors to all parts of it from the time it was small, up until it was huge.

Next, I payed special attention to how all of the outfits were tied together. In the beginning there were a lot of oranges, reds, etc. for the main characters. As time went on, their outfits got fancier, and switched more to shades of pinks. What I found interesting is that even though the main characters and the doo-wop girls were getting nicer clothes, the bums clothes remained the same. Through-out the whole entire show their colors blended in with the sides of the set (the brick). I believe that this decision was based on the fact that they wanted the bums to blend in. The
bums were on stage the whole entire show, so if they blended into the set, the rest of the characters would stand out and our focus would be drawn to them.

Another thing that caught my attention in "Little Shop" was the lighting. For instance when Seymour is trying to type, and the plant is yelling "feed me!" The lighting in that scene changes to make kind of an eerie, rainbow glow. It just added to the intensity. However most of the show the lights were bright, and loud which was what was needed for such a grand spectacle.

The last part of the great spectacle of "Little Shop" was the music. As in any musical, the music is going to stand out. I feel like even the back-up music, when they weren't singing was incredibly high strung, and intense depending on the scene. Also the music allowed for large movement from the characters without it seeming out of place. An example would be when Orion first comes on stage. He is singing along with the doo-wop girls. They have very elaborate movement, if they didn't it would not have fit the music they were singing.

I thought "Little Shop of Horrors" was a wonderful production. I felt it was well casted, and extremely exciting and entertaining. Definitely an audience pleasing show.
Little Shop of Horrors review

Little Shop of Horrors is an action packed musical. Some may describe it as twisted because the whole show revolves around the idea of a human-eating plant. However, CWU's performance of Little Shop revealed lot more depth beyond the basic storyline.

Musicals require different abilities from the performers. Of course, actors should be able to sing (or at least fake it), but because musicals tend to have large chorus scenes, it is helpful if they can dance as well. It was essential for all of the performers to be able to sing independently in Little Shop because rarely were people of the same voice part next to each other on stage during large crowd scenes. Little Shop has a lot of continuous motion involved (including set changes), so it was important that the actors had and maintained a lot of visible energy onstage in order for the show to run smoothly and not lose the audience's interest. The Baby Dance was an intense play. A lot of the characters went through serious crises during the show, and the small cast allowed the audience to really feel along with them (example- The second act when Rachel and Richard first find out about the baby). There was a focused connection between each actor in Baby Dance that was accentuated by the subtleties of the play (scriptwise or directing-wise). Small gestures and little tidbits of speech were important in Baby Dance, whereas Little Shop seemed to run with the theme that bigger was better. An actor's inflection is not as important in a show like Little Shop as it is in shows like Baby Dance.

One thing that also made a huge impact on my impression of Little Shop was the proscenium playing space. The extra distance means that things on the set and body gestures may go unnoticed. Little Shop worked perfectly in the McConnel
Auditorium because it needs all of the extra side space to hide extra sets, plants, and actors. It would not have worked in the Tower Theater, especially in an in-the-round setting. Although some things probably did go unnoticed, the storyline is such that the audience knew who to focus on. There were bums on the stage at all times, but the character singing the solo was always the one to watch for so the story wasn't lost. This happened frequently, but one example of this was when Audrey I sang, "Somewhere that's Green."

Little Shop has been very successful since its beginning. It probably would not have gone over well in Aristotle's time. His sixth element of drama, spectacle, was definitely there with the bright, ever-growing plant and the continual movement that occurred. The staircase also added an interesting piece to look at, and the lighting was an important part of the whole "look" of the show. One thing that Aristotle's friends would have appreciated was when Audrey I left with her spineless dentist boyfriend and orange lights illuminated their exits.

Diction, referring to the clarity of an actor's spoken or sung word, is always important. It was easier for Little Shop players because they wore microphones. However, diction in terms of heightened language and an avoidance of slang were not in this show. In fact, some of the dialogue is borderline cheesy. But it all worked with each character, tied the show effortlessly together, and brought the show to the audience's level appropriate to the time and situation. It was okay that Audrey II got peoples' attention by shouting out a "Hey you!" It's not often that one would have heard a person living on skid row use the word "thou."

