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Evaluation of performance values in daytime soap opera

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**Evaluation of Performance Values
in Daytime Soap Opera**

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts
San Jose State University**

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Theatre Arts

by

Anya Black

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ABSTRACT

AN EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE VALUES IN DAYTIME SOAP OPERAS

by Anya M. Black

This thesis addresses performance in American soap operas. It reviews defining characteristics, storylines, and audiences. A comparative study is made of voice, body, costumes, sets, camera work, lighting, sound, and music in *Guiding Light*, *Days of Our Lives*, and *The City*.

Research on this subject reveals that soap operas, as serial dramas, focus on complex and intimate relationships in the storylines. The majority of viewers are women. Low budgets and demanding productions schedules generate a high profile margin for television networks. Music, lighting, camera work, and sets receive limited attention. Beautiful bodies and fine costumes are required; the storyline is carried by dialogue more than action. Little research has been done on soap operas performance values. *The City* is more innovative in lighting, music, and camera work than *Guiding Light* or *Days of Our Lives*. Competition among soap operas in performance values is increasing.

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Critical Perspective

Soap operas were at first a form of the radio drama genre which began in 1922, and they have continued to flourish during the television era. “The need to fill the hours of broadcasting was what brought about the birth of soap opera in America” (Buckman 7). The transition from radio to television was made naturally and quickly, and with that change, added to voice, sound, and music were the performance values of body, costumes, sets, camera work, and lighting. All production elements used in film were now common to the soap opera.

With the introduction of the visual image, combined with the aural, performance values become instrumental in leading the eyes of the viewers toward the body and keeping them focused there as the storylines unfolded through voice and movement. Beautiful faces and well built bodies, costumed in fine quality and appropriate outfits, are essential to sustain the interest of viewers since dialogue, more than action, is the vehicle by which the storylines are moved. The character of the soap opera and the storylines remained the same in many respects with the advent of television and the additional performance elements. Two generations of characters developed and grew older with their caring viewers. These serials have continued to use the power of the cliff-hanger, especially on Friday afternoons to sustain the viewers’ curiosity over weekends.

Soap operas have always been attractive to advertisers since women, who do household purchasing, are the largest group of viewers. Traditionally, budgets have been

lower for soap operas than for other productions. This, combined with heavy advertising, has produced high income, but with demanding production schedules.

In order to remain connected to the mass audience, writers continued to focus on complex relationships and conflict among the characters rather than on the action of characters. This pattern forces the directors to give special attention to body, voice, and costuming. The writers also developed their storylines to reflect the general trend of cultural values, though somewhat behind the curve of change, evidently in order not to offend conservative viewers. Early soap opera stories contained more traditional family values, but as American society became more pluralistic and more receptive to alternative lifestyles, this was reflected in the storylines. Currently gender issues are treated with more diversity, and divorces occur with greater frequency. Problems of substance abuse, alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, and parental conflicts with children became part of daily episodes. This gradual evolution of storylines has kept soap operas believable to their audiences, and some shows target particular audiences by shaping storylines to attract them, such as *Guiding Light* introducing more teenagers in summer productions when school is not in session.

The storyline remains critical in competing for audiences in the soap opera genre. For example, *The City* “has no heart, no soul, and very little plot,” (Logan 44), and it is the least viewed production. However, as important as the storyline is, since the television medium has matured, it has forced producers to respond to the use of all performance elements common to the medium, and the problem of quality in the use of these

performance values in the soap opera is beginning to surface as an issue. The innovative use of montage and other creative camera techniques, and an occasional original use of music in *The City* is driving change in other soap operas.

My literature review of journals, books, and magazines which cover the critical study of performance values in soap operas is very limited; research in the use of music is especially lacking. Generally, the last most significant body of literature focusing on the study of soap operas was published in the 1970's and early 1980's. I have chosen to research and evaluate the use of performance values and to offer suggestion for their utilization in the competitive viewing market.

In the interest of remaining current and competitive in the use of production elements and in sustaining their audiences, television networks should compare their use of performance values in soap operas with one another, with prime-time television programs, and with the work of the movie industry. Financial interests are an issue in the evaluation of the quality of performance values because soap operas continue to yield high margins of profit to cover more expensively produced nighttime series. Therefore, competitive advantages of some soap operas over others may rest on economic decisions made by producers regarding how much additional funding should be directed toward improving performance values.

I will compare the performance values of 1996 episodes of *Guiding Light*, *Days of Our Lives*, and *The City* to distinguish variations among these programs and the respective networks, CBS, NBC, and ABC, which they represent. These three programs also

establish a comprehensive time line from 1937, to 1965, and 1996 for their beginning dates, and they offer geographic diversity for settings in the Midwest and New York City. A general description of the soap opera genre and the audiences in chapter one serves as the specific programs.

Attention will be given to specific performance values in both chapters two and three. Voice, body, and costume are given greater care and attention than are camera work, set, sound and music, and lighting. Much camera work, other than establishing shots, is a series of close shots of two people in extended conversation. Only in *The City* are there occasional uses of montage to introduce scenes and accelerate the storyline. Sets tend to be filled with too many furnishings, sometimes garish, and with too many accessories. Outdoor sets, with the exception of *The City*, are usually shot indoors, and thus do not appear to be realistic. Lighting is usually poor. Shadows may appear from two directions, and some scenes appear to be dark in comparison to comparable prime-time scenes. Music is generic and used mostly for transition between scenes, except for a few occasions in *The City* when it is used to replace dialogue.

Beautiful, handsome, and perfectly groomed bodies are essential to sustain the interest of the viewer, and their clothing must enhance their coloring, their build, and demonstrate success financially and socially. There is no evidence of mediocrity in voice, body, or costume values.

In the Conclusion I will suggest further study of performance values related to the soap opera and will offer suggestions for producers who face a competitive viewing

market. Since very little formal study of performance values in soap operas has been done, and the majority of reputable sources for research on storylines, audiences, and social issues were written approximately fifteen to twenty years ago, there is need for additional research efforts in regard to the soap opera genre which has a weekly viewing audience in forty million homes (Davison 12).

Chapter 1

Introduction

DEFINING CHARACTER OF THE SOAP OPERA GENRE

A defining characteristic of the soap opera genre is its serial nature, which now spans two generations of characters who develop and grow older along with the viewers. Historically, while Irna Phillips and Agnes Nixon are recognized as the primary creators of the serial radio and television soap opera, the serial form appeared in some works from earlier authors such as Henry James, Anthony Trollope, and Dostoevsky (LeMay 48; Warrick 127).

Charles Dickens, who cranked out weekly installments of his novels for nineteenth-century newspapers, is usually credited with having invented the modern serial form, but the basic structure--the story told in separate installments--goes back at least to *Sheherazade*. What Dickens knew, and the sponsors of the radio serials quickly learned, was the power of the cliff-hanger, the incomplete episode that ends in a critical moment and keeps the reader, listener, or viewer waiting avidly to learn what happens next (Warrick 127).

The level of viewer involvement with characters is unique to the soap opera genre. Care for particular characters in a serial is cultivated by the way they are presented, and

Agnes Nixon, a creator of soap operas, was a firm believer that for the public to stay with a story, they must care for the characters.

A financial factor also defines the soap opera. This comparative study of the performance values of *Guiding Light*, *Days of Our Lives*, and *The City*, combined with my general investigation of soap operas, reveals that they are set apart from prime-time television by economics and consequently a lower quality in production values. Soap operas work on lower budgets and earn more money than other productions for the networks. Many writers and actors often bring up in conversation the many deadlines and the continuous deluge of long scripts which have to be written, refined, and memorized. Actors often have long days which last twelve hours or more; they arrive on the set by 7:00 a.m. and leave at 7:00 p.m. The morning may consist of getting into makeup and a blocking rehearsal, with a brief interlude for lunch, and then one dress rehearsal. The director's notes are given, and taping may not begin until 4:30 in the afternoon; hence, a very long day is the result (Warrick 82, 87).

For mass popular entertainment viewed by millions, the daytime serials are produced on such a small budget that literally hundreds of hours of *All My Children* are brought to audiences for what was spent on *Roots*. Yet, these shows, without the benefit of reruns, account for a disproportionate percentage of network earnings. It has been said that even a popular hour-long evening dramatic show, costs upwards of two hundred thousand dollars per show. A daytime serial, conversely, is expected to earn a profit that may amount to many tens of thousands of dollars each week, which *All My Children* does.

Thus, although daytime drama may not actually be aired on prime time, it is nevertheless a prime moneymaker, and this is one of the key reasons why soap operas are considered successful (Warrick 137). “. . . The soap’s primary function is to generate millions for network coffers--and indeed it helps support the flighty extravagances of night-time programming” (Torgerson 54). The breakdown of the financial benefits of the soap operas for network profits revealed: “In 1978-79 an episode of a one-hour show cost around \$350,000 to produce, but brought in revenues of \$250,000. In 1978-79 average hour-long soaps cost a trifling \$170,000 for an entire week of five episodes, and the daily advertising yield approached \$120,000--\$600,000 a week; that is a 250 per cent profit” (Torgerson, p.55).

Since women are the majority of the audience and they are most likely to do the family shopping, companies which produce household products are favorable toward advertising on the daytime dramas. Because prime-time allows for fewer commercial minutes per hour than does daytime television, there are simply more daytime than prime time hours in which the networks can sell time. Therefore, daytime television reaches substantial numbers of women frequently and efficiently.

These low budget serials generate writing characteristics different from other television dramas. Most daytime drama writers indicate that it is like no other writing experience. They enjoy weaving webs of intrigue and give shape and form to characters created out of thin air. A writer creates his or her own universe with a specific amount of material which must be written each day.

Writing a serial, as acting in one, can begin to absorb one's whole life--especially for those writers who take their work seriously, as most do. Unlike writing a play or novel, the characters and the town they live in do not just go away suddenly when the writing is finished. In the serials the same lives go on and on. Irna Phillips once said that when she wrote a serial she carried the whole town around in her head and thought of the fictional inhabitants as real people. Harding LeMay, head writer of *Another World* says, "It's almost like having another set of relatives. I live with them all day long. I have nightmares about them." One writer of a soap became so involved with his characters that he used to call up the actors on his show and refer to them by their character names. (La Guardia 197)

Many writers create characters that resemble their own lives or people they know (LeMay 141; Nixon 67). On *Another World* the actor playing the part of Steven Frame was from Philadelphia and had the strange feeling that his character had something to do with that city. What he later discovered was that Agnes Nixon, the writer, was a native of Philadelphia. When Harding LeMay began writing the script for Steven Frame, after Agnes Nixon, parts of LeMay's background were added. Mr. LeMay recalled,

When I was seventeen, I ran away from home. I came from a poor family.

