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***Chicago: A Movie Musical Mockery of the Media's
Razzle Dazzle Image of Murder***
Emily Sulock

Introduction

Almost a decade has passed since Rob Marshall's 2002 movie musical, *Chicago*, took home the Academy Award for Best Picture. For a movie musical this was a huge success considering that a musical had not won this category since 1969. The film dominated the 2003 Academy Awards as it was nominated for twelve categories, overall winning six. No one had expected the film to do so well since it was three decades in the making after Bob Fosse's original release of the Broadway musical in 1976. Many times there was talk of adapting the musical to screen, but after Fosse's death in 1987, not many people felt comfortable with stepping into such large shoes ("From Stage to Screen: The History of *Chicago*" 16:45). Marshall was the first person to think of a concept that would allow the dark and cynical musical to easily transfer onto film. His concept: use one main character, Roxie Hart, and tell the story through her eyes. She is a 1920s modern woman, who longs for a fast paced life of liquor, jazz and her name famously known on the vaudeville stage. The film integrates musical numbers and scenes as Roxie imagines herself and everything around her as a vaudeville show.

Throughout the past century the story of *Chicago* has been adapted several times, but each version continues to present the same statement: that it is a dark satire which mocks the criminal justice system and the press' obsession with publicity and celebrity status in the twentieth century. Maurine Dallas Watkins, the original playwright to the 1926 script, was a journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. As females made their way into the journalism business they became known as sob sisters, writing heart-wrenching stories that would gain sympathy from the public. Watkins was not really considered a sob sister because she kept her writing neutral, often just telling the story how she saw it and not over dramatizing information. She was a shy and quiet woman but she had a quality about her that people automatically trusted. She would find

out some of the most valuable information because criminals would often forget they were talking to a journalist (Perry 15). She was assigned the murder trials, interviewing some of the city's most dangerous criminals. Two of the murder cases she followed involved Belva Gaertner, a cabaret singer defended by attorney William Scott Steward, and Beulah Sheriff Annan, defended by William W. O'Brien. The more Watkins wrote about these cases, the more she realized the corruption that was happening in journalism and the legal system. She decided to write a script, drawing inspiration from her murderesses and their lawyers, introducing her main characters: Velma Kelly (Gaertner), Roxie Hart (Annan) and Bill Flynn (Steward and O'Brien). The plot told the story of two women on trial for allegedly murdering their lovers as they were "under the influence of gin and jazz" (McConnell 62).

The first adaptation created was a Cecil B. DeMille silent film a year after the play's release. In 1942 the second adaptation was a black and white comedy film entitled, *Roxie Hart* with Ginger Rodgers as the lead. As Watkins grew older she decided to withhold the rights to the play without reason until her death, which then allowed Bob Fosse to create a musical adaptation for the Broadway stage. Fosse turned to composer and lyricist John Kander and Fred Ebb to create the musical score as he choreographed and directed. The show premiered in 1975 and it ran for two years with all-star casts, but unfortunately it was a show before its time and audiences were not ready for the bawdy, vaudeville styled show that allowed actors to speak directly to them in a Brechtian style, breaking the fourth wall (Markus and Sarvar 8).

After twenty years away from the Broadway stage the show made a revival with a new script by David Thompson, direction by Walter Bobbie, and choreography by Ann Reinking (played Roxie in one of the original casts) who used Fosse's style as inspiration to preserve the original tone of the show. With a new generation of audiences more accustomed to creating

celebrities out of murderers, i.e. the O.J. Simpson case, the cynicism of the show was more easily accepted. It has become the longest running musical revival on Broadway with over 5,400 performances.

For the past decade, I have admired the 2002 film of *Chicago*. Every time I hear those beginning notes I am filled with excitement. But it was not until a year and a half ago when I read Ginger Rogers' autobiography that I realized the film is an adaptation of a 1920s play. From that moment on I have researched as much as I can about Maurine Watkins and her life as a journalist during 1920s Chicago. In my research I also came across the adaptations that were made from the original play. As a dancer, I have always known of the Broadway musical, but I was not aware of the musical's history. The more information I discovered, the more I realized what the film actually stood for. The story was mocking the criminal justice system's corrupt way of presenting a murderess to the press, and then it mocks how the press easily fools the public into believing that a beautiful young murderess is innocent. But that was not enough. I needed to know why Rob Marshall's adaptation stole the Academy Awards in 2003, when nobody expected it. I was curious to discover how a single plot, one that has been adapted different ways over century, still pertains to a modern society where we are easily as, if not more, engrossed with murder trials, thus creating celebrities out of murderers. I plan to examine why these women, who should have quickly been forgotten, are still being recognized anonymously in the 2002 movie musical adaptation. How does the film's cinematography help easily relay the change from reality to Roxie's fantasy? How has Rob Marshall used his own unique concept to create a film for modern audiences with a plot that is almost 100 years old, while maintaining Watkins' original underlying message?

Literature Review

Dramatic and sensational news, better known as yellow journalism, has graced the media and public since the 1800s. The stories emphasizing crime, murder, celebrities, disasters and anything that dishes a juicy scandal, have spiked sales for the media by popular demand. One of the first cases to have gained notoriety under the “sensational public sphere” (Anthony 489) was the Helen Jewett Case in 1836. Helen Jewett was a 23-year-old female prostitute brutally murdered by one of her male clients. Newspapers all over the country covered the trial for over three months and it was mostly due to the New York *Herald's* editor James Gordon Bennett Sr. attempting to build a profitable newspaper (Anthony 489). A similar story that gained notoriety, and possibly helped the outcome of the trial, was the Lizzie Borden Case in 1892. Borden, arrested as the primary suspect in the brutal murder of her father and stepmother, was held on trial for almost a year as two newspapers wavered about her innocence. James Gordon Bennett Jr.'s New York *Herald* and Joseph Pulitzer's New York *World* were the two newspapers to release a wide range of information to the public pertaining to the trials (Bernhardt 2). “The journalistic style of the publishers was important in the presentation of the case and the manner in which they used the era's gender ideologies to portray Lizzie Borden” (Bernhardt 31) because it led to the discovery of her innocence in the trial through public support. But what is it about these cases, particularly how the media presented these women so that the public can relate to them on a personal level, that popular opinion helped to control the outcome? How has the media come to gain such an influential standpoint, making fame more desirable even if it means lowering one's moral values and consequentially corrupting each generation?