I was very impressed by this production. The thing that struck me the most was how solid it was musically because often musicals end up being plays with little off-key ditties scattered throughout them. It was very strong, especially when the full cast was onstage and chords just locked- fabulous! Characters were also developed more than I could have ever thought possible, which gave Little Shop an actual storyline. It was
distracting to have the doors flung wide open for a half hour after the show began. The splashes of afternoon sun were not helpful in the overall tone of the musical. There were also some sound glitches the afternoon that I attended the show. That was avoidable, and all of the microphone scratches and poor balance between the band and soloists were the only noticeably unprofessional things onstage. I thoroughly enjoyed the show, recommended it to friends, and then they proceeded to do the same.
"Little Shop" is gruesome fun

By DEWEY MEE
Contributing Critic

A strange, large, unidentified plant strikes terror in the hearts of Skid Row Inhabitants!! Odd subject matter for a musical, you say? "Little Shop Of Horrors" (playing November 13-15 and 18-21 in McConnell Auditorium) is based on Roger Corman's quirky 1960 cult film. Alan Menkin and the late Howard Ashman turned "Little Shop" into a modern musical morality tale that recalls "The Rocky Horror Show," "Grease" and "Sweeney Todd." Surprise, surprise—Menken and Ashman also wrote the music for Disney's animated blockbusters "The Little Mermaid" and "Aladdin."

Director Jon Keer uncovers the drama hidden inside the tongue-in-cheek script and splendidly juxtaposes humanity and macabre humor. Skid Row (brilliantly conceived and visualized by Scenic Artist Patricia Sweesy) is a prison for nerdish Seymour (Robb Padgett), poor Audrey (Christina Cox), the object of his unexpressed affections, and anyone else unlucky enough to live on the block. Seymour attempts to improve his meager lot by growing a strange, exotic plant he names "Audrey II." (Audrey II is manipulated by Joshua Schultz and Jeff Ouradnik, and the voice is supplied by Carson Lueck). As Audrey II grows, Seymour becomes an "overnight celebrity" and sought after Garden Club lecturer. Audrey II quickly turns devilish and Seymour is forced to commit "awful, bloody" deeds against his better judgement.

The music is varied and altogether irresistible. The snappy, infectious title song has a melody that will linger in your brain for weeks. Christina Cox belts out her section of "Suddenly, Seymour" with every ounce of vocal power she possesses. "Somewhere That's Green," Miss Cox's bittersweet solo, has a wickedly humorous preface (I know Seymour's the greatest...but I'm dating a semi-sadist'). To top all this off, Robb Padgett dances a tango with Kevin Salcedo, who gives a great performance as Mr. Mushnik, and the Skid Row Chorus dances in a Conga Line.

In addition to the perfectly cast Miss Cox and Mr. Salcedo, Simon Burzynski is marvelous as creepy Orin, who finds dentistry to be the perfect outlet for his sadistic tendencies and addiction to "giggle-gas." Orin enjoys his work and definitely is "The Leader Of The Plaque." But, as the chorus correctly exclaims, "Who wants their teeth done by The Marquis De Sade?"

"Little Shop" contains some mildly adult situations and a conclusion that may catch some viewers off guard...but why quibble? It all adds up to a production that is energetic, gruesome, and enormously entertaining fun.
To: Theater Arts Department  
Fm: Liahna Babener  
Re: Little Shop of Horrors  

Wednesday evening, I attended with my family the Departmental production of "Little Shop of Horrors." What a wonderful evening it was for all of us!  

Please accept my compliments for a dazzling show. The music, the acting, the staging, the sets, lights, and sound, the costumes, the choreography, the props--the entire production was splendid from beginning to end. Everyone who contributed deserves congratulations.  

I was particularly pleased that my eight-year old son was so entranced with the play. He worried on the way home that the characters who had been eaten by the plant might not be OK, but he seemed reassured to see them on stage at the end.  

I felt especially proud of this endeavor in light of the crisis with the lighting that happened the week of opening. That difficulty was handled with amazing skill and expeditious action, and you are all, especially Mark Zetterburg, to be commended for enabling the production to go forward under such circumstances.  

"Little Shop" is a complete success, and I am gratified to see that the Department's tradition of first-rate productions is intact. Thank you all for the fine work you do.  

Best wishes,  
Liahna Babener
I was (metaphorically) drugged and transported shackled and hogtied...to LSOH last night by our Moses Lake neighbors.

I've only walked out on two movies in my life and one of them was LSOH. So I was expecting a typical schoolhouse rendition of a lackluster property. However...

Jon Kerr's creative and detailed direction captured my imagination from before the opening bell and held me without so much as a glance at my watch during the entire show. I sought him out at intermission and complimented him, but anonymously.

The vocal/music direction and choreography (and of course that wonderful set) were also TOP drawer. I was impressed!

Please pass my compliments on to all involved, and to the wonderful talented young people who "ALL" were the stars of the show, each and every last one of them!