When I started writing *Another World* two years ago, I discovered that

Steven had almost no background at all- he was sort of a mystery. I started giving him a past very much like my own. I decided he had run away from his home on a farm when he was just a boy and that many of his difficulties today arise from never having been properly understood.

(La Guardia 197)

Irna Phillips was a passionate writer, and creating imaginary places and people was her favorite thing. “Everyone asks me how I got the idea for Kim Reynolds on the show because she certainly is an unusual character. She’s really me--at a much younger age. She’s fiercely independent, as I was, and she won’t settle for second best. She looks in the mirror and refers to herself as ‘the lady in the mirror’” (La Guardia 198).

The position of headwriter for a soap opera carries considerable power, but with that power comes responsibility and pressure. Headwriters often write the show’s “bible” which outlines what will happen to the show over the period of a year, which means that they may have to write three or four storylines per week. In the past, a headwriter had to pay extra writers from their own funds, which was a fixed salary. Therefore, some were more inclined to do all the writing themselves, and that meant shouldering more storylines and longer hours (LeMay 23). The normal custom of the headwriter is to write some of the scripts, and the dialogue writer does the rest of the scripting.

One of the difficulties a serial writer has is how to eliminate characters who leave the show without upsetting the viewers and the ratings; it is such a delicate matter that it

can disturb the viewers to the point of provoking hate mail or threats to stop watching the show (Intintoli 188).

A greater difficulty is a purely creative one: maintaining the realism of day-to-day living in a soap town without (1) boring the viewer with realism that is too shallow and uninteresting or (2) attempting to alleviate all the boredom of everyday life by becoming so melodramatic that the realism itself is shattered. The latter often happens . . . when writers, responding to their producers' pleas to get the ratings up with more story interest, start making all the available females in their stories pregnant, or decide to threaten the heroine with a murder rap. But these tactics would never be employed by the best soap writers. (La Guardia 199).

The need for creative adjustments in character changes, combined with the mammoth amount of work writers face, often leads them to rely more on the spoken word as opposed to involvement with the character. When this happens, dialogue becomes repetitive, and clichés are seen in the storyline as well as in the dialogue. Acting and characters are secondary to plot in the minds of the sponsors. "I sometimes cringe when I watch the show I wrote," says Henry Slaser, "and don't mind that the actors often rewrite their lines to make them easier to say. If the actors didn't do this, some scenes would collapse in cardboard dialogue" (LeMay 200).

Many producers of soap operas rotate their headwriters. This is not difficult, especially for Proctor and Gamble since they produce almost half of the daytime dramas.

The producers do have loyalty for their writers, but rating success is critical, and there are times when the writers come upon dry spells in their writing. The rotation system can be helpful for writers because it gives them exposure to a number of different soap opera situations, and they feel financially secure enough to want to stay in that field of writing.

The opportunities displayed by this system also motivate those in the lesser position of dialogue writer to strive toward excellence because they might someday become a headwriter. Agnes Nixon started as a dialogue writer in 1949, and she eventually took over as head writer on the *Guiding Light* and *As the World Turns*. Later she created *One Life to Live* and *All My Children* for ABC.

Among headwriters who deserve special mention is Irna Phillips who taught Agnes Nixon and is considered among soap opera experts to have been the most capable person for shaping the storylines of daytime serials. “She has been the greatest of all daytime serial writers, often referred to in the press as ‘the queen of the soap opera’” (La Guardia 203). She created *As the World Turns*, *Another World*, and *Days of Our Lives*, all of which are still on the air today. Upon her passing, Harding LeMay reflected:

I did not get along very well with Irna Phillips, but my admiration for her had grown immeasurably as I fought to win acceptance for my ideas . . .

She had been a good teacher and, like all serious students of good teachers, I not only rebelled against her, but also wanted her approval. It pained me that it would never come. (LeMay 113)

LeMay found that once he was able to take over from Phillips, he enjoyed writing the many fantastic stories for *Another World*.

It was not an unpleasant chore to unravel the complexities of the poisonings, burglaries, and delayed retributions inherited from my predecessor. There is an undeniable excitement about solving problems, which may explain why some people become writers, and there was also an unexpected satisfaction in learning technical devices peculiar to daytime drama, such as threading as invisibly as possible the necessary recapitulations of past events into each daily script. Beyond that, there was the exhilarating immersion of oneself into the lives of others as I drew upon my own experience to motivate behavior of characters becoming more familiar and consequently more acceptable to me. (LeMay 39-40)

Whether past or present the writers of soap operas enjoy putting characters' lives to the test of how to live through the different crises of their lives. Harding LeMay was an academician prior to writing for *Another World*. Since he did much of his writing out of his home, he did not always receive first hand recognition as did actors. However, he did find that he received recognition after identifying himself to his classes:

My evening classes at Hunter resumed in mid-September. I returned to them, anticipating a much welcomed relief from the personal dilemmas infecting the population of Bay City. During the first week I did not mention that I was also writing for a soap opera. Several students,

however, recognized my name from the program credits, and hurried to my desk after class to ask if Steve and Alice were really getting married. I diverted their attention back to Emma Bovary, whose tragic history was our current class subject. (LeMay 46)

Many of his students, being fans of the show, taught him some pertinent things about life. He was able to pinpoint what storytelling was while teaching nineteenth century literature. He observed that Dostoevsky used the “Friday cliffhanger” just as modern soap operas usually do, and that Charles Dickens used large number of characters simultaneously in multiple stories.

Of his students, LeMay also states:

My students attended college courses at night after working all day as hospital aides, typists, seamstresses, and waitresses Following me into the corridors after classes, they begged me to let Rachel be happy for a change. I asked why it mattered so much to them. “Cause Rachel go out after what she want,” one of them replied abandoning the careful grammar with which she answered questions in class. “People that go after what they want get it,” she explained, her companions grinning their assent. Rachel was a fighter, perhaps a surrogate fighter for them Those late evening discussions with Rachel’s outspoken fans, as irritated janitors waited for us to leave our classroom, prompted me to make her, not Alice, the dominant character of *Another World*. (LeMay 49)

Only a serial writer in a contemporary setting can enjoy such external influence on his work. James Lipton, a soap opera writer, commented about his work, “Like many other writers, I go from one medium to another, but when I feel an itch to write contemporary drama, I find the most receptive market is that most of maligned of all literary fields, the soap opera” (60).

Students of drama continue to observe multiple daytime serials which are produced on a minimal budget and followed by many of the same viewers throughout their lifetimes. My next focus is on storylines as I seek to identify what sustains the attention of regular viewers.

STORYLINES

Cultural themes and cultural trend in values are reflected in the soap opera storylines. “In a soap opera they’ve got to see people they can believe in and relate to, either the daughter, the mother, their cousin, brother. They’ve got to be believable people” (Hobson 98). These realities shape the direction and form boundaries for storylines, and the basic context for the storylines is in the social institution of marriage or other significant and intimate relationships. A generation ago soap operas acquired external societal support and validity by adhering to some traditional values such as marriage to one person during a lifetime, as in the case of Alice and Tom Horton in *Days of Our Lives*. Reviewing the literature of a generation ago to the present, shows us that storyline adaptation to societal

and broadcast industry changes has taken place. Those adaptations are made as characters face traumas of divorce, the complexities of serial marriages, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, terminal illness, impotence, drug abuse, AIDS, Down syndrome births, and other personal problems. For example, in *Guiding Light* “Fletcher and Holly have a daughter with Down Syndrome. Although this issue was given much attention during Holly’s pregnancy, the show has not pursued the story much since little Meg’s birth” (Davison 13). This same article concerns itself with abortion, homosexuality, and political correctness. Regarding homosexuality, the following assessment is made:

They are beginning to deal with homosexual characters, although how realistically they do will depend on what the audience seems ready for. Are we likely to see a homosexual character from a core family in an ongoing relationship, or a gay couple kissing? “Well, I don’t know why not,” says Margaret De Priest, *Another World* headwriter. “I would think the situation begs for it.” She does think, however, that you’re more likely to see hand-holding first. (Davison 12)

As characters become entrenched in the lives of viewers, storylines can exceed the boundaries of real life without upsetting or losing viewers. For example, Elly and Stu on *Search for Tomorrow* took nine years before they actually got married. In reality the majority of weddings are planned and carried out within a year. A more radical example of unrealistic storylines is demonstrated in the character of Jake in *Another World* who was killed in a car crash. He returned from the dead five months later. This is fantasy,

and it is common to the soap opera genre. “The lack of external reality is unimportant because it is the characters and their actions in the world in which they operate that create the drama in soap operas” (Massey 186).

The formation of marriages, struggles in those marriages, and finally the dissolution of some unions account for much of storyline content in daytime television. Pluralistic views toward family and marriage provide a challenge to script writers and though marriage is one of the most celebrated events in soap opera storylines, its treatment is treacherous territory. While soap operas provide continual problems in relationships, some occurring in sequence with the same character, and some problems occurring simultaneously with other characters, they also have developing romances of many kinds to broaden appeal to many types of viewers.

“From the beginning of soap opera to the present day, weddings of popular characters have drawn enormous response. When Elly and Stu were married (*Search for Tomorrow*) the show received 20,000 congratulatory letters and numerous wedding gifts which were actually used on the show as props” (Soares 73). Fans often have to wait many years for their favorite couple to get married. Characters such as Alice Matthews and Steve Frame on *Another World* were thwarted on several attempts at marriage, only to be successful on the fourth try.

Preparations for soap weddings go on for months and sometimes even several years as in the case of . . . Van and Bruce on *Love of Life*, and Adam and Nicole on *The Edge of Night*, or Joane and Tony for *Search for*

Tomorrow. These are such vastly important events for steady watchers that neighborhood wedding parties are not uncommon. (La Guardia 118)

The posture writers take toward matrimony is that marriages cannot last eternally except for those that belong to the tentpole characters, those who have been on the show for several years, hold traditional values, are married and have a satisfying monogamous relationship, such as Alice and Tom Horton, and Steve and Audrey Hardy.

Producers and writers know that the more interesting marriage story is of a marriage that fails, and it holds the most interest if all the stages of the breakdown are revealed in a series of vignettes. Dr. Paul Rosenfel, a New York analyst who believes that mass media has great influence on society, writes of soap operas, "It's about the only form of television that shows people how to face up to the problems of divorce, losing a child, death, illegitimacy or infidelity, drug abuse, alcoholism, and many other problems dealt with in daily life" (Soares 131). Evidently, people who watch the serials see these problems portrayed and believe that their own lives are not unusual and that they can cope with their own situations.