John D. Stevens confronts these questions in his article “Social Utility of Sensational News: Murder and Divorce in the late 1920s.” Although his main focus pertains to the media in

the 1920s, it is because of the coverage of cases similar to Helen Jewett and Lizzie Borden that led to the social change in the 1900s. The outcome of these two cases gave young women more of a vocal role amongst men. Stevens spotlights that newspapers covered “sensational news, particularly of murder and sex, in order to sell more copies” (Stevens 53). Using two separate trials pertaining to murder and divorce, he suggests that the communities’ involvement with news can redefine an individual’s set of values. Typically as a new generation comes of age they wish to rebel against the older generations and those with traditional views. During this time newspapers were influenced by the concept of yellow journalism, creating what was called “jazz-journalism... the new tabloid newspapers were streaked with yellow, and the magazine stands were as replete with crime and romance as the movie houses” (Stevens 53). As more people read or listened to the crime stories, they would pass judgment on those in the stories, creating a new ideal set of standards in society. In his essay, he describes a murder trial that was used because of its sense of drama. The more dramatic a story, the easier it became for journalists to create riveting main characters. For example in this trial, there was: the murder victims, the wronged wife, and the comic relief. They would use this type of storytelling so that audiences would have something to grab onto. As the trial took place, the New York *Mirror* “devoted about one-third of its total news space to the trial (14 pages on the opening day)” (Stevens 56). People consumed themselves with the trial whether the story released new information or not. Stevens’ point is that the public is not often inclined to respond emotionally, the story only becomes influential when the media broadcasts it (53). He states, “murder is an inherently ‘sensational’ subject, although writing style and display can make it more so” (Stevens 53). Murder alone is a topic worthy of attention, but how a newspaper releases a story is what attracts readers.

Focusing in on a sympathetic character, newspapers are able to get the reader's attention emotionally. More typically those readers would be women because during the Victorian era they were thought to be emotional (due to reproductive organs), physically less capable, and held less mental capacity compared to men. Therefore once a person, primarily a woman, becomes emotionally involved with a case they start to feel connected with the person on trial. In the trial of the Lizzie Borden case, Mark Bernhardt states, "Why the papers took their respective positions can be attributed to two primary factors: gender ideology and journalistic style. Victorian notions of womanhood implied that ideally women were nonviolent and yet women had the potential to murder" (2). The gender ideology focuses on the differences between men and women, stating that women were too gentle to commit murder. Women during the Victorian era were required to behave and dress in a certain manner; the public could not believe that a woman would act out in such a masculine manner. Society reasoned that the only way a woman could commit murder was through insanity due to emotional instability from their reproductive organs (Bernhardt 4). The journalistic style is how the story is presented to the public, i.e. if the newspaper takes a personal side to the trial. The New York *World* stated Lizzie Borden as guilty but then changed their opinion saying she was innocent as the *Herald* stood by their first claim of her innocence. "Building up an image of Lizzie as an innocent woman wrongly accused of murdering her parents and facing execution made for an even more dramatic story" (Bernhardt 23). The *World* claimed her not guilty because the public grew tired of a story where the young woman finally gets what she deserves. As moral values are questioned, more problems arise from the public because of the media's influence.

The media's power over the public increases everyday, quickly diminishing moral values and changing human ethics. Clayton E. Cramer posits that the media plays the principal role in

influencing public opinion by immortalizing murderers. In “Ethical Problems of Mass Murder Coverage in the Mass Media” Cramer uses the news coverage of murders in *Time* and *Newsweek* between 1984 and 1991. He begins with the news coverage of one man who committed a mass murder, then continues with another man committing a similar murder who found inspiration from the previous man’s news coverage. Cramer lists the three ethical problems that he believes the media have caused:

1. The level of coverage given by *Time* and *Newsweek* to certain great crimes appears to encourage unbalanced people, seeking a lasting fame, to copy these crimes.
2. The quantity of press coverage given to mass murder suggests that political motivations may have caused *Newsweek* and especially *Time* to give undue attention to a particular type of mass murder, ultimately to the detriment of public safety.
3. The coverage given to murder by *Newsweek* and *Time* gives the electorate a very distorted notion of the nature of murder in the United States, almost certainly in the interests of promoting a particular political agenda (29).

Once one story is given too much publicity, in time it may encourage another person to seek fame in a similar way. Whether the person is consciously or subconsciously seeking fame through murder, they jeopardize the public’s safety. Cramer raises a good question, “How do we measure the quantity of press coverage for a major crime? The more remote a newspaper is from a crime, the less extensive the coverage we should expect” (31). At what point can the media say there is enough coverage about one story and move on to the next? Does the word “enough” even exist to the media? For the media, it becomes a question of balance. Because the First Amendment guarantees the freedom of speech and of the press, it is the media’s role to inform the public of the most important news stories in a more honorable manner. From the media’s standpoint, it is hard to walk away from a story when they know revenue is high, but from the public’s standpoint, sometimes less is more.

In 1926 Maurine Dallas Watkins challenged these concerns by writing a script that was something entirely new to the modern world entitled *The Brave Little Woman* (Perry 230), but

later known as *Chicago*. Watkins, a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* followed plenty of murder trials that finally led her “to create a deeply cynical satire of the celebrity mania that she saw as the dominant feature of twentieth-century urban life” (Perry 225). From watching and writing about the trials for the public, she witnessed what people would do for a little publicity. The play:

focused on the criminal-justice system, ‘sensation journalism,’ and the stupidity of old-fashion notions of chivalry in an era of pretty young women wielding guns and sex to get what they want. It endeavored to expose the utter corruption of both the legal system and the newspaper industry—how lawyers and reporters were interested not in justice or truth but in making themselves look good (Perry 231).

