

## **Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*:**

### **A Study of Some Features of Post-WWII America**

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#### **Abstract**

"I want everybody to be smart, as smart as they can be. A world full of ignorant people is too dangerous to live in" (Kanin; 210). This quote from *Born Yesterday* seems to be Kanin's personal philosophy instilled during his early childhood and explored through his canon of work. In many of his plays, Kanin explores highly controversial themes; these themes reflect his outspoken political and social views.

A clearly influential figure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century theatre, Kanin was able to draw a portrait of America post-WWII through his satirical play *Born Yesterday*. The play, actually, depicts the transformation of a former chorus girl from an ignorant young "lady" into an educated and cultured "woman". Revolving around the characters of Billie Dawn, her boyfriend Harry Brock, and her tutor Paul Verrall, the play conveys the 1940s era looking for luxurious life, power and money.

The present paper is basically a political and social commentary on Kanin's *Born Yesterday*. The study focuses on the discussion of three axes: women's education rights, gender roles, and post-war politics. Analyzing these issues within the scope of the play, the research paper explores how they intermingle with each others to present various colours in depicting a portrait to exhibit some features of post-WWII America. The paper ends with a conclusion which states briefly the main findings of the study.

## **Garson Kanin's *Born Yesterday*:**

### **A Study of Some Features of Post-WWII America**

**Garson Kanin wrote *Born Yesterday* during World War II, and when it debuted on Broadway in 1946, the country was in a state of post-war optimism. Kanin's skewering of Washington politics and corruption, particularly the shady activities of lobbyists, is all too familiar territory today, but at the time of the play's debut, it was controversial. While initially controversial for its scathing and unapologetic portrayal of corruption in Washington, *Born Yesterday* won over audiences with a combination of charming wit and memorable characters, in particular, the loveable Billie Dawn (Gassner; p.182 & Bordman; p.87).**

**The play's comedic scenes revolve around scrap-dealer Harry Brock, who has bullied and schemed his way into prosperity. After getting fifty million Dollars, he has come to Washington to buy himself a senator and a piece of legislation which will support him to get even richer. The one potential stumbling block is his long-time, live-in girlfriend Billie Dawn; a former chorus girl whose behavior will not be proper with Washington's social circle (Calta; p.10).**

As Brock thinks Billie does not fit his current social circle, he follows the suggestion of his lawyer to hire a tutor to cultivate her style and to give her a higher class education. Though Brock is concerned about Billie's social skills, he is himself blustering, crude and unrefined. But his success in taking advantage of the post-war scrap metal business, as well as his cleverness and influence in pushing his way into a big government chance to further that business, gives him power over those around him (Jones; pp.4-6).

During World War II, scrap metal became more important than ever before. Because of the need for vast quantities of metal in the production of new tanks, ships, airplanes, and guns, the necessity of collecting and reusing all available scrap, and the rationing of items such as fuel, oil, and rubber, was a vital part of the war effort.... Steel and iron recycling became especially important, with certain campaigns collecting millions of tons of each.... There is no question that on the whole, industrial scrap was necessary to kick-start the war effort. By the time the war had finished, the U.S. had produced over 85,000 new ships, 80,000 tanks, and nearly 300,000 aircraft, as well as millions of guns and billions of rounds of ammunition (Pittsburgh Public Theater; p.10).

When the war finished, the battle-fields of Europe and the Pacific islands were littered with countless tons of destroyed and abandoned vehicles and weaponry, no longer useful for waging war, but once again, useful for the scrap business. The opportunity for wealth presented by the reclamation of wartime scrap was incredible. In *Born Yesterday*, Harry Brock is one of these hopeful opportunists looking to buy out European scrap companies, import scrap from Europe at a low price, and turn it into big bucks back in the U.S.A. But for him, and other prospectors who sought to get rich quickly, there were a mound of taxes, regulations and laws in the way. These laws were designed to prevent monopolies companies which control the majority of the industrial institutions in which they do business (ibid; pp.10-11).

If Brock wanted to complete his business plan, he would need to remove such regulations; this is why having Senator Hedges on his side is very important. So, Brock and his lawyer plan to bribe Senator Hedges to skirt the tariffs, regulations, and red tape that stand in the

way (King; p.18). However, after the first meeting with the Senator and his wife, Brock's idiotic girlfriend Billie Dawn, nearly kills the deal every time she opens her mouth:

Senator Hedges: We must show you around. Beautiful city.