The goal for many soap opera writers is for their characters to continually and openly deal with problems. Every episode deals with the situation from multiple characters' viewpoints, not just one character. Other writers like Tania Modleski think that identification with multiple characters may inhibit the viewers' ability to identify with one character. Modleski states that soaps expose viewers to "numerous limited egos," all working against each other so that no one person ever has total control over any one

problem (14). As writers lead viewers through problems the soap opera form gives the spectator enough conclusion to the story to give relief to the viewer. Because the high pitch of problems is relieved, the viewer can be back for more. Storylines show that total resolution to problems is not possible and that total solution could bring more grief and heartache.

Writers do approach storylines realistically when dealing with marriage problems.

For example:

When a good marriage fails on soaps, the problem is usually “lack of communication,” an inability of one partner to share his life with the other .

. . . In some cases, the communication problems are obvious, and a little silly. For example, Brad (*Young and the Restless*) does not tell his wife Leslie that he is going blind. Instead he makes mysterious trips to a

Chicago clinic creating suspicion and distrust in his marriage. (Soares 77)

Instead of telling Leslie that he is going blind, he attempts to hide it as long as is possible and then, without a truthful explanation, tells her that he wants a divorce.

Though this is not likely to happen in real life, it does heighten the problem of communication in marriages.

Another marital problem is loneliness. On the soaps people come together out of “common loneliness,” and there is apparently no greater loneliness than that which is felt by the neglected spouse. Forced separation, over-dedication to a career, and

disagreements over children are among the factors that lead to silence, then loneliness, and the inevitable affair.

Among problems always popular and understandable is the love triangle, which traditionally involves two women in love with the same man or vice-versa. Such love triangles have been a part of daytime television from the beginning. Manuela Soares wrote, “There is nothing so common as the doting elderly husband who is unaware of the lover his wife has stashed in the bedroom closet” (83). Today, persons in their twenties to their seventies participate in extra-marital affairs, and what intrigues viewers most are the questions of where the couple will meet next and how the unsuspecting spouse will find out about the affair. Therefore, the audience tunes in for the next episode.

However, what the storyline ultimately leads to is true commitment, though the audience can tolerate considerable relationship entanglements. In the end, commitment means getting married.

The soaps are about commitment, in and out of marriage. They are concerned about what makes marriage “work,” and what makes it come apart. Critics may complain that marriages fail with depressing regularity- that all is domestic disaster- but they would be hard put to come up with more realistic view of marital trials. (Soares 77)

Since viewers normally look to soap operas with some expectation of moral uprightness being presented, they appreciate seeing the characters work hard at their marriages before succumbing to extra-marital affairs or getting divorced.

Divorce has been a touchy subject, and many viewers will write to the network in disbelief at what is happening between a husband and a wife. Though the viewers are considered, the storyline is predictable because, “Soaps are philosophically opposed to divorce—but dramatically they could not live without it Divorce must be introduced very carefully. It must be justified in moral terms especially on the more traditional soaps We don’t treat marriage lightly” (Soares 79).

Because of many divorces and new romances, the creation of the step family is quite common. Erica Kane has been married eleven times total and has given her daughter at least two stepfathers, Jackson Montgomery and Dimitri Marick. She has married both men twice (Sloane 1995).

Many characters on a given program seem to be or have been legally connected through marriage at one time, and this makes for volatile situations since most nuclear families eventually break apart. An example of this is Iris on *Another World*, who appears to enjoy making trouble for Bay City.

About her marriage, Iris says, “I married Robert because I had to prove to daddy that I could manage without him.” When it turns out that she can’t, Iris wails that her husband has abandoned her “just like daddy.” She accused daddy’s younger second wife of “poisoning daddy’s mind against me,” whereas it is Iris who is attempting to undermine her father’s marriage in every way she can. Many conflicts result from this troubled behavior. (Soares 109)

Such family relationship issues provide the necessary storyline tension to sustain the viewers' interest. In a *Guiding Light* scene Blake seeks consolations about her marriage to Ross from his first wife, Vanessa, and Matt, Vanessa's new husband. Vanessa and Ross have a daughter, Dinah, from their marriage, who is having an affair with Hart, Blake's brother.

Important characters in some storylines are grandparents, such as Alice Horton in *Days of Our Lives*, who is seen as a loving moral person who can set the example for the rest of the family. Grandparents are to be dedicated to the preservation of family morale, and though they usually do not force their views on the family. They communicate them through advice.

Grandparents on the soap operas have grown children, with whom they occasionally have conflicts. "Grandparents seen as grandparents tend to be good; it's only when they are social movers in their own right that they create trouble for their children" (Soares 106).

A well-rounded extended family includes teenagers and young adults, and since viewing audiences are comprised of vast numbers of devoted youthful viewers, storylines include characters and situations with which they can identify with and learn from; writers and producers aim to please and secure this audience. For example, *All My Children* introduced a pair of young lovers still in high school, while *Young and the Restless* wrote in a whole healthy population of adolescents. For instance, the Brooks sisters, who varied in age from late teens to early twenties, were brought on. "It was a youth soap if ever

there was one; and it was a hit with the young and the restless in the audience” (Soares 7). By bringing in younger characters there is an opportunity for the teenager or young adult to identify with someone other than their parents; this can advance their understanding of family relationships by perceiving the characters as siblings.

Romance in storylines has an obvious attraction for young people. “It was for the stories of love and romance that young people started watching Those shows that have added young people, that have tried to speak more to the young, that have added new ideas, and confronted social issues, are the soaps that young people try to watch” (Soares 13).

Issues related to parents hold the attention of younger viewers. They are intrigued by storylines of long, lost parentage, and since this is the age during which they and their parents begin experiencing conflict with one another, the theme of family conflict becomes more interesting. However, many writers and producers tend to avoid this subject.

Children are talked about more than seen. Adults worry about them, fight over them, and debate their parentage. But there are few scenes in which we see a parent locked in emotional conflict with a school-age child. This is one of the areas of life that isn’t often presented in the soaps (perhaps because the viewer would have a difficult time deciding whom to identify with). (Soares 105)

Storylines and characters dealing with drug abuse, alcohol abuse, and obesity also hold the attention of younger viewers. Some of the teen stories are quite poignant since

only in daytime television do writers have the chance to tell a meaningful story of a teenager having to deal with these difficult issues from a young person's view.

The drug abuse issue was tackled by the character, Cathy Craig, on *All My Children*, but Agnes Nixon expressed the following apprehension about doing the project:

We were not able to write scripts nor even an outline for our taped sessions and were thereby giving to a young actress named Amy Levitt one of the most difficult jobs of dramatic improvisation anyone has ever faced A book could be written about the tapings and those wonderful young people who had wisdom, insight and an ability to accept, and therefore come to terms with themselves, that would put most adults to shame. (Nixon 68-9)

“When Cathy Craig attended drug therapy sessions on *One Life to Live*, real addicts participated in the discussion. The sequence was filmed on location at Odyssey House, a rehabilitation facility in New York City. Viewer response was generally supportive” (Soares 115).

“Cathy and other drug users were portrayed as emotionally troubled teenagers and young adults; their hope lay in straightening out their emotional difficulties, in learning to know and express themselves” (Soares 119).

Everyone involved with the storyline found it to be a very satisfying experience. Early in the shooting an ABC cameraman said, “I kept my wife up all night telling her about these kids.” (Nixon 69).

The story started in the spring and went through summer, and some teens wrote in to say that they were encouraged to get help for their addiction. Others who toyed with the idea of doing drugs decided not to do it because of the program. Also, parents and other adults wrote for information about starting rehabilitation programs in their own towns, and all the people who needed information were given it.

Soap operas have dealt with the problem of alcoholism for many years, and though teenagers on the soap operas must deal with the effects of alcoholism on the family, it is portrayed more as an adult problem.

This is one social problem that looms large on the soaps The course and treatment of the illness varies. But one trend is clear: alcoholics eventually reform or they leave the story. This is all to the good, since viewer identification with the alcoholic appears to be quite strong. One viewer went so far as to admit that she matched Kay Chancellor glass for glass when Kay had a drinking problem . . . and she stopped drinking right along with Kay! Young Lynn Henderson on *Love of Life* uses alcohol to escape her problems, much as adults do. She comes from a troubled home, and is in desperate need of love and security. Motherly Vanessa has taken an interest in Lynn, providing her with a home, and helping her learn to trust herself and others. Lynn is remaining sober for longer and longer periods- though she has not yet solved her problems. (Soares 120)

Obesity, another addiction issue, surfaced in the storyline of the *Young and the Restless*. Joann Curtzynski began over-eating as a result of a loss of self-esteem, which came about because she quit school and went to work to put her husband through college. This meant taking menial jobs which did not interest her. With help from a counselor she learned to love and trust herself again. Thus, the show attempted to frame her problem in a positive light, the storyline moved toward her eventual recovery.

A critical issue undermining parent-child relationships is money:

It seems that money gets in the way of trust and understanding. The rich use money to bribe, wheel, and defeat their grown children. Phoebe of *All My Children* and Geraldine on *The Edge of Night* do this. Even with younger dependent children, the rich are not so warm and sympathetic as the poor. Wealthy Iris (*Another World*) cannot hold the affection of her fifteen year-old son; in fact she cannot even persuade him to live with her. Rex and Tony Cooper in *Somerset* work through a similar problem. Only when Rex discovers that money won't buy his son or his career can he and Tony begin to develop a real relationship. (Soares 107)

Generational issues serve storylines by providing ongoing tension in relationships, with occasional resolutions. Therefore, different generations of viewers identify with characters in the same episodes.

Struggles between the generations surface in a number of ways. The issue of premarital relations and the choice of a mate for marriage offer ideal situations for such

conflict. Parents often alienate their children by attempting to wreck their love relationships. They also disapprove of their children who decide to divorce or have extra-marital affairs. By the same token children can abhor dad's new wife or mom's new lover. Both sides are incapable of giving space and being non-judgmental. Opposition to the choices that parents and adult children make leads to conflict, and even though there are good intentions on the part of some, a battle ensues. In these situations, no matter how lovingly one tries to communicate, there is something said or done that is misconstrued as an attack or confrontation.

The generations occasionally have a problem with sexual jealousy regarding a child's desire for the opposite sex parent and vice-versa. This scenario is more prevalent on the more modern soaps. When soap operas first began, issues of sexuality between parents and children were avoided, and when dealt with, it was mostly from a feminine perspective.

In order to solidly identify with real issues in American society beyond those of a family and personal nature, storylines include problems related to racism, environment, and politics.