To expose these sides of the characters, she drew inspiration from real people during their trials and utilized quotes from her original articles. This was also around the time that the idea of publicity was born. The more attention a story received, the more the public became personally invested. The woman who inspired Roxie’s character, Beulah Annan, loved attention from the newspapers and knew that the more journalists wrote about her, the more publicity she would receive. Annan grew a personal relationship with Watkins, often telling her how sorry she was for killing her lover. If the public continuously read that she was sympathetic, it would help the outcome of her final trial. Watkins described the 23-year-old as “young, slender, with bobbed auburn hair; wide-set, appealing blue eyes...more than usually pretty” (Perry 101). Her picture was often printed in the papers, with her caption as “the prettiest woman ever accused of murder in Chicago” (Perry 101). With each article that was written claiming this statement, the more positive publicity Annan received. In the play the reporter comments to Roxie,

Who knows you now? Nobody. But this time tomorrow your face will be known from coast to coast. Who cares today whether you live or die? But tomorrow they’ll be crazy to know your breakfast food and how did yuh rest last night. They’ll fight to see you, come by the hundred just for a glimpse of your house-Remember Wanda Stanpa? Well, we had twenty thousand at her funeral (Watkins 15). (*sic*)

Using a dark humor, Watkins makes fun of the people she watched perform during serious criminal proceedings. She is doing what Cramer has suggested of the media and that is immortalizing murderers. Yet, she is doing it in a subtle way through art, forever mocking the media and the criminal justice system in four different adaptations in the past century. Cramer stated, “The human need to celebrate human nobility, and to denounce human depravity, has caused us to devote tremendous attention, both scholarly and popular, to portraying the polar opposites of good and evil” (29). In a way this was Watkins’ objective: to raise the topic that the media influences our human interest in contemporary crime. In the documentary *From Stage to Screen: A History of Chicago*, Chita Rivera (from the original 1975 cast) mentioned that audiences “thought that [Fosse] was wiping their face in the fact that we honor, we make celebrities out of criminals” (2:25). *Chicago* spotlights the media’s influence over American interest in a murder trial over what is happening in other parts of the world.

Even though Fosse’s adaptation of the story was not well received in the 70’s, audiences of the 90’s and new millennium were well prepared for a bawdy story that confronts the media’s constant attention to scandal. While audiences admired the 1996 revival, there was still talk of converting the show to film. John Pavlus’ “Razzle Dazzle” talks about the production side in attempting this adaptation and that the most important aspect of the film was not only cinematography but lighting as well. Both hold the responsibility to tell the story properly. Each, similar to the media, influence how the audience is going to feel about a character being accused of murder. Not many people wanted to take on the responsibility of creating a film adaptation of *Chicago*. The original musical already had a difficult concept of a vaudeville style where actors spoke to the audience, breaking the “fourth wall” which is when the audience and the actors pretend there is a fourth wall standing between the two (Markus and Sarver 8). Trying to portray

that concept into film is highly complicated since that notion does not always easily translate to screen. This is because the screen acts as a film audiences' fourth wall. Rob Marshall, director of the 2002 Academy Award winner, decided "to braid Chicago's musical numbers into the narrative by staging them in a theater called the Onyx, which represented the world of Roxie's fantasies" (Pavlus 43). In order to integrate the songs into Roxie's fantasy world of show business, cinematography had to play a large role to incorporate interesting transitions from the real world to the stage.

As though the cinematography was not difficult enough, another aspect to the theater is lighting. In this film the lighting acts as another character. "Musical theater draws in this moving light – it's part of the energy of the show.... The audience's perspective does not move in theater like it does in film. Instead, the movement of the light is like our 'camera eye,' our perspective changer" (Pavlus 44). In theater, lighting introduces a scene change as a camera does. It sets the mood for the audience, subliminally telling us what emotions to feel. When we see blue light, we can feel somber and sympathy for the character. When we see red, we feel a sense of heightened sensual anger. In the film, the lighting plays the role of scene changer when introducing Roxie's reality and dream sequences. In her reality the lighting is dull, dark, grey and seems as cold as a jail cell during the winter. But in her fantasies the lighting is as bright and majestic as live theater. The purpose of the film is to connect film audiences to a beloved live theater show. This notion lays more pressure on the cinematographer because he has to tell the story while captivating audiences to believe that they are attending a live performance, not just a film.

Pavlus is not the only person to note the technical struggles that went into the movie musical. In an article written in 2009 for *Cineaste Magazine*, "Cutting Rhythms in *Chicago* and *Cabaret*," writer Karen Pearlman breaks down the cinematography and how each film shot

directs the audience through the movement of story, emotion and image. Pearlman states “movement of image is the point of *Chicago*. It is a film that audaciously, and for the most part successfully, declares that the razzle-dazzle of punchy and aggressive dance, cinematography, and cutting can sweep away our moral compass and lose us in frenzied pleasures” (31). The cinematography guides us smoothly through the difficult transitions as a musical scene crosses between Roxie’s dream and reality; the audience begins to feed off the character’s emotions and energy. The audience finds that their moral values are personally questioned as they get swept up in the excitement of the film. An example that Pearlman uses is during the musical number of “Cell Block Tango” where six female prisoners tell their story to Roxie as she envisions them dancing out their committed murders. The shots change from everyday life in the prison to a large dark room setting the ambience of how dangerously powerful these women are. Not only are they beautiful women but also they each carry a rage with them as they dance that brings the audience to aggressively agree that these men indeed “had it coming.” Pearlman writes, “Killing someone for popping their gum is entirely justified by the emotion and energy that courses through the body of the dancer’s performance, shaped by the editing, to give her the convincing slam that signals her righteousness, even through the incredible cynicism of her story” (31). The way a scene is portrayed can influence the audience’s feelings about the situation or the outcome of what is happening. It tells us how we should feel since these women are justified for their actions. If, as Pearlman argues, through cinematography the characters influence our emotions and our own values, what other musical scenes pose Watkins’ original inspiration to mock the media for creating the celebrity frenzy that surrounds murder trials?