Mrs Hedges: Too bad the Supreme Court isn't in session.

You'd love that.

Billie: What is it?

(Mrs Hedges doesn't know what to make of this. She looks over at the Senator to see if he has any ideas).

*(Born Yesterday, Act One;*

*pp.193-194)*

If Brock's going to succeed in Washington, Ed suggests that he either dump her or marry her. The problem is that to cover Brock's illegal activity, he and his lawyer bullied Billie into becoming the dummy head of most of his corporations, and he cannot give her the brush-off because "she owns more of him than he does" (*ibid*, Act One; p.197). The bull-headed industrialist, Harry, realizes that if he has got any chance of making a name for himself, he has got to do something about Billie. So, he chose the idealistic journalist Paul Verrall to give Billie a higher class education.

Billie: He thinks I'm too stupid, huh?

Paul: Why, no —

Billie: He's right. I'm stupid and I like it.

Paul: You do?

Billie: Sure. I'm happy. I got everything I want. Two mink

coats. Everything. If there's somethin' I want, I ask.

And if he doesn't come across — I don't come across. If you know what I mean.

*(ibid, Act One; p.201)*

As Paul tutors Billie, he gets her to read the newspaper and look up the words she does not understand, she opens up to him about her life and their relationship changes from teacher/student to something richer. With the assistance of Paul, Billie succeeds beyond anyone's expectations. She blossoms under his tutelage and her eyes are opened to much more than the classics of literature. And we witness Billie's empowerment through her education, that knowledge does give her

power, as she explains to Harry: "Well, all this stuff I've been reading...I realized what it means. How some people are always giving and some taking, and it's not fair. So I'm not going to let you any more, or anybody else" (*ibid*, Act Three; p.221).

During the war, as most working-aged men served in the military, women had left the home and entered the workplace. As the war came to a close, the men returned from abroad and women returned to their former role in the home, but something had changed; women had *tasted* independence. The issue of women's rights fought its way to the foreground of United States politics for the second time in the twentieth century (Gans; pp.2-4 & Finney; pp.13-15). The intellectual awakening and independence of women, addressed through the character of Billie Dawn, is often characterized as a modernized version of George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. However, while Eliza was truly transformed, Billie's evolution is better explained as an awakening that develops from the education Paul provides (Madsen; pp.7-9).

Billie came from a blue-collar family. Her father is an elevator operator, and she is very proud of having been cast as a chorus girl in the original production of "Anything Goes", that's where she met Harry, and he has kept her for a decade. Perhaps her own shaky economic background made it easier for her to accept Harry's dictatorial ways and temperamental outbursts because, with him, she is following now a much better lifestyle (Henley; pp.10-11).

Once Paul opens Billie's eyes to what else there is in the world, she really blossoms; she starts to read, which she has never really done before. She uses a dictionary for whatever words she does not understand. She starts to see the illegal and immoral ways Harry is perfectly willing to use to get richer and is angry at him for that. Moreover, she is angry at herself for having accepted his demands so unquestioningly in the past (*ibid*).

At the beginning of *Born Yesterday*, the protagonist Billie Dawn has the acumen to get what she wants in life, even if she only desires two mink coats, but she uses her sex appeal as a tool instead of her mind. She therefore presents, like other women in Kanin's work, a contradiction between liberation and convention. Kanin was writing immediately following WW II, a time when American women were transitioning back to domestic duties after having filled roles in society left open by enlisted soldiers. For this reason, post-war America emphasized specific and distinct gender roles for both men and women. On the surface, Kanin's play revolts against the cultural

distinction of these gender roles; however, there is always a subversive trait undermining the progressive nature of Billie Dawn (Hampton; pp.5-7).

Dumbness is a critical element to the character of Billie Dawn. The entire premise of the play is based on the ignorance of the former chorus girl and the plot develops due to her subsequent education. Billie has street smarts and knows how to use her body to get what she needs, but she is oblivious to etiquette, current events, or academic knowledge. On the surface, it may appear that Billie's eventual education in the play is progressive; however, her education is sculpted by and for men rather than for the purpose of self-improvement. She begins her journey of learning under the orders of Harry Brock and in the hope of impressing Paul Verrall. Even as Billie becomes more and more educated during the play, Kanin inserts lines that make an audience laugh at Billie's remaining stupidity (*ibid*; pp.7-8). These serve as reminders of how much more Billie has to learn to undermine her agency. When Brock asks her about the meaning of "*peninsula*", Billie confidently answers "It's that new medicine!" (*Born Yesterday*, Act Two; p.211) Thus, even as Billie becomes educated, she retains some of the idiosyncratic "dumbness" which keeps her within a traditional gender stereotype and shows her to be intellectually weaker than the men around her.