Storylines involving African American characters usually deal with direct racism, life in the ghetto, or integration into the wealthy Anglo community due to some connection or lucky happening.

Producers and writers of daytime programs have different opinions about storylines including African-Americans. Tamar Tunie who played Jessica on *As the World*

Turns does not necessarily feel that “you need black writers to tell a story that involves black characters. I think the bigger problem here is that there is very little commitment to a storyline that uses black actors--no matter who is writing” (Collymore, *Black Lash: Daytime's* 39-40). Felicia Minei Behr who is producer for *All My Children* confirms this:

You want to have characters who people tune in to see. If a story ends and you don't have something else coming up, you have to look at your canvas and decide what isn't working. If the character who has to go happens to be African-American, do we keep him simply because of their race? You can't do that. You have to move on. Look at all the white characters we have let go. If something isn't working, you have to try something else.
(Collymore, *Black Lash: Daytime's* 45)

When writing for African-American characters, some writers have consulted African-American friends for an honest portrayal. Kay Alden who writes for *The Young and the Restless* has done this and through this she has leaned not to over-characterize African-Americans. Some writers also allow their actors to bring in some of their own language to the script.

There are only two full-time African-American associate writers on daytime television. Michelle Val Jean who writes for *General Hospital* thinks that there is a difference between the stories that are given to African-Americans and Anglos. She also believes that since daytime writing is hard to break into at the moment, it really is not an issue of race. Some African-Americans are making an impact as writers; Michelle Val

Jean is forging new ground on *General Hospital* with honest scripting of Black families. In one scene between Justus, city councilman, and his grandmother Mary Mae, he imitated what the white butler at the wealthy Quartermaines might be saying, “Master Quartermaine, how shall we hide all the little Colored men on the lawn?” (Collymore *Black Lash: Are* 54). This was realistic scripting, because this is the way, in the opinion of the actor who played Justus, of how some Black families would talk. The actor appreciated that the producers allowed that type of a storyline to be included in the episode.

Ecology is another controversial topic for writers and producers, and they are careful when dealing with it. When it is included in the story, they spend little time on it because it divides viewers. Some may threaten to stop watching if the show supports a specific view. In some ways, ecological issues are like political issues in that they begin to fade into the background as storylines focus on death, divorce, infidelity, children, or illness. In the past *General Hospital* has dealt with the toxic waste incinerator. The Port Charles community has been divided over what to do about it, and when it was a storyline, it was talked about only briefly, which is what soap operas are known to do with controversial issues.

Political issues are also usually connected to personal situations because it is love stories which keep people tuning in day after day. Not only is it difficult to place politics within the structure of the storylines, but the high level of conflict associated with political

contest demands that the issues not be dwelt upon for long periods of time because it is not inviting to audiences.

Soap operas of the nineties are more likely to use a political election for background in a storyline. However, even these storylines are used cautiously since producers don't want to lose any portion of the audience by identifying with one specific political party or belief.

Another World has a politician among the cast of characters. Grant Harrison is a senator who causes trouble for the morally upright citizens of Bay City. The issues that plague his life deal with the multiple women he loves and the many children he has.

The Teflon senator married a paralyzed Amanda Cory, cheated on her with his press secretary, Lorna Devon, and then, when it appeared their affair was about to be exposed, he dropped her like a hot potato. So when Grant turned up bleeding in the Harrison driveway with a life-threatening bullet wound, the question wasn't: Who shot Grant? It was more a case of:

Who didn't want him dead? (Leahey 21)

According to one well-known writer who has worked on both traditional and "relevant" soap operas, the networks simply do not like political stories. They prefer love stories because, they say, the viewers do. For this reason soap operas are more successful in treating relevant issues which are incidental to love stories and other personal crises (Soares 117).

Gender issues, though not talked about by characters as part of the storyline, are nonetheless present. Women have often been given roles which offer support to powerful males in the professional world. Dinah, Vanessa, and Blake are all examples of this in *Guiding Light*. Female careers such as housewife, secretary, or nurse, often thought to go along with the caring, nurturing nature of the female gender, are common. Annie, as a nurse, fits this role in *Guiding Light*. Recently, a woman may have a high-powered career such as a lawyer or doctor, but social standards of loyalty to the family first puts her in a position of being split between being satisfied in a profession or finding satisfaction in marriage and family relationships. Angie, a physician, Sydney, a business woman, and Jocelyn, a lawyer, all fit this pattern in *The City*.

Since the soap opera genre is not pressed to complete a storyline in one sixty-minute episode per week as are prime-time shows, there is more space for originality and flexibility in the storylines. This allows for considerable variation in the pace of events and in the number of characters' viewpoints within a storyline.

On the basis of my research I believe that performance values and storylines have equal attraction to viewers. Producers have traditionally recognized the significance of storylines. "What is most important to the program makers is that the viewers are emotionally involved with a character, concerned about the outcome of a storyline and its impact on the characters" (Intintoli 189). Conversely, the importance of performance values, especially the focus on the body, was expressed by a male college student who said of Kristin in *Days of Our Lives*, "She won sex scene of the year," an award given by him

and his college friends who get together to watch the program daily (*Leeza* 1996). They are representative of a particular audience as are housewives who have neighborhood parties to coincide with soap opera weddings of their favorite characters.

In the next section of this chapter, audiences will be described in terms of their levels of devotion to viewing and their levels of identification with the storylines and significant characters.

AUDIENCES

The soap world lives for the viewer. “Involvement and investment on the viewer’s part are what soap makers strive for. Many practices and conventions are utilized to achieve this end. It is also in the general interest of the communicators to have the audience feel it can affect the show” (Intintoli 183). “These viewers are loyal, concerned, emotionally caught up, involved—all these words apply to the daytime fan” (La Guardia 179).

Diverse types of men and women are extremely devoted to the daytime serial; all professions and occupations are represented among those interested in the daytime dramas. Though critics may make light of soap operas and demean those who view them, the fact is, soap operas still appeal to persons with all levels of education and with different social and cultural backgrounds. Letters arrive from viewers who range in age from early teens to the eighties, and the educational gamut runs from near illiteracy to the

highly intellectual and articulate. In terms of the breakdown of viewers into categories, there is general agreement that audiences are comprised of more women than men.

Critiques of audiences are vital; “The interaction of communicators and the audience is complex, unique, and more important in soap production than in any other media fare” (Intintoli 182).

The broader audience may be divided into the categories of traditional and fanatic viewers.

Most regular viewers tend to be traditional, ordinary people, but whose lives are not governed by the absolute need to see every episode. They may arrange their activities or lunch hours around soap opera schedules, or video tape them and watch them at their leisure, but soap opera characters do not become part of their world.

These moderate, traditional fans are women and men of all types, including college and high school students, who often arrange their schedules around their favorite shows. This includes not only the average citizen, but movie stars and politicians who have been known to carry television sets while touring on the road simply to keep up with their favorite show (La Guardia 117).

Women form the largest numerical class of viewers, and they are typically interested in receiving three benefits from the soap opera, identified by Marilyn J. Matelski as emotional release, fantasy fulfillment, and information on a given topic. Many viewers watch certain shows to see specific characters and their behavior in particular situations. Plotlines were considered important to women viewers since they did not stay with a

program just because they had watched it for years on end. The program had to maintain their interest in order for them to continue watching. She also found that the audience did not just watch a show because it conveniently fit into their schedules. They had clear opinions about which shows offered enough satisfaction to engage their attention. Part of the feminine audience prefers a story which resembles their own reality, but another part wants to see something apart from their own experiences and environment (Matelski 47-48).

Television star Carol Burnett, after seeing the interest of her children in daytime programs, periodically appeared on one of her favorite shows, *All My Children*, as a comical character. She states,

I became intrigued by the hold it had over my three daughters. I started watching in bits and pieces *All My Children* brought me recognition in my own children's eyes. They took it for granted that I had my own television show and was on television every week. Then I did a brief guest appearance on *All My Children*. That did it. I became a star. (Warrick vi)

Extensive research has been done by Thomas Skill and May Cassata on what appeals and what does not appeal to the female viewer. Since the serial character may live for many years on a show, there is adequate time for a character to become fully developed. The viewers are allowed to look closely into the minds of the characters. All categories of women viewers were in agreement in terms of what they found appealing in

female soap opera characters. The three personality traits that were most popular were sensitivity (97%), emotion (94%), and believability (90%) (Cassatta & Skill 33).

Men, as well as women, are drawn into the ranks of moderate viewers. A California woman stated that in her younger years when taking care of her children, her husband would make fun of her for watching soap operas. Now she says, "No more! Not long ago, he found himself completely lost in a detailed discussion of the soap operas, their fine actors, their social contribution, and their handling of delicate subjects This was in a group of well educated, culturally oriented people" (Soares 2).

Some of the past favorites of men have been *Ryan's Hope*, which drew about 20% of the male audience. One New York police precinct admitted to being fans of the soap opera *Somerset* when it played. *All My Children* draws approximately 30% of the male audience (Soares 2; Massey 182; Warrick 137). Mary Stuart of *Search for Tomorrow* stated that "men are always writing to me. Why, I have a fan club made up solely of vice-presidents . . . who watch *Search* during their lunch hour" (La Guardia 130). The truth is that many businessmen plan their day around their favorite soap opera (Soares 2).

However, it is not just businessmen who are interested in soap operas. Some male actors are surprised by the number of truck drivers and gas station attendants who address them by their characters' names: "Hi Joe! or Hi Adam!" (La Guardia 130). The male viewer must be considered since men comprise 25% to 30% of the viewing audience (LaGuardia 130; Soares 2).

The college and teenage category of viewers is not ignored by the networks. One network survey suggests that 70% of all women under the age of nineteen prefer daytime serials to other types of daytime programming (La Guardia 117).

Alison Alexander performed a study of 230 high school students by having them chronicle their viewing habits and their peer and family relationships. She found that children who lived in single parent homes were more likely to watch soap operas than opposed to children in two parent homes. She discovered that children who watch soap operas watched more television than their non-viewing counterparts. (Alexander 301)

Moderate young viewers tend to fall within the framework of “average” in regard to perceptions of the content of soaps and in regard to their general attitudes toward social behaviors.

Women, men, college students, and teenagers described above all feel enthusiastic about their viewing of soap operas, and they admire many of the actors in the roles they play, but they are able to avoid having their personal lives controlled by their favorite show, and they do not perceive of the soaps as reality.

In contrast to traditional viewers, fanatics are viewers who have excessive enthusiasm or intense devotion to soap operas, and that may lead them to strange and sometimes dangerous behaviors or over enmeshment in the story until they perceive themselves as part of the scene and cast.