Method

I am using a textual analysis method by breaking down certain musical scenes of the 2002 movie musical *Chicago*, directed and choreographed by Rob Marshall, that directly pertain to mocking the media and the criminal justice system. Since Maurine Dallas Watkins created the satirical play “to expose the utter corruption of both the legal system and the newspaper industry” (Perry 231), I am examining to what extent her original idea is still coming across to audiences in a contemporary style.

After thoroughly watching the film multiple times, I will deliberately select the musical numbers that pertain to the media and the criminal justice system. The film has twelve musical scenes throughout the hour and fifty minutes. Some of these numbers introduce or help us to understand a character or situation as the film progresses. There are three scenes that I plan to dissect because they are the most relevant to the media and criminal justice system. The musical numbers I plan to examine are “All I Care About,” sung by lawyer Billy Flynn, “Both Reached For the Gun,” include Billy, Roxie and the press, and “Razzle Dazzle,” sung by Billy to Roxie.

By using Karen Pearlman’s article, “Cutting Rhythms in *Chicago* and *Cabaret*” and her method of three different kinds of movement (story, emotion and image), I plan to break down the musical scenes, focusing on the cinematography and how the choreographed movement and lighting help to distinguish reality and Roxie’s fantasy world for a contemporary audience. As many of the musical scenes quickly change between real life and the vaudeville show she creates in her mind, I will examine how Marshall’s unique concept works, or does not work, for those particular numbers.

Pearlman mainly breaks down the editor’s successful, or unsuccessful, job of the “shaping of movement” (28) within the story. She looks to how the musical number is opened by

a dramatic question, problem, or opportunity for the main character that has stakes and implies an action. Each number then it not just a song, but a complication of the dramatic question, a raising of the stakes, and a resolution or a throwing of the plot into another direction, which in turn opens new dramatic questions (29).

I will use this concept to confront the questions pertaining to the musical numbers that I am examining. I will look at Marshall's concept in delivering the scene to the audience and how each is set up. "Both Reached For the Gun" is the scene I plan to spend the most attention to because it is the first, and only, scene the audience sees Billy and Roxie confronting the press. It is also the first press conference for her trial. It uses all of the concepts that pertain to my research question: the mocking style against the media and criminal justice system, the change between Roxie's reality and dream sequence, and how Marshall's choreography and directorial style are unique to the contemporary film.

This method will help me answer my research question because it breaks down each scene, questioning how the movement of story, emotion, and image evolve in that specific musical number. In addition to applying her method for the scenes used, I plan to examine how Marshall's concept of Fosse's original music and choreography make these specific scenes unique and how they are more relatable to a modern audience.

Analysis

The underlying theme for the storyline of *Chicago* is to mock how corrupt the journalism industry and criminal justice system are, as well as to show how desperate people can get for fame. Rob Marshall's 2002 film adaptation keeps this tone by using his own unique concept of telling the story through one character, Roxie Hart (played by Renée Zellweger). During the course of the film the audience watches Roxie murder her lover for tricking her into believing that he can help her reach the fame she's always dreamed of through the vaudeville stage. Roxie, desperate to be a performer, watches her dreams shatter as her lover dies, but out of luck finds

fame in the corruption of the press. Marshall set up the film so that the story is told through Roxie's perspective. As she lives out her reality, the audience is often quickly switched into her mind's eye to show a kind of dream sequence that dramatizes her life on a vaudeville stage. Since she has never gotten a job in show business, she constantly dreams of her life on stage.

The beginning of the film is introduced as the opening trumpet music slowly plays and the camera fades in to an extreme close up of a woman's blue eyes. The camera zooms into her right pupil until the frame is completely black. It then quickly pulls back and we are given the opening title "Chicago" blinking in 1920s Broadway style lights. As the trumpet draws out its final note, the words flash in the frame and we are given another extreme close up of the profile of a man's lower face saying "5,6,7,8." Jazz music picks up as the following shot has us walking down a hallway to eventually show a group of people standing in a jazz club. The next three shots use crosscut edits, showing a jazz drummer, an extreme close up of someone smoking a cigarette and another extreme close up of a drink being poured. The concept for the film has already been set up with the extreme close up of Roxie's eyes. This image tells us that the story is told through her mind's eye view. The quick intercutting shots that we are given tells us that a lifestyle in the 1920s is fast and involves drinking, laughing and smoking cigarettes while enjoying jazz music in a smoky vaudeville club.

The whole opening sequence establishes the cutting rhythm of the film as many things are introduced at one time. We are given multiple shots of audience members, jazz players, and dancers in the dressing rooms. We also begin to follow one woman as she walks into the dressing room of the club, but we are only given extreme close ups of everything but her face. It is not until she is on stage with the spotlight revealing her face that we are introduced to Velma Kelly (played by Catherine Zeta-Jones), a cabaret singer who has just murdered her husband and sister.

She performs her opening number, "All That Jazz" without her sister as the camera changes angles from a pan shot, to a close-up of Velma, and finally to a traveling shot across the club to show Velma and her dancers. After Velma is clearly introduced as the cabaret singer, the camera travels from the stage to focus in on a blonde, female admirer and so we officially meet Roxie Hart. The next few camera shots cut between Velma on stage and Roxie in the audience; from these images we see Roxie's desire to be in Velma's shoes, acting as an eager child watching her favorite performer. With her jacket still on and her purse in her hands, she seems to have just gotten to the club or is waiting for someone. As Velma sings a high note, we see the first time Roxie actually projects herself on stage. First the camera zooms in on her face and cuts to a close up of Velma's face. The next cut goes to the initial frame of the extreme close-up of a woman's blue eyes (who we now know is Roxie) to a close up of the back of Velma's head, and finally to a close up of Roxie on stage. The next frame shows Roxie in Velma's costume as it zooms onto her face soaking up the spotlight, but it is cut short as a man interrupts her fantasy calling her name. As we watch them exit the club we are shown a close-up of the man slapping her ass immediately as the camera cuts to a close-up of Velma slapping her thigh and the tempo of the music picks up. Marshall uses choreographed movement, such as the slapping, throughout the rest of the film to initiate a crosscut between two characters or reality and Roxie's fantasy. Throughout the rest of the musical number Velma's performance is crosscut with Roxie fooling around with the man. We discover through these images that this is her lover, not her husband, as she turns over a wedding photo. In the end of the scene we see policemen arriving at the club as Velma's number comes to an end while she poses on stage with her head back and arm in the air as her thumb and pointer finger form the shape of a gun. The beginning sequence of the film is important because it sets up the storyline for the two characters. In seven minutes we watch

Velma as a cabaret singer and how she performs her last number before she is sent to jail; at the same time we see Roxie longing for a life on stage and how she's been having an affair. The point of the quick cutting between these two women's lives is to get the audience used to the fast paced lifestyle and the rhythm of the rest of the film (*Chicago Commentary* 06:31). It tells us that the rest of the musical numbers will be just as fast paced and continuously crosscut. Now that the characters have been introduced and we are engrossed with these two women, the plot can take off and we begin our journey with Roxie.