Moreover, Billie Dawn's immorality manifests as promiscuity. Billie and Brock have been living together for eight years. Her father does not support the relationship, calling Billie a "concubine" (*ibid*, Act Two; p.206). Billie sinks further into sexual debasement by suggesting to Paul early in the play that they start an affair of their own; she lets him know that there have been a few others before him. However, as Billie's education develops, so does her moral compass. Billie acknowledges her immoral situation after Paul reminds her she traded something for her two mink coats. Her response, "Don't get dirty you're supposed to be so wonderful, so don't get dirty" (*ibid*, Act Two; p.208), concedes her acts as immoral. By the end of the play Billie has decided to leave Brock and marry Paul, legitimizing their relationship. Billie's moral problem is solved but only through participation in marriage. Billie's move from one relationship to the other also undermines the new sense of freedom that she has found in education (Glenn; pp.22-28).

The play has many timelessness and underlying issues. The political issues like knowing how to use and manipulate the law to achieve one's own ends or paying off a greedy politician to get what

one wants are still in the headlines today. Harry wants to bribe Senator Hodges to oppose laws that would curtail his future profiteering from the scrap metal left over from WWII, and his lawyer, Ed Devery, is perfectly willing, for a hefty price, to help Brock do just that (Sullivan; pp.12-13).

Brock's plan to make money off the aftermath of World War II, besides being illegal, would also have been viewed negatively by the public as an attempt at "war profiteering". Since the advent of mass production techniques, businesses involved with the production of weapons, vehicles, and supplies for battle have often seen widespread conflict as an opportunity to make quick cash.... *Born Yesterday* is one of many World War II-era works of literature to deal with the subject of profiteering, with others including Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*, and Arthur Miller's play *All My Sons* (Pittsburgh Public Theater; pp.10-11).

Paul is the kind of idealist that Ed may have been when he was younger, but something happened to Ed along the way. He started out being very idealistic about law and government and even wrote a well-respected political book, but he has lost his way. Now, he has been a Washington insider. He has disillusioned, and his main comfort is in a bottle of the most expensive scotch he can buy (Rich; pp.6-8).

The decade of forties was a decade of political turmoil and intellectual discovery in the United States. WWII had come to a close, pulling the United States out of the Great Depression. Frenzied debate about nuclear warfare had become prevalent in the political world, and paranoia about Communism and the Soviet Union were widespread in national politics, foreshadowing and leading to the Cold War (Emsworth; p.4). When we hear the following lines in the opening scene of *Born Yesterday* we have to stop for a while and think for a moment; here's a Washington journalist, Paul Verrall, talking to a Washington hotel maid, Helen:

Helen: Changed much, do you think?

Paul: What?

Helen: Washington?

Paul: Not enough. I could stand a little more change.

The idea of the war wasn't to leave everything the same, you know.

(*Born Yesterday*, Act One; p.183)

What a curious line Kanin put in the mouth of Paul Verrall! "The idea of the war wasn't to leave everything the same" (*ibid*). Did Verrall really think the idea of the war was to bring about change? What other agenda for WWII was there within the lines of the play? (Emsworth; p.2). The conversation between Helen and Paul emphasizes Paul's priorities and points to one of the play's major thematic concerns; that the government has to change. Paul criticizes the current United States government but he has not lost hope in the democratic ideals the United States symbolizes. He centres Billie's education on early democratic thought and a renewed sense of nationalism, suggesting Billie study both current events as well as writings of Jane Addams and Tom Paine, among others (*ibid*).

In fact, in 1945 the far left was thinking opportunistically. The ruin left by the war gave the leftists an opening to push through a long list of socialist programs, and in Britain and other European countries that is mostly what they got. Paul Verrall's complaint was that the government was wasting its chance to do something radical in Washington. *Born Yesterday* is a brilliant comedy but what has been embedded in it is as much leftist propaganda as in Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* and J. B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* (*ibid*; pp.3-4). From the play, we can gather something of Kanin's ideology:

Helen: Listen, you know what they charge for this layout?