Actors stay alert to fanatics since they have on some occasions been grabbed by adoring fans long after they have left a show; some have had to move and use unlisted

numbers. Robin Strasser who portrayed Rachel on *Another World*, became pregnant, and her pregnancy was written into the storyline of her character. Some of the fringe fans who became obsessed with the actors, characters, and storylines, knew this, and they began making threats when Rachel, her character, talked about not wanting her unborn baby. At first Robin was only slightly irritated by the hate mail. She then became fearful of walking New York streets. She said, “You know, a man was shot on *The Secret Storm*. Some viewer put a bullet right through his person!” Shortly thereafter, Larry and Robin gave up their apartment and fled Brooklyn with unlisted phone numbers” (La Guardia 123).

Another actress who played bad girl Belle on *The Secret Storm* received “hate mail.” Her story was:

One day she came home to find her housekeeper walking out on her. The reason as the housekeeper stated it : “I can’t work for a woman like you! To treat your husband the way you do! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!” It was no use explaining that the housekeeper had been watching the show, and refused to believe that Maria wasn’t Belle. It didn’t seem to matter that Maria and her own husband were a terribly happy couple with two lovely children. (La Guardia 123)

How a soap affects a person’s behavior reveals fanatical tendencies such as in the case of David Berkowitz, a criminal who randomly shot young women at random in parked cars. The power of the soaps is expressed in the following story:

Throughout the questioning he remained calm and detached, admitting his guilt but showing no emotion at all. And then one day, while watching television, he began crying and screaming so violently he had to be forcibly subdued. What was he watching? A soap opera called *Days of Our Lives*. And what touched off the rampage? A discussion between two people on the show about committing the child to a mental health institution, a threat David Berkowitz might have heard in his own childhood His armor was finally “cracked” not by people of authority but by a soap opera. (Warrick 131-32)

Some fanatics have humorous responses. Stefan Gierasch who played the “wire man” on *Another World* said,

I was in a car with Mark Rydell, and a cop made us pull over to the side of the road. Mark asked me if we were going too fast. Before I could answer, the cop yelled at Mark, “Oh my God, he’s risen from the dead! It’s Jeff Baker!” Mark had been playing Penny’s first husband, Jeff Baker, on *As the World Turns*, until he got tired of the part and had to be killed off in a frightful auto accident. (La Guardia 128)

When an actor’s contract expires, the options are to let a character move away, or die in a believable manner. When *As the World Turns* killed off Jim Lowell, an unusual number of letters and calls were made to the network. The producer, Irna Phillips, chose to respond with letters to console the viewers (La Guardia 1974).

When actress Teal Ames decided to leave the *Edge of Night* to pursue other career opportunities, the show had her character killed while running between a car to save her child. While still on the air that day the show received 260 telegrams, and later more than nine thousand letters complaining of her death. Producers chose to appease the audience by having her come on-screen at the end of the next day's episode to say that she was alive and planned to move to Hollywood (La Guardia 119-20).

There are touching stories of people who call or write characters like Mona and Erica Kane to let them know how much they appreciate the example of how to work through the mother/daughter relationship which appears to be difficult at times (Soares 105).

A nurse working in a cancer ward wrote to *Another World* to find out what would happen since some of her patients were afraid they might not live long enough to find how a story ended (La Guardia 131).

It is not uncommon for regular watchers to plan neighborhood wedding parties when a favorite character is to be married.

A few years ago I was shown a letter written by a viewer on behalf of herself and six neighbors. She said they were all angry because they had prepared a wedding party at her house, huge cake and all, to celebrate the marriage of Steve and Alice on *Another World*--and suddenly the wedding was called off. How could the writers of the show be so unpredictable? she asked. James Lipton, in the article referred to above, noted the case of

a woman who called a serial producer's office one day to complain desperately that she and a number of her friends had planned to watch a certain wedding on the serial together--with a good deal of money invested in a catered luncheon meant to celebrate the happy TV event. The wedding never took place. Now what was she supposed to do with all that food? she asked the surprised secretary who took the call. (La Guardia 119)

In addition to adults in the working and homemaking world who cross the line into fanatical viewer behavior, college students have gradually moved into those ranks. "Back in the 1960's, a group of Boston University students arranged their class schedules so they could be free to watch *One Life to Live* everyday. But that was uncommon then" (Soares 6). At that point in time anything associated with the term soap operas was thought to be a put down. The more important topic was the Vietnam War (Soares 6).

As time progressed, serious social topics were exchanged for personal issues and topics. Kathy Glass, an actress on *One Life to Live* found after touring high school campuses across the country that young people sought out "happiness to be happy . . . The romantic stories of Phil and Tara, Jenny and Tim, and Liza and Steve are clearly more fun than the progress of foreign policy or civil rights legislation" (Soares 6).

Jean Rouverol, a writer for the soaps, tells of the number of college students who live in dorms whose viewing habits cannot be monitored. A clue as to how many may be viewing surfaced when some cast members of *General Hospital* went to give a seminar on

the campus of Harvard. “Fans had almost mobbed the place, some of them climbing the fire escape and trying to break through the window” (Rouverol 3).

One Duke University student said of the soap opera, “It’s the only constant in our lives” (Soares 5). The ability of the soap opera character to identify with the viewing audience is unique to this form of television. The character, like the college viewer, is searching for more “happy happy love, and probably not finding it” (Soares 6). “Unlike the issues oriented ‘in’ activities of the sixties, the soap opera fulfills fun-fantasy needs. And it provides what every young person dearly wants in life—a chance to feel close to people without having to bear responsibility for all that goes wrong with them” (Soares 6). High school students as a group of viewers are quite committed, although with more restricted schedules than college students. High school people are less involved on a daily basis. Soap opera producers are well aware of this young teenage audience, and they respond to it most strongly in the summer. One young person states her devotion to viewing and responding in the following letter:

I watch *Guiding Light* every day. I never miss it. The show is so wonderful, well what I mean is that it helps me through a lot of problems I have. My life hasn’t been too happy lately. I’ve been having a few problems that are similar to Morgan’s . . . It has done so much for me. And now my problems have been helped, because Morgan has done an awful lot for me just by her working through all of the problems she’s had.

(Intintoli 219)

Late May and early June are the months when ratings go up. In the summer of 1995, on *General Hospital*, Stone and Robin confronted the issue of their sexual relationship and AIDS. Stone had just discovered that he was HIV positive, and they were beginning to work through what that meant. In prescribing their behavior, the physician lectured as a teacher, not as a professional medical doctor would normally talk to patients in his office. Youthful viewers increase during summer, and the issues which confront that group are addressed with greater care.

Likewise in September producers expect a sudden drop in that viewing segment. As one devoted high school freshman said,

Every Monday through Friday at 2:00 p.m. I watch your program, *Guiding Light*. I would like to ask if possible if I can have a picture or poster of the entire cast of *Guiding Light*. I would like to hang it up in my room because I will soon be going back to school and I won't be able to see the program. (Intintoli 221)

All My Children is a favorite of teenagers. Every weekday high school girls stand at the doors of ABC's studios hoping to catch a glimpse of one of the romantic heroes. And one young man declared that if he could get close enough to his favorite heroine, "they'd have to scrape me off with razor blades" (Soares 3).

Fanatic viewers tend to cut across both genders and all ages. Though they represent a minority of viewers, they are worthy of considerable attention because in absolute numbers they do represent a large body of people.

Perhaps most important to the networks is the fact that a significant number of television viewers, traditional or fanatic, are devoted to the daytime shows, almost to the exclusion of prime time television.

Current Nielsen Media Research statistics indicate that *Days of Our Lives* is viewed weekly in 5.82 million homes. Only *Young And the Restless* surpasses it with more than 7 million homes. *Guiding Light*, with slightly more than 3 million homes is next to last rated, *The City*, with approximately 2 million homes represented. An assessment of *The City* is:

It is a bust with viewers--in fact, it now posts worse ratings than *Loving* ever did. And there is no big mystery why, for all the millions pumped into it, *The City* has no heart, no soul, and very little plot. The attempt to do without such soap staples as core families and senior citizens might have worked if *The City's* young cast (with the exception of edgy Aussie star Corcy Page) weren't so uninspired. (Logan 44)

Storylines and characters must appeal to diverse audiences simultaneously if shows acquire and sustain high ratings. As will be pointed out later in chapter three, the camera work of *The City* has become a pace setter for other daytime dramas, but its low ratings result from storyline and character deficiencies.

Chapter II

Comparison of Performance Values

VOICE AND BODY

People respond less to ideas than to particular vocal tones .

. . . The 'what' illuminated and informed by the 'how' is the dynamic communication . . . that comes through in the inflection as much as in the literal meaning of the word; sometimes even more. (Lessac 239)

Voice and body are connected by the intangible parts of the speaking experience in the overt physical deliveries of vocal quality, facial expression, and body gestures.

Beautiful bodies in the American soap opera genre are the only acceptable bodies, and the face is the focus. With an emphasis on dialogue over action, and close-up and close shots over full shots, facial appeal is critical.

Faces of the performers reflect conventional beauty. Women typically have wide eyes with dark eye lashes, full lips and small chins. Their lovely faces are coiffed with elegant, pert, or striking hair styles. Contrast in both color and hair style characterize the female actors.

Blake in *Guiding Light* has auburn, shoulder length hair, which may fall in loose curls, or it may appear with a more sophisticated manner. Jocelyn, in *The City*, is also a redhead, who has a pert and shorter trim than Blake, Jocelyn's style fits well with a New York street scene. An older, more than age 55 Caroline on *Days of Our Lives* is a light redhead with a hint of blonde, not gray. Gray is not acceptable for most women in soap operas, though they may be over fifty-five years old. Redheads in soap operas tend to be more outgoing, to be centers of attention, and also to have vibrant and intense personalities.

Leading woman Sydney in *The City* is as blonde as was Marilyn Monroe, and she wears an almost straight, shoulder length style. Younger Kari in *Days of Our Lives* is also blonde and has a short cut with very little evidence of a permanent. Annie, a nurse in *Guiding Light*, is also blonde. All of these blonde characters have a light and youthful feel to their personalities.

Dark brown hair frames the exceptional face of Dinah (*Guiding Light*). Equally stunning is Hope in *Day of Our Lives*, with longer straight brown hair. Vanessa in *Guiding Light*, who is Blake's close friend, has dark brown hair. In scenes with Blake, the contrast between the two women holds the interest of viewers. All of these characters with dark hair seem to be elegant and in control of themselves.

For men to qualify as handsome, they must have square jaws, narrow eyes, thin lips, high foreheads, and prominent cheek bones. They also must have a full head of hair. Though blonde or white hair is rare, Shawn, in *Days of Our Lives*, is an older restaurant

owner who authenticates his age and position with white hair. In all productions, medium brown to black dominates male hair color. Hair styles are usually current.