A few months have passed since the night in the club and we are shown Roxie in her apartment with her lover. In this scene we are further introduced to Roxie and why she is having an affair: he talks her into sleeping with him because he tells her he has a contact down at the club who can give her an act. After her lover has pushed her into a corner she hysterically takes out a gun and shoots him. As she realizes what she has done, she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror and we are crosscut into her mind as four images of shadowed dancers are crosscut against each other. We are then brought back to her reality as she watches the image of herself in the mirror blur to a black screen. A flash goes off and we catch a glimpse of her lover on the ground with the bullets in his chest. This scene shows Roxie's dream shattering in a matter of seconds. Everything she has built in a life of liquor and jazz has vanished as quickly as the fast paced life she desires.

In those four images that we are given in the crosscut of shadowed dancers we see the lighting of the stage and the club are different than the lighting that surrounds her in reality. As her everyday life is filled with dull colors, this contrasts against life on a vaudeville stage since the lighting used there is bright, sharp, luscious, intoxicating and even entrancing us as audience

members to continuously watch. The lighting of her fantasy invites us to be a part of the scene. We can begin to understand her desire to be on stage and famous.

Almost every musical number in Roxie's fantasy is introduced or incorporated into the story this way. Whatever is happening among the characters in real life correlates with the music, lyrics, costuming, choreography, set design, make-up, lighting, and camera angles as in her fantasy. Each of these aspects helps to connect Roxie's reality with her mind's eye view of her life as a vaudeville act. This seems to play up the film's overall message: that everything in life, especially journalism, publicity and the criminal justice system are all a spectacle.

The next character that we are introduced to is Velma and Roxie's lawyer, Billy Flynn (Richard Gere). He is a man who is known to have never lost a case during his entire career because he knows how to play to the public's love of high crime stories involving jazz and liquor. Billy knows how to play up to the press's desire to raise profits, giving them scandalous stories to feature in their newspapers. He is the first character that challenges the role of power between the press and the criminal justice system because he knows how to manipulate the game in his favor.

As every new and important character is introduced through a musical number we meet Billy in a similar way through Roxie's fantasy. She learns about him from the matron of Murderess Row, "Mama" Morton. As Mama is describing how every woman wants Billy to defend her case, the wall behind her lightly fades to show women standing behind bars purring the words, "We want Billy, Where is Billy, Give us Billy, We want Billy." The camera cuts to Roxie's face, slowly zooming in, and we see there is a new brighter light that crosses her face, particularly her eyes. We are again being welcomed into her fantasy as she watches Mama's image disappear and see's how the eight women behind bars are longing to have Billy defend

their cases. The bars disappear and a stage is lit up with more women dressed as follies. The camera zooms in to two shadowed figures at the top of a staircase, one man down on one knee shining the shoe of another man who is dressed in a top hat. A drum rolls as his name is being announced and just as we think a spotlight will come up on the man in the top hat, it shines on the man who was shining the shoe. The first lines he sings are, "I don't care about expensive things, cashmere coats, diamond rings, don't mean a thing, all I care about is love." This image, and the lyrics that are given to us, are from Roxie's imagination of how she anticipates what he will be like. Mama has described a lawyer that has never lost a case, someone who is a lucky golden coin to have in the courtroom. The image of him shining the shoes and the song lyrics make it seem as though he loves his job and cares about the women he is defending, when in reality he will defend any trial for a high price while gaining more publicity.

He sings the lyrics "I don't care for wearing silk cravats" as Roxie's fantasy changes to reality. We are introduced to the real Billy Flynn who is being fitted for a tailored suit in his office. The images, and lyrics, in Roxie's fantasy mirror the complete opposite of Billy's life. In the fantasy we watch him surrounded by numerous beautiful women singing about love being the only thing he needs in the world. While in reality, Billy does not care for love and prefers all of the expensive luxuries of life as he gets into the back of a Rolls Royce with a personal driver. As the car drives out of the frame, the camera cuts to the fantasy where the women surrounding Billy have created a type of car out of bodies, crossing the stage as he is in the midst of them. The reality images cut into the fantasy as we learn that Billy is working on Velma's trial and they are in the midst of the press conference. Roxie finally gets to introduce herself to the lawyer and she learns that he has a \$5,000 retainer fee. Since she does not have that kind of money she offers herself instead of the money. He responds to her by saying, "Now listen you mean just one

thing to me. You call me when you have \$5,000” (38:10). Roxie’s fantasy scene comes back in, but we officially realize how delusional she is when it comes to other people’s intentions and how Billy is only greedy. She is not a very intelligent person and is quick to offer sex as a trade to get what she wants. She did not pick up that her lover was using her and never intended to fulfill his promise. She did not even pick up that the best lawyer in Chicago is only after money and to keep the press on its toes. The only person she knows she has more power than is her husband, who will do whatever he can for her because he loves her.

The number “Both Reached for the Gun” is one of the most important songs of the plot because it shows the relationship between the press and the legal society. Whatever information someone in the legal side gives to the press will eventually go to the public, and whatever the public is feeling can either favor the lawyer’s client or go against them. Both groups rely on each other to stay in business. In the song the audience learns that Roxie agrees that she did shoot her lover but did it out of self-defense as they both reached for the gun.