Wayne Freeman

PS: Wes, I now direct and produce adaptations of screenplays for clients from around the world and often need "college age" voice over talent as well as authentic dialects (black, NYC, southern, etc.) and foreign accents.

The pay is absolutely abysmal...but, it is exciting, educational and challenging work. Audio is an acting genre not to be entered into lightly.

I'll keep in touch, If and when I need talent, re the above. WHF
Dear Jon:

Just a note to let you know how much I enjoyed and appreciated your fine work with the cast of LITTLE SHOP.

There were so many good things to admire — especially the ensemble feeling, the nice vocals, the solid casting, the proper tempo for each scene — the honesty without “overacting” of roles that can be easily overacted — your excellent work with Kevin Salcedo in which you took him in to new level.

The little things that tell me I’m in the hands of a director — Christina turning back at the door, slick physical routines, chorus working together, trying to cover scene changes, and others — made the evening very enjoyable.

The problems with the setting are unacceptable, and I apologize to you on behalf of the department for placing you in that situation. To your credit, you made the most of a bad “scene.”

In areas of concern, the costumes were not always flattering to the actors, and this problem should have been more closely addressed. I wanted very much to see the plant operators step out for a bow during the calls. It’s also possible that your concept of “freezing” the production served as an excuse for some elements to be left unfinished. In these situations, it might be better to leave the show fluid. I believe these actors can handle it.

But all in all, really fine work. I hope we can invite you back and look forward to that opportunity.

Cordially,

Wesley Van Tassel
Professor

Please note:
This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.
400 E. 8th Avenue • Ellensburg, WA 98926-7460 • 509-963-1766 • FAX 509-963-1767
EOAA/Title IX Institution • TDD 509-963-3323
ACTORS AND CREW AND MUSICIANS AND even JON —

THIS SHOW WILL BE VERY SUCCESSFUL, THANKS TO YOUR WONDERFUL WORK.

ENJOY THE RUN — LOVE EACH MINUTE!

THANKS FOR YOUR GOOD WORK, ESPECIALLY JON....

DUDE and WES
All the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action.

Jon -

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to be part of such a fabulous show. You're a great director and you really know how to push people to bring out the best of their capabilities. Thank you for helping to create a show that's better than pizza! I look forward to working with you again!

Sara
John,
Thank you so much for letting me be a part of this spectacular show!

Jackie
"Chet" AKA "Tomboy Pete Ring"

Hi you—Thank you so much for all you have done for me and the show. Thanks for being a great mentor and friend. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you and be a part of this incredible show.

Dina

John,

Thank you so much for giving me a chance in the show. It has been wonderful, and I am so grateful for your incredible directing job! You have been one of the most creative and inspiring people I have ever encountered. Thank you again for the opportunity to be a part of this beautiful show!

Danielle

John,
I have learned so much from you. I have held the best time of my life and I have grown as an actor and as a person. Thank you for giving me this opportunity and for being a GREAT Director. Your passion and energy have been contagious and have inspired me to give my all. Thank you for everything! A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL THE OTHER 'STARS' IN THE SHOW!

Kevin

Thank you for pushing me farther than I ever believed I could go. The discipline and inspiration you’ve given me will carry with me forever. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything. I will never forget it!

Love, Allison (A.K.A. Holly)

Hi—Thank you so very much for being a part of this incredible show. I am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to fly and to be a part of such a fantastic show. I can’t wait to see you again! 

Ann D. "Antelope"

Hi you—Thank you so much for all you have done for me and the show. Thanks for believing in me and for casting me. Thanks again! 🎩

Annie J (Dorothy)
Mr. John Kerr;

First of all, I wanted to say "thank you" once again for letting me be apart of "Little Shop of Horrors." I have learned so much form you, as an actor, in such a little amount of time. I feel that you have been an inspiration and someone whom I will always hold in high regard. As you know, I will be attempting to get into a good graduate program in the near future. To that end, even though we spoke briefly about this, I was wondering if it would be possible to receive a "letter of recommendation" from you. I realize that you do not know my work or me as well as you should in order to write such a letter. However, I hold your opinion in high regard, and believe that it would definitely add a lot to my chances of achieving my near future goals. Thank you once again for investing your time in me.

Sincerely;

Simon Burzynski
Central Washington University

Please note:
This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.
MEMORANDUM

TO: Jim - it's a good thing

FROM: his words are now --

DATE: or he'd give us more

RE: books.

what a great beginning for our

MA in the gale program;

W