Paul: Two hundred and thirty-five a day. [This was 1946;

Harry Brock had rented a hotel suite that would probably cost \$5,000 a day in 2013.]

Helen: Listen, anybody's got two hundred and thirty-five

dollars a day to spend on a hotel room there ought to

be a law.

Paul: Too many laws already.

Helen: While I'm getting eighteen a week I don't see why

anybody should spend two hundred and thirty-five

a day.

Paul: For a hotel room.

Helen: That's what I say.

Paul (smiling): I know some people who'd call you

a communist.

Helen (darkly). Tell them I'm thinking about it.  
Seriously.

(*Born Yesterday*, Act One; p.183)

*Born Yesterday* leans on the same leftist themes of "class struggle" and capitalist venality as the Hellman and Priestley plays. Harry Brock in *Born Yesterday* is a corrupt business tycoon who has made a fortune, not by building a better mousetrap, but by ruthlessly stomping out competition. Like Ben Hubbard in *The Little Foxes*, he has an enemy of the working man. Brock's mistress, Billie Dawn, casually lets it slip that Harry Brock actually arranged the murder of a labour agitator who was trying to organize a union. And like Ben Hubbard, Harry Brock gets ahead by bribing public officials to eliminate competition (Nadel; pp.12-15).

Yet in his play, Kanin has Harry Brock claim that he has a champion of "free enterprise" (ibid). Harry Brock was actually just the opposite; monopolization is an enemy of free-market capitalism. But the radical leftists had a stereotype to promote, the capitalist as corrupt and brutish, and that is what Kanin made of Harry Brock (ibid).

Was Kanin hoping for the day when Marxist revolution would come to the United States and Britain as it had in Russia? We do not know, but consider one of the last lines in *Born Yesterday*: after Harry Brock had been roundly defeated he asked Devery: "What's goin' on around here?" and Devery answered: "A revolution" (*Born Yesterday*, Act Three; p.227). It seems that the playwright, trying to take advantage of the universal detestation of fascism to promote socialism, was trying to promote the idea that American capitalism was no better than, indeed much the same as, fascism (Emsworth; p.3). However, there is no direct evidence that this left-leaning playwright was consciously following a prescribed party line:

On the other hand, Brock's assault on Billie and his later plea to her; "I don't hit you so hard," are exactly the fascist impulse. Compare to Mussolini's famous reply to the journalist who asked him what he would do upon gaining power: "Why, I will kill you.".... When Paul called America a democracy Billie instantly saw the light

of "It ain't fayah!" The irony was that Paul Verall was a morally, socially responsible and conscience-raiser for "The New REPUBLIC." Of course, Paul Proving how horribly deadly are the destructive possibilities to corrupt of "free market" capitalism. Even the seeker after truth, justice, and the Progressive American way almost lost his "soul" (ibid).

Paul wants power given back to the people and he hopes to see government's corruption eradicated; but he is not naïve. He realizes there will always be a struggle between selfish and unselfish men, but humankind does not have to live in greed and corruption. Paul explains this to Billie as they discuss Brock's selfish tendencies:

**Paul:** Has he ever thought about anybody but himself?

**Billie:** Who does?

**Paul:** Millions of people, Billie. The whole damned history of the world is a story of the struggle between the selfish and the unselfish... All the bad

around is bred by selfishness. Sometimes selfishness even gets to be a cause, an organized force, even a government. Then it's called Fascism. Can you understand that?

*(Born Yesterday, Act Two; pp.208-209)*

Paul links selfishness and greed to a neglect of the democratic philosophies undergirding the nation. His conversation with Billie in Act Two illustrates how the rules, regulations, and ideals on which the government of the United States is founded are being disregarded. Paul believes the U.S. government of 1946 no longer follows the original values upon which the country has been founded (Miller; p.24 & Rich; p.18).