The scene opens with Roxie and Billy standing outside of the courthouse introducing Roxie to the press in her first press conference. In a desperate attempt to get her own voice into the papers, she takes the spotlight from Billy telling the reporters, “I bet you want to know why I shot the bastard” (45:55). Billy’s response to her dramatic attempt is to pull her back towards him as he says through the side of his mouth, “Shut up dummy” getting a sharp look from Roxie and introducing the music of the song. The camera is crosscut from Roxie’s expression, to Billy outside of the courthouse, to inside a theater with Billy sitting in a chair downstage center with Roxie, who is now portrayed as a ventriloquist dummy, on his lap. Since we have already heard him call her a dummy for embarrassing each of them, her representation as a ventriloquist dummy makes sense because even in reality she is only a doll in Billy’s overall scheme. It is

known to us that she is unintelligent, typically acting very immature, so his name-calling not only puts her in her place, but also sets up her fantasy. At 46:43 the camera angle changes to show behind Roxie's back as Billy is holding onto her. The frame shows that Billy really is not pulling on anything, he is holding onto a piece of wood that is attached to her back, moving his pointer finger up and down. It is just a trick of the eye saying that the press will believe whatever he states as well as showing that Roxie feels he is controlling her.

For the next four minutes the camera crosscuts between her reality and her fantasy as the press questions the two of them to find out the details of the story. As a way for the crosscuts to happen smoothly, the characters follow through with choreographed movement that was given by Marshall. For example: in reality a reporter asks where her parents are, the camera cross cuts to the fantasy with Billy answering the question as a puppeteer but it is Roxie presented as a doll who mouths the words "six feet under." Billy then interjects by saying, "But she was granted one more start." When he says the word "one" he holds up his left finger to reference the idea of one as the camera crosscuts back to reality. Several times in the fantasy the camera changes its rhythm through the use of one of these three techniques: a tracking, tilt, or pan shot. It can move from left to right in the reality sequence and continue into the dream sequence moving the same way, leading us from one perspective to another and beginning to confuse the audience about which scene actually depicts reality. Through the editing techniques of quick pace camera cuts, even we are tricked into Billy's manipulation along with the reporters and the public. We are a part of the fast paced world of crime, alcohol, and jazz music where society only cares about a scandalous story. The faster Billy answers questions, the more he is able to repeat that Roxie did it out of self-defense. We are not only tricked but just as exhausted as the people in the scene

because of the amount of energy it takes to hold a press conference and for everything to go as planned.

It is the choreographed movement such as a gesture or a head movement that helps the story to move along and for the audience to follow Roxie's perspective, that in her mind she is Billy's puppet doing and saying everything he tells her to do. This is telling us that even Roxie realizes she is manipulated into Billy's control. She needs him to get her off the case as innocent; therefore she knows that if she does not agree to his every move, it could bring about her death. As the scene goes deeper into the song, we are shown more of Roxie's fantasy than her reality since she is now Billy's puppet and is just mouthing his words. It becomes a power struggle between the two characters: Roxie wants the attention on herself to gain fame but she has to let Billy get the spotlight because he is the one with experience when dealing with the press. We can still see this power struggle at 47:11 when Roxie is acting as the dummy and gestures to the gun that is on her bureau; she reaches her hand out, covering Billy's face. He quickly lowers it so he can be seen. We realize that Velma Kelly was correct in the scene prior when she states to Roxie, "You wanted my advice, right? Well here it is. Don't forget Billy Flynn's number one client is... Billy Flynn" (44:35). Through his introductory scene and this one, we see that he does not care for any of his clients. He only cares about the money he earns and keeping his record clean. His character stands for the corruption in the criminal justice system.

The reporter, Miss Mary Sunshine (Christine Baranski) stands for the corruption in the journalism industry. Although she is only a minor character she has a relationship with Billy and Mama Morton that is unlike the other reporters. In the beginning of the scene she is the first to ask a question to Billy and Roxie by just a gesture of her finger. After Billy announces that they have entered a plea of not guilty, Miss Sunshine's question is: "As you know my paper is dry.

Do you have any advice for young girls seeking to avoid a life of jazz and drink?" (45:32).

Instead of asking an ordinary question to get the facts, she jumps right into the idea that Roxie is innocent. It is as though she knows the truth but is just as willing as Billy to stretch it as much as possible because she knows what sells her papers. As we saw in the Lizzie Borden trial, the New York *Herald* changed its opinion of her from guilty to not guilty because the public would rather read about someone wrongly accused than someone who deserves the punishment for what they did. Miss Sunshine plays just as an important role as Billy because she helps influence the public's opinion by publishing Roxie's story. The other reporters in Roxie's dream only have personal contact with each other by dancing and singing as marionettes together. By presenting the press as marionettes, it suggests that they are easily influenced by Billy's claim; in other words, they are just toys that Billy plays with in his game of control. Since it is Roxie's dream sequence she is the one who sees the journalists as marionettes. Although we know she is immature and naïve, the journalists as marionettes do not suggest that they are as naïve as Roxie. It suggests that they are too lazy to investigate the information of the story for the truth because they know that the story Billy has given them is enough to sellout the papers.

As the other reporters are manipulated by Billy's story of Roxie's experience, Sunshine sings that reaching for the gun is "understandable, understandable, yes it's perfectly understandable, comprehensible, comprehensible, not a bit reprehensible, it's so defensible." We are then shown the three characters in the same close up together as Billy taps Roxie's chin to make her give an innocent smile to the audience/reporters. This single frame shows the audience that the outcome of the equation is because of these three people. Roxie (left) needs Billy as her lawyer, and Billy (center) needs Ms. Sunshine to portray Roxie as an innocent girl wrongly accused of murder. The frame then zooms in on Roxie as she smiles, showing us that although

she is the main factor for this story being told, she is still the person being used as a doll in the media and the criminal justice's system game. They know what will sell the papers and in the end what will give her and Billy more publicity. She needs them to become famous as much as they need her story for profit.