Female bodies, though thin, have curve. In relationship to their male counterparts, they are shorter or just approach the height of the male. The women have well-toned bodies, but they do not look athletic.

Most males in contrast, do look athletic, though some character roles for older men allow a few extra pounds beyond the ideal weight.

Soap opera performers must have bodies which are appealing enough, with little movement, to hold a viewers attention for up to two to three minute scenes.

Body movement in this film genre primarily facilitates tempo changes of a scene, allows the camera to focus on various areas of the set, and creates opportunities for dialogue changes and new character introductions. Scenes are likely to begin with movement as characters take their places to converse, with one another; movement tends to be increased both in size and amount toward the end of scenes. Then the scenes usually end with a last remark by an important character or with a reaction shot. For example, in the *Days of Our Lives* restaurant scene, June 11, 1996, Hope is sitting at the table as a waitress walks by. Then Shawn, her father-in-law, comes to the table, sits down across from her and begins a conversation. At the end of the scene, Bo, who wants to make amends to Hope, receives an emergency call from the police station. He walks past Hope swiftly as the scene comes to an end, and Hope reflects, "Are we ever going to work this out?"

When the social worker in *The City* clinic scene, January 16, 1996, enters the reception area, she, Angie and Zoey talk as they move toward Angie's office. Toward the end of Angie's discussion with the social worker, Angie gets up from behind her desk and crosses over to the corner of the room. Her movement accelerates the tempo of the scene, and it supports the emotional climax of their dialogue.

VOICE

Scenes must be carried "vocally by differences in tone, increased volume, changes in pitch, increased intensity or emotional strain, and increased tempo by shortening the length of speeches, by increasing the rate of delivery, by making speeches staccato, and finally by picking up cues with greater and greater speed until speeches overlap and the peak of the scene is telescoped" (Dean and Carra 201). Such careful use of the voice is essential for the extensive soap opera use of dialogue, and because relational conflict and resolution are linked to feelings of sadness, depression and exuberance. This creates a need for a full emotional range of vocal expression.

Emotional intensity builds steadily in *The City* clinic scene, January 1, 1996, as Angie, an African American M.D., who has an Anglo nine-year old in her foster care, is being challenged by the social worker in regard to the advisability of inter-racial foster care. An article had appeared on that subject in a newspaper in which the journalist had quoted some clinic conversation out of context. In response to this article four Anglo

families had called the social service agency wanting to adopt the child. This upset Angie, and at that point the tempo of the conversation became accelerated, and as pointed out earlier, Angie got up from behind the desk. Movement and voice reinforced the reality of her frustration.

Hope in the *Days of Our Lives* restaurant scene, June 11, 1996, begins her conversation with Shawn in a somewhat pensive manner, and there is little change in that feeling or tempo. However, their conversation is momentarily interrupted as the camera moves to the bar area where Bo and his mother talk. His beeper sounds; he leaves and then the scene closes with a close-up of Hope making a contemplative statement to herself.

The *Guiding Light* hospital scene with Ed and Rick, February 9, 1996, father and son physicians at Cedar's Hospital, begins with feelings of concern and anxiety as Rick tells his father that he has just received a subpoena to testify about his ex-wife's alcoholism in regard to a child custody issue. As they continue talking, the pace of the conversation slows when they think about outcomes for the people involved,. The tempo picks up only when Annie, his former wife and a nurse at the hospital, enters the area where they are sitting.

The three representative soap operas reviewed share a conventional approach to the use of the voice, and all the actors, whether in major or minor roles, heroes or ordinary people, are good looking.

CAMERA

Camera work determines what the viewer will see, and since television is characterized by small screens, there are built in restrictions which govern the kinds of shots which will be used most frequently. Limited budgets and fast production schedules augment these restrictions.

Television has greatly increased the use of the close-up. To compensate for the small screen, the close-up is used to bring us into closer contact with the action. For dialogue sequences the shoulder-and-head shot has become the predominate framing. Cost-minded producers like the tighter shots because they are easier to light and can be joined to almost any other shot, reducing the amount of coverage needed The close-up can bring us into a more intimate relationship with the subjects of the screen than we would normally have with anyone but our closest friends or family. . . . One of the full shot's most attractive qualities is that it allows the actor to use body language. This type of physical expression has all but disappeared from the movies since the silent period. Again, television and tight-fisted producers are to blame since there is nothing as inexpensive to shoot or to light as the close-up. (Katz 123, 132)

Soap operas began in the radio era when voice was all that was needed, but with the introduction of television, cast selection for "body" became critical. That meant that

the best possible camera work, within the framework of budget, also became important. Since the networks have not invested in the highest quality sets, lighting, and sound for soap opera productions, camera work became even more important.

Conventional approaches to camera work are used in all of the daytime soap operas. Of primary importance are establishing shots which identify location. They are usually long shots which transition quickly into medium close shots of one or two people. Since a feature of blocking is to have characters move about the set early in the scenes, the long shots give an immediate full coverage of the set. *Guiding Light*, *The City*, and *Days of Our Lives* all follow this pattern. The following examples demonstrate this.

In the *Guiding Light* bedroom scene, January 25, 1996, with Blake, Vanessa, and Matt, Blake is first seen center right with a medium shot as Vanessa is in full view behind her while making the bed. Approximately three-fourths of the set is seen in this first shot. Matt, not visible in the opening shot, soon appears from the left side of the set and becomes involved in the conversation.

The *Days of Our Lives* restaurant scene, June 6, 1996, with Hope as the central figure begins with her centered in a long shot with a waitress to the left, two patrons behind her, and a table with no patrons in front of her.

The *Guiding Light* hospital scene, February 9, 1996, with Rick as the key figure, opens with a long shot. Rick is the most prominent, with Ed, in a medium full shot next to him, and a nurse behind them at the nurses' station.

Sydney, the principal character in *The City* is in the great room, January 15, 1996, and appears with Richard and Samuel. In the long establishing shot Sydney is seen at the far left, sitting at the table, and Samuel is in a full shot to the right. From the middle of the set, undraped windows enable the viewer to see the high rise buildings across the street from the apartment.

Once beyond establishing shots, close-up camera work is the most frequently used technique in soap operas. The practice is especially common in all the daytime programs at the end of scenes. The following examples from *The City*, *Guiding Light*, and *Days of Our Lives* are representative of this practice.

In *The City* elevator scene, January 16, 1996, Nick walks past the elevator door in a long shot and presses the elevator door button. As he waits for the door to open, the camera moves into a medium close shot. When the door opens, to his surprise Sydney is in the elevator--a long shot view of her. Immediately the camera goes to a close-up of Nick and then to Sydney. The next shot is over her shoulder for a close-up of Nick, then a quick front close-up of Sydney, and back to Nick for the final close-up.

In the *Guiding Light* bar scene with Hart and Dinah, January 22, 1996, two minutes and fifty-five seconds long, all shots are close-up with the exception of a long establishing shot to show the full set, the bar tender, Hart and Dinah, and at the end of the scene a long shot to show Hart walking from the bar. In the two minute, thirty-five second conversation of Hart and Dinah while both are seated, there are thirty nonstop close-up shots. Of all scenes studied this had the most continuous use of close-ups.

The camera, in the bedroom scene in *Days of Our Lives*, January 5, 1996, focuses close-up on an object at the beginning of the scene in order to move the storyline. As Jennifer walks into the bedroom, she takes a red match book from her coat pocket and places it with the keys in a candy dish on the dresser. What is significant about the match book is that it has a Swiss Bank account number on it, which connects her husband, Peter, who is eager to make love to her, to a criminal. The scene closes with a tight close-up shot of the red match book in the white candy dish.

Single shots of the person whose story is being told in a scene are often used, though two shot close-ups are frequently employed because the interaction is usually between only two persons.

Blake, in the *Guiding Light* bedroom scene, January 25, 1996, is the subject of the first single shot. Soon she appears in a two shot with Vanessa, and then back to a single shot. After Matt and Vanessa sit on the end of the bed, a two shot appears of them and their interaction to Blake's statements. The scene ends with a close-up of Blake.

The restaurant scene in *Day of Our Lives*, June 11, 1996, shows Hope in a close shot after the location of the scene established. That is followed by a two shot of Bo and Carolyn, and then a single shot of Bo. As Shawn goes to Hope's table to serve her clam chowder and sits down for a conversation, the camera alternates between single shots and two shots. Though three people other than Hope are involved in that scene, it ends with a single shot of her.

After Sydney and Samuel appear in the establishing shot of *The City* great room, January 16, 1996, the focus is pulled to her with a single shot. Then Richard enters in a two shot with her, a single shot on him, then a single shot of her, and finally a long two shot of them during their confrontation.

Since intense feelings of anxiety, sadness, stress, love, and romance are expressed often, reaction shots are used to capture the body language appropriate to such feelings.

Matt and Blake both have single close-up reaction shots at the end of *The Guiding Light* bedroom scene, January 25, 1996. Blake exclaims, "Trust was the strongest thing we had going in our marriage, and I destroyed it. How is he ever going to love me after that? Maybe I have lost him forever!" As she talks, Matt turns his eyes away from her and downward, as though he is pondering this and other information the audience does not yet know. Then the camera returns to Blake, and the scene ends with a brief silence as she looks forlorn, assuming that it is all over.

Foster parent Angie, a physician, is visited by the social worker in *The City* clinic, January 16, 1996, and she is challenged by the social worker in regard to inter-racial foster parenting. The social worker implies that soon, adoptive parents will be interviewed regarding Kayla, the eight year-old in her care. Angie declares, "This is too soon for Kayla." The social worker responds by asking abruptly, "Too soon for Kayla, or too soon for you?" The scene ends with Angie in a reaction shot with her facial expression displaying shock.

In the *Days of Our Lives* scene, June 11, 1996, as Hope sits at the restaurant table expecting Bo to come over and talk with her, he receives an emergency call from the police station. Instead of talking to her, he has to walk swiftly past her. In disappointment she comments to herself and holds a fixed look of dejection.

The above descriptions of camera work all demonstrate basic and conventional use of the camera in settings which are not creative.

SETS

Scene design in contemporary soap operas sets the tone and style of the productions and it also differentiates the various productions. The scene designer creates a workable environment for the performers, and lets the viewers know where and when the action is taking place. The scenery is to be coordinated with other production elements, and it is to provide a central image or metaphor for a particular program.