Kanin's emphasis on egalitarianism which has been explored through male/female relationships has also been shown through his focusing on the issue of democracy. He has focused on democratic social thought and the citizen's obligation to abide by the law. *Born Yesterday* focuses on ideal democratic values and the law before they have been corrupted (Nichols; p.30). In *Born Yesterday*, the idea of "yellowing democracy" has been described in Paul Verrall's article "The Yellowing Democratic Manifesto" (*Born Yesterday, Act Two; p.207*). Paul explains the concept to Billie in the following conversation:

**Paul:** Well, look. You know what 'yellowing' means?

**Billie:** Not this time.

**Paul:** When a piece of paper gets old, what happens to it?

**Billie:** Throw it away?

**Paul:** No, it turns yellow... Now, 'democratic'. You know what that means, don't you?

**Billie:** Not Republican.

**Paul:** Well, not exactly. It just means pertaining to our form

of Government, which is a democracy. ... All right now, 'manifesto?'

**Billie:** I don't know.

**Paul:** Why don't you look it up?

**Billie:** I did look it up. I still don't know.

**Paul:** Well, look—when I say 'manifesto', I mean the set of

rules and ideals and—principles and hopes on which

the United States is based.

**Billie:** And you think it's turning yellow?

**Paul:** Well, yes. I think that a lot of the original inspirations

been neglected—and forgotten.

*(ibid)*

The old yellowed version of democratic law, which was once young and idealistic, has "been neglected—and forgotten" (*ibid*). America's Founding Fathers who wrote democratic law championed power given to the people. So, Kanin's play seems to suggest that America can stand firm on the principles of democracy as a nation governed by its people (Rich; p.11).

Paul may condemn current government practices, but he fully supports the original foundation of thought the United States was built upon and still remains optimistic that those ideals can be revived. He believes the democratic "machine" can still work if the selfish and greedy people who try to corrupt it can be curtailed. Billie converts to Paul's philosophy and ultimately the two become a symbol of emancipation from political tyranny and the fight against corruption. Their faith in the ideals of the United States mirrors the philosophy of Cold War Americans and containment culture (Nadel; pp.21-24).

Cold War America's emphasis on traditional gender roles was not an automatic challenge of women's educational rights. The cultural

implications of women's education are more complicated, much like containment culture and theory itself. The cultural structure is hidden behind a veil of seemingly progressive movements. Women were encouraged to receive an education but at the same time were told that their main job was to look after their children and tend to the comfort of their husbands. Douglas T. Millar and Marion Nowak discuss these conflicting views in their book, *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were*. Women's education might have been suspect to some in the older generation; they note, "But this was America, the land where equal education was promised [even required] for all" (Miller & Nowak; p.159).

The play's insistence that Billie ultimately marry demonstrates an overall lingering conservatism regarding women's social roles. *Born Yesterday* would have been a progressive play pushing the bounds of hegemonic discourse if Billie were to remain single, move away from Brock, and take control Brock's business. However, the play ends instead with Paul and Billie's impending marriage. Billie's previously questionable sexuality will be confined to her role of a loving wife. The play suggests that Paul and Billie share an egalitarian relationship based on democratic equality and Paul's wish to further educate Billie about matters of American politics and morality (Finney; p.39).

In talking about directing the play, Gina Wilkinson points out that Kanin had started writing *Born Yesterday* before the end of WWII because he was disgusted by what he witnessed in Washington; the lobbyists, "the 'five-percenters' and big dealers of every kind, operating ever more openly and disgracefully, trying to make the biggest possible buck out of the war" (Wilkinson; p.7). Kanin was shocked by the cynicism that viewed bribery as an acceptable way of turning the wheels of that delicate machine called democracy (ibid). Kanin wrote *Born Yesterday* with the intention to demonstrate that any person, even one such as Billie Dawn, could be a catalyst to change the corruption Kanin experienced while working for the Office of Strategic Services, the wartime predecessor of the CIA (Johnson; pp.6-7).

Brock's primary goal in having Paul tutor Billie is to elevate her social skills to the level of a senator's wife, giving her the qualities necessary to entertain guests and support Brock's business. However, the type of education Billie ultimately receives challenges the boundaries of social expectations. Billie not only gains knowledge pertaining to her domestic responsibilities, but learns about the power

of the ethical principles. The education Paul offers Billie teaches her about morality through literary influences as well as his own actions. He does not fall prey to Billie's seductive nature; he falls in love with her. But instead of sleeping illegally with Billie, Paul convinces her to marry him. The moral superiority of monogamous marriage is glorified when Billie agrees to marry Paul in Act Three (Sullivan; pp.21-26).