As the reporters sit behind Roxie and Billy, the camera changes angles to show Billy as the mastermind puppeteer standing above controlling, not only Roxie, but the reporters as well. In the fantasy she envisions him controlling their strings, making them do what he wants them to do. This represents that in reality he is controlling/swaying the reporters' opinions of the trial and how they are presenting Roxie to the public because if she is innocent to others she will hold the public's pity for her situation as wrongly accused, since what she did was out of self-defense. We hear the reporters agree that "Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes they both, oh yes they both reached for gun." At the end of the musical number we are taken back to reality as we watch Miss Sunshine type up her report for the morning papers. At the height of the music, the reporters that have been manipulated by Billy's statement are dancing around being pulled left and right by the control of Billy. The camera's pace of crosscutting happens faster and faster between him standing and laughing over the reporters, to Roxie dancing without his control, and back to reality as the papers are being printed and the public begins to read about her trial. The Billy on stage drinks a large glass of milk while his own voiceover is holding a long note. Our last shot shows the stage full of the reporters collapsed from the exhaustion of the conference as he holds the empty glass of milk above his head while Roxie lies across his lap. This little majestic trick sets up for a scene later in the film when Billy describes that everything is an act and the public only wants to see a good show.

The scene that follows this energetic number is a small newsreel about Roxie's fame.

Since her husband does not have the money to pay for Billy as a lawyer, they auction off personal items from her apartment. The things that seem to sell the fastest are what she used the night of the murder, such as her lingerie or the record that played. We see women cutting their hair and dying it in a similar fashion as she is shown in the newspapers, while little girls are buying “Roxie” dolls. One man even shows his tattoo of a heart with Roxie’s name through it to the camera. Billy and Miss Sunshine’s manipulation has worked as the city of Chicago falls in love with Roxie’s sympathetic story.

From this scene, we see that Billy knows his way of controlling the reporters; he needs them to report exactly what he says in order to get Roxie off. Between reality and Roxie’s idea of the press conference there are 26 camera changes. The beginning changes need to be perfectly set to choreographed movement to signal a change in perspective. If not done properly it can overwhelm the musical number making it unsuccessful by confusing the audience. Since Marshall also choreographed the dance numbers of the film, he wrote in small changes to signal a camera change or show a relationship between two characters (*Chicago Commentary* 04:34). Marshall’s clever idea of making the press conference scene into a puppeteer moment shows Billy’s power over the media aspect of the trial. Before the press conference scene happens, we see how Billy meets with Roxie in order to create a story of her innocence, something to feed to the media. We see that the media and criminal justice system have corrupted the public into creating stories that will keep them asking for more. Billy and Miss Sunshine may be corrupt, but they are artists at what they do since they are able to get the public’s sympathy, eventually leading to Roxie’s innocence.

The final musical number that really involves a spectacle is “Razzle Dazzle” the scene when the verdict is being decided. In a previous scene Roxie becomes over confident in her new

found fame and fires Billy as her lawyer. After watching a fellow cellmate hang, she rehires Billy desperately doing whatever he asks of her. Before she heads out to her final trial she confronts him by telling him that she is scared. She is quickly put back in her place and shows her immaturity as she acts like a little girl looking for consolation in her father. Billy's reaction is one of the few times that we see him act sincere because this is his job and he knows that he is good at his job. He responds to her by saying, "I've been around a long time. Believe me you have nothing to worry about. It's all a circus, a three-ring circus. These trials, the whole world. It's all a show business. And kid you're working with a star" (1:19:18). The doors to the courtroom are opened by two women dressed as though they were in a circus, and what we find is that the courtroom is filled with women all dressed similarly. Billy's pinstripe suit now has red sparkles down the stripes as he advises Roxie to "give 'em the old razzle dazzle." Women are performing acrobatic and aerobatic tricks all throughout the room as the typical members of a courtroom are awaiting her arrival. The walls of the room are even decorated as a circus tent. This scene gives us a glimpse into Billy's life in the courtroom, where he is most comfortable. In her fantasy, Roxie sees him as the ringmaster, and therefore in control of the room and her fate. When he brings her in front of the press' side to get pictures, we are again crosscut from her fantasy to reality. The trial begins as Billy sings in her fantasy and defends her in reality. One of my favorite cuts begins in reality as Amos, Roxie's husband, gets up to take the stand. When he walks by Roxie stands up as though to confront him, all while Billy sings the words, "they'll let you get away with murder." As she stands there watching Amos, the fantasy takes over and Roxie sees all of the women and Billy surrounding her, whispering the word murder at her. It is the only time we see Roxie act sympathetic for everything that she has put her husband through because he is the only person to love her and treat her properly. Following this, Billy questions

Amos on the stand asking why he has filed for divorce against his wife. Amos, a simple-minded man, is easily confused by the conversation. The camera is set in reality as it shows seven separate shots of the two men during their back and forth conversation. In the final shot reality and fantasy combine as Amos sits in the reality world, but a circus woman has her arm around his neck. Roxie envisions this because she is watching Amos become confused with the amount of questions he is being asked. She understands that Billy has Amos right where he wants him, all adding to his act of dazzling the crowd and changing Amos' mind about divorcing Roxie. The final part of the musical number happens as Roxie takes the stand to be questioned. In her fantasy, she sits in a hoop and is transferred through the air from her seat to the stand; it is the moment the film has been leading up to. As Billy sings "Razzle Dazzle," it becomes clear that the whole movie is the "razzle dazzled" image of each industry.

The overall tone of the film is held in the final scene as Velma and Roxie, both were found innocent and then released from jail, decide to work together as a team because it is the only way they can gain back the fame they had during their trials. Roxie's fantasy has finally become a dream as she performs her first opening night along with Velma. As they are being introduced to their audience the announcer says, "You've read about them in the papers and now here they are, a double header! Chicago's own killer-dillers, those two scintillating sinners, Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly!" (1:41:55). The most profound scene portraying the mockery of the system is when they exit the stage to return with fake guns and the audience's laughter. We are cut to people in the audience that we are familiar with such as Billy, as we watch him smile and shake his head. The unlikely duo, Roxie and Velma, have finally found their appreciation for each other because they can finally gain a celebrity status with the help of the other. Although Marshall's adaptation admires those involved in the criminal justice system and the media and

how they perform their jobs, it does mock the system's relationship. The mockery is just hidden under the spectacle that the film presents. The musical numbers are so grand and blinding that the mocking tone becomes lost. The true satirical quality forever lies within Watkins' original work.