Because television networks use soap operas as high income producers and cover losses on other programs with profits, financial corners have to be cut in performance values. Sets appear to be one of the areas where cost controls diminish quality standards. Also, tight production schedules necessitate convenience, which disallows maximum attention for the development of excellent sets.

The sets for all scenes in this study were evaluated in terms of line, mass, composition, texture, and color. Questions asked were: Are the lines of this set angular

or curved? Was mass heavy, moderately full, or sparse? In terms of composition was there interesting diversity in props and furniture, and did the set have balance between right and left stage? Is the texture rich, soft, slick, or hard? What colors were used to attract viewers' attention and gain a positive response from them?

Soap operas generally intend to convince audiences that they are true stories of real people. There are some exceptions such as those episodes which are so fantastic as to have someone come back from the dead. Apart from those anomalies it would be expected that sets would reflect the projected realism of the stories, but that is only partially true.

The lack of realism is expressed in sets, at differing levels, in all three soap operas of this study. In many scenes the mass of the sets was excessive, with too many pieces of furniture and wall decorations which made rooms feel too busy; not even the elaborately designed houses presented in the San Francisco Bay Area have rooms with such exaggerated decor. Also, the colors and texture are excessive. Outdoor scenes shot in studio sets, as *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light* are fake; that is, the sets do not conform to real life in the observations of the average person.

In two *Guiding Light* scenes, February 9, 1996, the hospital and the living room, mass is exaggerated. Where Ed and Rick stand and converse at Cedars Hospital, behind Ed is the nurses' station with a picture and two instruction signs above his head, and behind Rick is another section of the station with two certificates, a picture, a paper towel dispenser, eight tall glass jars with medical supplies, and noticeable handles on the oak

doors of the cabinets. As they move two steps to the left a large trauma unit sign with white letters on a bright red background fills the space behind Rick. The living room is more overwhelming. Ross works at the computer on the formal desk, and as Blake enters, two pictures are on a five foot width of wall to her left, and then a painted door with rectangular embossed design. Then as she moves further left, behind her are a sofa, a red leather chair, table lamp, oil painting, the fireplace, and a world globe. The mass in these sets exceeds what is normally in homes.

In *Days of Our Lives* the outside mountain scene, January 22, 1996, shot in the studio, demonstrates the problem of attempting to create outdoor reality without shooting on location. The set is too symmetrical, with perfect trees on both sides of the actors, and an oversized boulder to the left dominates the background. The boulder is too close to the cabin to fit the normal pattern of cabin building in the mountains. Also, the snow on the trees, cabin, and ground was too evenly distributed.

Color is the problem in *The City* clinic scene, January 16, 1996, in regard to appearing realistic. It is too warm and colorful for the average clinic, especially one in a low income area. The light orange wood floor looks more like one for a living room set than a clinic, which is usually tile, and the chairs in Angie's office are a bold solid aqua blue. Several bright orange medical folders are on Angie's desk, and bright multi-colored medical charts are on the wall. What curtains are visible are the shade and tone of green usually worn by medical teams who do surgery.

All of the indoor scenes were warm in color, and it is understandable that producers would make this choice because warmer colors attract viewers. This offers part of the ambiance which also holds their attention, but it does not represent reality. (Note photograph #1 accompanying this study).

In *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light* the general texture is richer and softer in the indoor sets than in *The City*. The fabric on the *Guiding Light* living room sofa looks inviting to the touch, and the oil paintings and other appointments have rich or darker colors. *The Days of Our Lives* restaurant set uses red in table coverings, and the flowers, ketchup, and mustard containers all add to the warm reds and yellows of the set.

The producers basically settle on sets representing large rooms in large houses, with considerable formality, though with many furnishings of somewhat indiscriminate taste. The audience evidently overlooks, does not understand, or does not care about this. Sets generally need more attention and investment in time and money.

COSTUMES

Of the various visual elements in theatre, the most personal are costumes because they are actually worn by the performers. Visually, performer and costume are perceived as one; they merge into a single image on-stage. At the same time, costumes have a value of their own, adding

color, shape, texture, and symbolism to the overall effect.

Closely related to costumes are makeup, hairstyles, and masks. (Wilson & Goldfarb 85)

Clothing suggest position, status, and occupation of the character, and it reveals such traits as modesty, flamboyance, or conservatism. Clothes also define the occasion as work, leisure, routine, or special event. Costume is used to separate major characters from minor characters, to set the style and tone of the production in general, and to establish consistency with other visual elements.

Since fit bodies, beautiful and handsome faces are essential for the success of soap operas, costuming must enhance the image of perfection. Therefore, costumes are treated appropriately to reflect reality so that the viewer will accept the characters as believable and can identify with them. They are dressed in such a manner as to connect with the aspirations of viewers in terms of high quality or daring in style.

Most characters appear in clothing of the quality which can only be found on the Nordstrom, Escada, Versace continuum.

Blake, in the *Guiding Light* living room scene, February 9, 1996, enters wearing a gray and black plaid coat. When she removed her coat, her stunning black jump suit with a large gold belt buckle was fully visible. Her lawyer husband was working at the computer on the mahogany living room desk; he was wearing an elegant robe with medium wide vertical blue and white stripes.

Dinah, in the Tower's Bar at the top of the hotel, *Guiding Light*, January 22, 1996, was wearing a beige wool dress trimmed in expensive lace. Her accessories included a necklace and bracelet of large pearls, and a huge ring. The pearl necklace included additional hanging jewels which partially covered her cleavage. In the same scene the bar tender wore a black tie, a wing tip collar, and showed off a multi-colored vest with vertical stripes. It was striking.

All of the costuming was accurate in terms of position identification. In *The City* Sydney wears a stylish expensive dress and high heels while other family members, acquaintances, and friends dress casually. This sets her apart as a person of financial power and as a decision maker. When she meets Nick accidentally in the morning in the elevator, he is wearing dark casual clothing, while she is dressed up, January 16, 1996. In a mid--morning scene, Samuel, who works for Sydney as household management assistant and chauffeur, wears a tie in the apartment as they discuss her affairs, whereas her son Richard wears a robe.

Alex and Jocelyn both show position costuming. As they meet for lunch in the *The City* restaurant, January 10, 1996, Jocelyn, a lawyer wears a simple brown tailored suit and white blouse; her only jewelry is earrings, so simple and nondescript as to be barely noticed. Alex wears dark slacks and his trademark cowboy boots. Since he is a detective and works out of his house, this is his standard dress. Their costuming is consistent with their positions.

In *Days of Our Lives*, June 11, 1996, Bo, who is also a detective, is seen at the restaurant talking with his mother at the bar, and he wears a red T-shirt and blue jeans as his beeper sounds. Since he evidently plans to blend into the woodwork as a detective, his dress is in agreement with his work.

Ed and Rick in the *Guiding Light* hospital scene, February 9, 1996, are both wearing white lab coats as they have their discussion near the nurses' station about personal family affairs. They are clearly identifiable as physicians. Angie, the physician in *The City* clinic scene is immediately set apart professionally from the nurse, her receptionist, and the social worker in that she is wearing a white lab coat. The social worker is dressed position appropriately by wearing a simple dark coat. Her clothing suggests business and authority, yet ordinary enough as to not be overwhelming to her clients. Jamie, in the *Days of Our Lives* hospital scene, shown with Lucas, is wearing a hospital volunteer's dress; this identifies her as an information desk volunteer.

Social positions in the community, represented by Blake, the wife of a lawyer, in *Guiding Light*, and Dinah, married to Roger, a wealthy businessman who owns the television station, are identifiable by the obviously expensive clothing they wear.

Since soap opera producers work carefully to help the viewers identify with their characters, they follow accepted conventions of dress for both social and professional positions.

LIGHTING

“Lighting, though it was historically the last design element incorporated into theatre production, is the most advanced in terms of equipment and technique. Most of these advances have occurred in the past hundred years” (Wilson & Goldfarb 98). Prior to the invention of lighting, playwrights and thespians were forced to be creative and rely on natural resources. Therefore, plays were held outside during the day, and night would be suggested with torches or candles, as well as by direct communications through words. After Edison invented the incandescent light in 1879, a more imaginative era began in lighting design and use. The chief function to lighting is to provide visibility in order for the viewers to see action in the performers’ faces. This is more important than mood, another basic use of lighting. Mood can really be created by lighting alone, but action, scenery, and words, along with lighting tell exactly what the mood is. Bright warm colors suggest a carefree and happy mood, whereas a somber mood can be created with blues, blue-greens, and muted tones. Time of day or night and place are also easily established by conventional lighting. Style, either realistic or non-realistic can be established by lighting, such as using table lamps and outside sunlight as an indication of realistic scenes. Focus and composition in lighting applied to soap operas draws attention to the faces and bodies of the actors. Rhythm is established on a continuum of slow fades to abrupt staccato like changes; in the soap opera, other than limited use of montage, the rhythm tends to be languid with slow fades.

It seems ironic that among performance values in soap operas, lighting seems to be the least advanced in spite of refined and powerful lighting instruments and available computerization. In fact, the lighting on all NBC, ABC, and CBS soap operas is of a lesser quality than is used for their other programs. (As cited in the introduction, p. 3, daytime soap operas generate a 250% net profit, which suggests that potential quality would be compromised).

The City, *Guiding Light*, and *Days of Our Lives* all share the common flaw of obvious shadows appearing where there should be none. Throughout *The City* clinic scene, January 16, 1996, as actors walk about the set shadows are seen on the floor, on the ivory wall dividers, on the desk, and on the filing cabinets. Chairs cast shadows on the floor, and when the social worker sits down in front of Angie's desk, her shadow is seen on the desk (note photograph # 2).

Kari and Lucas in the *Days of Our Lives* kitchen scene, June 11, 1996, cast several shadows which come from opposite directions. As Kari holds a cup of tea, shadows from her arms and cup are cast downward on her dress. The lighting is coming from stage right, and in the background the kitchen cabinet is casting a shadow toward stage left since the background lighting in that section of the scene also is coming from stage right. As Kari moves, lighting from stage left becomes dominate and a shadow from her face falls on her neck and right shoulder; a longer strand of her hair on the left side of her face also casts a shadow on the left side of her neck. Then as both Kari and Lucas come into

focus in a two shot, light coming from both sides of the set causes shadows to crisscross on both characters (note photograph #3).