As Billie's interest in education grows, her discontentment with Brock also increases. She begins to take notice of his corrupt business practices and confronts Brock: "If a man goes and robs a house—that's work, too" (*Born Yesterday*, Act Two; p.216). She finds enlightenment through education as she realizes:

I just ...hate my life. There's a better kind, I know it. If you read some of these books you'd know it, too. Maybe it's right what you say I'm still dumb. But I know one thing I never knew before. There's a better kind of life than the one I got (*ibid*).

Truth, justice and freedom are the main messages in *Born Yesterday*, but honestly it is, after all, a virtue greatly espoused by the play, it would also have been nice for the script not to assume that its audience was stupid enough to warrant the oft-placed spiels about democratic values and the power of the people. Brock's lawyer gets the final word in this thoughtful, razor-sharp comedy. He offers Kanin's a belief that an increasingly informed and educated public will outwit those who would corrupt and diminish democracy with sincerity and conviction. Though it is meant to be upbeat, it may also leave audiences with the dismaying recognition that the struggle continues (Nadel; pp.14-18).

When the United States entered WWII in 1941, Kanin was an up-and-coming director for RKO, a legendary Hollywood studio. That same year, he was drafted into the Army Signal Corps, and was eventually transferred to Washington to work for the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA. While in the military, Kanin assisted with the production of propaganda films and war documentaries. He also had the opportunity to witness firsthand the influence that corporations and lobbyists had over the government, and was appalled by the widespread lies and swindles that occurred daily in U.S. capital. It was these observations that led Kanin to compose the script that would become *Born Yesterday*. He had first planned to turn his experiences into a screenplay, but soon realized

that no studio would want to produce such an inflammatory film; he decided that his story would serve its purpose better on the stage (Hampton; pp.2-6).

Although it was a huge success, *Born Yesterday* stood out among other works of its time for the way it contrasted typical attitudes toward American politics. After the Allied victory in 1945, the American public was infused with new feelings of optimism and patriotism. Having overcome both the Great Depression and WWII, the Americans were more trusting their government than ever before, and were willing to ignore the shady dealings that had become typical in the offices of politicians (ibid; pp.30-39).

On the other hand, *Born Yesterday* exposed these corrupt practices, satirizing both lobbyists and the politicians who bent to their will. While audiences enjoyed laughing at Kanin's play, others were not so amused. Kanin later became one of the many artists investigated by the Congress under suspicion of "un-American" activities during the Red Scare of the 1950s (ibid).

Hampton has conflicting opinions where the politics of *Born Yesterday* are concerned. The play exposes government and political corruption in 1946. Sixty-seven years later, the majority of the Americans realize that political corruption is prevalent in the United States government. Hampton argues that Paul and Billie's stand against political exploitation is "quaint", but Hampton also recognizes Brock's character as someone with whom the Americans can identify—a man above the law, capable of buying a senator. The only difference Hampton observes between 1946 and 2013 is that now, "Harry wouldn't be spending his millions to buy himself a senator. He'd be spending them on his own campaign to become one" (Hampton; pp.39-46).

*Born Yesterday* depicts some characters who are emancipated from tyrannical thought and ignorance and others who fall victims to greed and indulgence. However, Billie is not fully emancipated. Instead, she moves from one form of government to another; from Harry Brock to Paul Verrall. The play, actually, emphasizes and highlights the significance of revolution (Sullivan; pp.22-26).

In *Born Yesterday* Harry's main focus is made on making money by any means possible. In an interview with Paul, Brock boasts about his rough reputation and the objectionable measures he took to build his empire. He believes he has a right to own anything he desires,

including Billie Dawn. At the end of Act Two, Brock spits at Billie, "I don't own nothing cheap, except you!" (*Born Yesterday*, Act Two; p.216). Brock's belief that he can gain power through buying and controlling people supports Billie's retort, "Big-Fascist!" (*ibid*; 217). This quarrel marks Brock as the monarch of *Born Yesterday*, representing the tyrannical rule that must be extinguished. Billie, Devery, Eddie, the Hedges, and all the hotel staff are subjects of Brock's wealth and power until Paul's lessons on the American ideals of a democratic system ignite a revolution (Sullivan; pp.22-26).