Conclusion

The story of *Chicago* is a piece of literature that will stand the test of time because it shows that in the past 100 years alone, human beings have not changed. We are similar to those who lived a century before us, in that our morals have not changed. The reasoning for the play is to ridicule the media and the criminal justice system. From someone who experienced the whole process when crime was at its height in the media during the 1920s, Maurine Watkins gave us a glimpse into how each aspect of a criminal trial is involved with making murderers into infamous celebrities. Through the past century we have been given five different adaptations that seem to have become more of a success than the last. But with each adaptation it has become more of a spectacle. Since Fosse was the first to adapt it to the Broadway stage, he added in his flair for spectacle and with the help of Kander and Ebb, the music and lyrics were added to match his grand ideas. When we go to a Broadway show, or even a film, we want the spectacle. We expect to be taken out of our daily lives and engrossed in a new one for two hours. Although audiences did not respond positively to the 1976 premiere, I think it was just because they were not ready for a show to be so honest about society. They also were not as immune to the media over publicizing of a story. But I think Fosse's adaptation challenged people into a new way of thinking that maybe the media and the criminal justice system do act this way, whether they were ready for it or not.

However if it were not for Fosse, Marshall's adaptation would probably never exist. He needed the style of the show and the original music to work from in order to create his masterpiece. Now because of Marshall, the story that would have died out with time has been brought to a new generation with a fresh look. He does have technology at his hands, but he utilizes it in some of the most unique ways because he includes his background as a choreographer and director. He connects all of the best aspects of the theater and combines them with film in his movie musical. In live theater there are other components that act as characters and he invites them in the film. One of the components is lighting. In theater lighting introduces and dismisses a scene. It can heighten the drama or cool down a mood, lighting is everything. He uses different types of lighting when referencing reality and Roxie's dream sequences. The lighting of reality is dull and grey, referencing the type of life that Roxie lives, but the lighting of her fantasies references life on stage and the bright, sharp excitement it offers. Another component that is added in the film is the cinematography. In the first ten minutes, we are introduced to the fast paced rhythm that is used throughout the rest of the film because of the amount of cuts and crosscuts that happen. We are introduced to the two main characters and the life that each of them live, both surrounded by the 1920s lifestyle of jazz and liqueur.

Within the cinematography one concept that can easily go unnoticed is the choreography. When writing the script, choreographing and planning edits Marshall choreographed small gestures that would trigger a camera cut. Small gestures that would include a head movement or hand placement became important. Nothing was overlooked. Since Marshall was filling in Fosse's shoes, he might as well have done it meticulously, never neglecting the smallest movement. However because there is such an emphasis on the spectacle the dark satire against the media and criminal justice system is easily missed. When I first watched the film I was

caught up in the music and choreography, which is why I admire the film so much. It was not until I began my research that I noticed the underlying theme. The deeper I went in my research I realized how important Watkins' original script is because it still relates to the media and criminal justice system. Since she experienced it firsthand she saw how they interacted with each other, eventually portraying it in the play. The reason the theme is so important to notice is because it exposes each industry and reminds us to not be too trustworthy of the information we are handed.

The limitations I came across in my study were that I was unable to see the revival of *Chicago* on Broadway before presenting. I was also unable to get a preview of the 1976 Fosse version. Without having references to the Broadway shows, I had to rely on interviews and commentary by Rob Marshall and other people involved with the original shows to give me insight to what it was like working with Fosse. I also relied on Douglas Perry's book *The Girls of Murder City: Fame, Lust, and the Beautiful Killers who Inspired Chicago*. Out of all of the research that I have done, he seems to be one of the few people to really understand Maurine Watkins and all of the adaptations that came out of her work.

Other limitations I came across in my studies were accessing the original trials from the 1920s and more information about Watkins. From what I found, she was originally very excited about life in Chicago and how different it was from her strict upbringing, but halfway through her playwriting career she realized how unfortunately corrupt society was and left life in the city for unknown reasons. She withheld the rights to *Chicago* restricting anyone from creating a new adaptation of the play; it could have been because she was so disappointed in the adaptations that had already come out of her work (Perry 264). It was difficult for me to find information from her original trials until I came across Perry's book. He became my most reliable source of

information because he gives information on not only Maurine Watkins, but also the other women involved in Chicago's newspapers and the women on Murderess Row. I am interested to know how Watkins would feel about Marshall's adaptation since she was disappointed with the other works. Unfortunately there will never be an answer but I can only assume that she would be disappointed in what has become of her creation. The film and other modern adaptations are supposed to highlight the irony of how much the original plot relates to society today. It is supposed to make the statement that the journalism industry and criminal justice system have not evolved in the past century by giving us an endless amount of criminal celebrities. Marshall's adaptation focuses on the music and choreography but not how the satirical tone towards corruption in the 1920s is still prevalent today.

After looking at all of the aspects and adaptations of *Chicago* we are left to only think of the future. Where will this infamous show take us in the next hundred years? Will it still be exposing/representing journalism and the criminal justice system in the same way it did during the 1920s? Only time can give us these answers, but we can keep studying the media and how it publicizes a criminal trial. We are left today with infamous trials of people such as Helen Jewett, Lizzie Borden, O.J. Simpson, Scott Peterson, and more recently Casey Anthony or the George Zimmerman Case. Scholars should be continuously studying what is being published everyday and how much publicity each story has. If given the time I would look into a couple of these cases and would focus to see that as time goes by each story that happens gets more publicity. The story of *Chicago* is important to study because it is a piece of literature that is among common knowledge for younger generations. The public knows just as much information, if not more, about the people during their trials than anyone does of celebrities. Scholars should keep looking to pieces similar to *Chicago* and how these works push the limits by shining a mocking

light on the media and criminal justice system. Watkins can rest in her grave knowing that, although she was a part of the sensational journalism in the 1920s, people are still knowledgeable of her contribution of a cynical play that exposes the media and criminal justice system for what they are. It is just hidden amongst the modern spectacle of the film.

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