While stationed in England, Kanin wrote *Born yesterday* reflecting his deeply affected mind by the world-altering events of WWII. Aware of the impending reconstruction of America, he sought to examine the dawn of a new civilization through this play. In 2004, and more precisely, during the latest production of the play in the theatre of Palo Alto, the director of the play, Mark Mezadourian, claims that "Kanin cared passionately about human rights, that everyone had the right to be free and equal.... It seems simplistic, but it's not happening now and it wasn't happening during or after World War II" (qtd. by Israel; p.2). According to what Mezadourian said it seems that the character of Billie Dawn is symbolic of the American people. She goes from being simple to a place where she not only has intellect, but a will. Through the character of Billie Dawn the play reflects the power of an individual to manifest change. That is what she does: by learning, by being open, taking in information and taking action. Mostly what she does is ask a lot of questions, and she figures things out. This was what Kanin was after; to have innocent enquiries about America (Israel; pp.1-3).

At the beginning of the play one might hardly notice that Billie is a major character. Her first appearance lasts only a moment when she enters the hotel room. "Billie appears wearing a mink coat and carries another ....Billie is breathtakingly beautiful and breathtakingly stupid" (*Born Yesterday*, Act One; p.184). Kanin's description of Billie

illustrates a woman who is a slave trapped under the guise of beauty and wealth. She is nothing more than Brock's concubine till she learns that she is worthy of being treated as a human being. After Paul nurtures Billie's curiosity, she becomes a revolutionary and she starts to fight against the corruption of government (Nichols; p.30).

*Born Yesterday* seems to unfold the lessons about government toward the audience as much as toward Billie. As Paul Verrall said "I want everybody to be smart, as smart as they can be. A world full of ignorant people is too dangerous to live in" (*Born Yesterday*, Act Two; p.210).

### Conclusion:

Partly romantic comedy, partly political satire, *Born Yesterday* simultaneously condemns corruption in American politics and confirms the value of a good old-fashioned education. Throughout Playing off the Pygmalion theme, and the transformation of the dumb Billie Dawn into an enlightened citizen, Kanin was able to depict a portrait of post-WWII America. *Born Yesterday*, actually, explores Kanin's thematic interest in idealistic democracy and the power of education.

Billie's education leads her to reject the corrupt principles Brock upholds and to accept a new government, espoused by Paul, which conforms to America's ideal cultural structure. Therefore, Billie's education is like a revolution, spreading quickly, infecting those around her, and ultimately leading to freedom from tyranny while gaining a sense of self-worth.

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مسرحية غارسون كانن "ولدت أمس" :  
دراسة لبعض ملامح امريكا بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية

م. لطيفة اسماعيل جبوري

كلية الاداب /الجامعة المستنصرية -

قسم اللغة الانكليزية وادابها

ملخص البحث

"أريد من كل شخص أن يكون نكيا قدر المستطاع. فالعالم المليء بالجهلة خطير جدا للعيش فيه". يبدو ان هذا الاقتباس من مسرحية "ولدت أمس" هو الفلسفة الشخصية لدى كانن التي غرست فيه خلال طفولته المبكرة والتي استكشفها من خلال معيار اعماله, حيث يقوم كانن في العديد من مسرحياته باستقصاء مواضيع مثيرة للجدل, ويعكس في هذه المسرحيات وجهات نظره الاجتماعية والسياسية.

ويكونه شخصية مؤثرة بوضوح في مسرح القرن العشرين فقد تمكن كانن من رسم صورة لامريكا بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية من خلال مسرحيته الساخرة "ولدت أمس". تقوم هذه المسرحية بتجسيد التحول الذي يطراً على فتاة جوقة سابقة وتحولها من شابة جاهلة الى امرأة متعلمة ومتقفة, حيث تدور احداث المسرحية حول شخصية يبلي داون وصديقها هاري بروك ومدرساها بول فيرول. وتقوم المسرحية من خلال هذه الشخصيات بعرض لحقبة الأربعينات من القرن العشرين الساعية الى الترف والسلطة والمال.

ان هذا البحث أساسا هو تعليق اجتماعي وسياسي على مسرحية كانن "ولدت أمس". وتقوم الدراسة بالتركيز على ثلاثة محاور: حق المرأة في التعليم وأدوار الجنسين في المجتمع وسياسات ما بعد الحرب. ان تحليل هذه القضايا في نطاق المسرحية يوضح كيفية تداخلها مع بعضها البعض لتقديم الوان متنوعة لرسم صورة لبعض ملامح أمريكا بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية. وينتهي البحث باستنتاج يذكر بايجاز النتائج الرئيسية للدراسة.