When Ed moves next to Rick in the *Guiding Light* hospital scene, February 9, 1996, the shadow of Ed's body can be seen on the wood panel edge of the nurses' station. Also a shadow of Ed's head falls on the red and white trauma sign near him, and the shadow extends onto the cream brick wall next to the sign. Ed has a shadow from his nose on the lower third of his face and a shadow on his neck which comes from his chin. As they stand and talk, shadows from Rick's ear shows up on his lower cheek, and as he sits down and continues to talk with Ed, shadows from his curly bangs become more noticeable. It is evident that the light shines downward. When Ed moves and sits down next to Rick, Ed's shadow is visible on Rick's lab coat. Also, Rick's own stethoscope, hanging around his neck, is shadowed on his lab coat. Next, when Annie enters the scene, a shadow on her clothing is cast by her arm. She also has a shadow on one side of her face, and another shadow on her forehead which comes from an extra standing next to her.

Evidently, producers are of the opinion that audiences will not be turned away by such noticeable flaws.

A common characteristic of all soap operas is to use lighting as an instrument to bring focus on the characters in dialogue by increasing the intensity of light on their faces. Though dialogue, and not action, is common to this genre, when action does occur,

lighting does bring focus to the movement of the characters, and dimmed lighting on the set as background enhances this focus.

In *Guiding Light*, Ross and Blake in the living room scene, February 9, 1996, do move from one side of the room to the other, and the light follows her from the door on the far right of the screen to the far left as the scene ends. The light is minimized to the degree that it is not possible to discern the subject matter of a large painting on the back wall.

Light falls on and reflects off Shawn's white hair as he walks toward the table where Hope is seated during the *Days of Our Lives* restaurant scene, June 11, 1996. The light on her face and hair is considerably brighter than on the plaid waist high curtains, immediately behind her. There is some reflection off her dark brown hair. Though Bo's face is somewhat dark as he sits at the bar, when he gets up to walk across the room after his beeper has sounded, his face becomes better lighted immediately and continues that way until he moves off the right side of the scene.

In *The City* elevator scene, January 16, 1996, Nick first appears by walking from stage left to stage right and presses the elevator door button. A natural outside stream of light coming into the hallway catches his face and chest, and the attention is fixed on him until the door opens and Sydney comes into focus inside the elevator. The light intensity in the elevator is highest on Sydney's face.

Dinah and Hart, in the *Guiding Light* bar scene, January 22, 1996, with thirty consecutive close-up frames, have their faces lighted brightly. The background was dark,

except for some extra light focused on Hart as he entered the bar to join Dinah, and then as he made his exit. This is typical for keeping attention focused on characters in dialogue.

Lighting is also used to simulate ordinary sources of light such as table and ceiling lamps in a room, or sunlight in outdoor scenes.

In the *Guiding Light* living room scene, February 9, 1996, a lamp behind the sofa casts light forward, which reveals more of the fabric design of the sofa, and the light cast against the wall shows part of the subject matter of the oil painting. The *Guiding Light* bedroom lamps are conventionally located on the night stands and give the impression of an ordinary source of light.

When Kari and Lucas have a catered dinner in her apartment, *Days of Our Lives*, January 9, 1996, two lamps in conventional locations are turned on, and the lighted candles also create a realistic appearance.

In the bedroom *Days of Our Lives* scene with Peter and Jennifer, January 5, 1996, a lighted lamp near the white candy dish makes the cabin bedroom seem natural.

The City street scene, January 9, 1996, has some of the most realistic lighting of all the scenes reviewed. Shot outside, the sunlit areas have a crisp clear look of an early winter afternoon, and the shadows on side streets are quite dark.

The City living room scene, January 16, 1996, appears realistic both from lighted lamps in the room and from the windows which expose buildings in sunlight on the opposite side of the street.

Lighting tones tend to be unrealistic in all three soap operas reviewed in that gels veer toward warm colors in most scenes; orange, red, yellow, and brown tones are dominate. Though *The City* is more realistic about other factors related to lighting, the living room, bar, and clinic scenes have an excessive orange cast. The exception to warm scenes among those evaluated in this study was the *Days of Our Lives* outdoor cabin scene, January 22, 1996, which had snow, evergreen trees, huge gray stones, and a gray cabin. The colors of the cabin and the area around it were realistic, but the lighting fell considerably short of looking natural since it was evidently filmed in a studio.

Lighting, for all soap operas is basic and rudimentary. It does little beyond providing visibility.

SOUND AND MUSIC

Sound effects are any sound produced by human or mechanical means to create for the audience sounds or noise associated with the scene being produced. Music, like sound is temporal; it is event which moves through time in contrast to an object which can be caught in a moment of time and frozen. Music accompanies the visual as well as verbal to intensify or lessen the delivery in a scene.

The music-image relationship within classical narrative film may be described as a process of mutual anchorage based on semantic isotopy: the chain of visual signifiers functions as a context for the musical chain,

selecting and ‘anchoring’ identical or corresponding musical signifiers, and vice versa. In other words, music does not unilaterally specify or add to the meaning of the images, the images also lend meaning to the music. The two are interpreted together. (Gripsrud 186)

In the soap opera sound and music are used sparingly to establish auditory reality, to advance the action of the storyline, to provoke desired emotional connection of the audience with feelings of the characters, and to provide psychological functions. Music is important as basic communication because in it intellect and emotion come together.

Generally the music is utilitarian, simple, and ordinary; its production is inexpensive since it is generic harmony and melody with mostly electronic instrumentation.

Some conventional sounds which are used to create reality are found in all of the scenes studied. The following examples are representative of ordinary sounds:

In the *Guiding Light* hospital scene, February 9, 1996, paging over the public address system and the ringing of phones enhances the feeling of being in a hospital. Also, a bell dings as in a timer. In the *Days of Our Lives* restaurant scene, Bo’s beeper sounds, and there is background talking by other patrons. During the bedroom scene with Peter and Jennifer, *Days of Our Lives*, January 5, 1996, he tosses her coat on the bed, and as it lands on the wood of the foot board, that normal sound is heard. When Lucas, in the *Days of Our Lives* living room scene, January 9, 1996, surprises Kari with a catered dinner at her apartment, the cigarette lighter has a clicking sound as he lights the candles, and the sound of a closing door is heard as Niko, the caterer, leaves the room. *The City*

elevator scene, January 16, 1996, which has no dialogue, but only sounds and instrumental music, uses a realistic sound of steel elevator doors sliding open. Street sounds, which will be identified in detail in chapter three, are prominent in the montage opening of *The City* restaurant scene, January 10, 1996.

Occasionally, the storyline is advanced by specific sounds or an adjustment in the mood of the music through a change in instrumentation, rhythm, harmony, melody, or lyric. For example, the sounds of Bo's beeper suddenly moves the story forward because he must leave the restaurant. In a much different way lyric, coupled only with movement and no dialogue, moves *The City* street scene, January 9, 1996, with Alex and Jocelyn.

Music serves the psychological function of easing quick frame changes, and music transitions connect scenes in an episode which have similar moods and feelings. The music serves as a bridge into the next scene and is faded out as the next characters and scene are established. The following scene music descriptions verify this practice.

The musical transition into the *Guiding Light* hospital scene with Rick and Ed began in the preceding scene; Reva and Allen, who are in a cohabitation relationship, are engaged in confrontation over Reva seeking custody of her children. Reva tells him that she is leaving. The music begins with a soft string melody, and an oboe synthesizer on a single tone melody, higher and plaintive, becomes louder as the emotional intensity peaks. The music continues as the hospital scene opens with Rick holding a subpoena from Reva's lawyer. The music stops when Rick makes his first statement. Reva's former husband Josh, who has custody of her children, is now married to Annie, former wife of

Rick. The music bridges the two scenes which are filled with emotional intensity because of relationship breakups and new legal entanglements.

Another scene with Reva leads into the bedroom scene with Blake, Matt, and Vanessa. As Reva tells Annie that she is taking legal action for custody of the children, a dissonant sustained synthesizer chord begins, and as the emotional outburst occurs, a single piano tone with repeated minor intervals creates rhythm to emphasize the feeling of being threatened. The bedroom scene opens with Blake emotionally distraught over her actions which she took toward her husband. She exclaims to Matt and Vanessa, "I've accused my husband of an affair. I've broken trust; he'll never have me back." By the time she finishes her second line, the music fades away and the rest of the scene is conversation without background music.

To move into the *Days of Our Lives* hospital scene, February 9, 1996, with Jamie and Lucas, in the second half of the preceding scene as Bo asks Hope for a date, with the request for a second chance for their relationship, generic piano music, much like dinner music in a restaurant, begins. Its mood is romantic, and that continues into the hospital scene long enough for Jamie and Lucas to walk through a door, close it, and go to their places to begin the scene. That scene ends with Jamie and Lucas in disagreement, and at that time a series of eighth notes, single tones on the piano, begins: f/e, f/e (half step), e/d, e/d (whole step). That pattern moves down chromatically as the next scene opens with Kari and Austin, whose relationship is filled with tension because she spent the night with

Lucas, his half brother. This is an example of how a series of scenes are bridged with instrumental transitions.

The City also uses these conventional musical transitions. Preceding the great room scene with Sydney, Samuel, and Richard, Nick sits at the bar having a conversation with the bar tender. As they talk, the singer, accompanied by guitar, is supplying background music. It is barely heard, but it produces auditory reality for the scene. As Nick's conversation ends, the singer sings the last note, and the guitar chord is carried over into the next scene until Sydney begins her lines in a telephone conversation.

Before the clinic scene with Angie and the social worker, a different great room scene than the one researched for this study, with Sydney and Richard, is taking place. As that scene ends to bridge into the clinic, percussion only is used with a repeated pattern of two eighth notes, followed by a quarter note. A sustained dissonant synthesizer chord is added to carry over into the clinic scene which begins with a tense meeting with Angie and the social worker.

These examples of the use of music reinforce the utilitarian nature of music in all soap operas. It can be performed with little preparation, at minimal cost and with little or no intention of having intrinsic value or interest.

All three soap operas reviewed in this study share similar applications of performance values. The quality of sound and music, lighting, and sets, in the opinion of this writer, is substandard in relationship to the technology available.

Chapter III

Contrasts In Performance Values

VOICE AND BODY

The settings of *Guiding Light* and *Days of Our Lives* reflect life in traditional communities whereas *The City* has an urban, fast paced, stressed, yuppie atmosphere. Characters tend to be younger, thirty to forty-five years old, and single again or never married on all three shows. Some have had children in former relationships and have to deal with those complications. The performers' bodies must meet yuppie criteria. Facial hair is acceptable; Nick has a well-trimmed beard with a few gray flecks, and he is handsome. The New York City detective Alex, though not wearing a beard, has an up-to-date short hair cut, and natural gray flecks also appear in his hair. Male performers in both *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light* have full heads of hair which are solidly brown, black, or white. Extra weight is a factor which also differentiates *The City* from *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light*. *The City* men do not carry an extra fifteen to twenty pounds as some *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light* males do. Therefore, *The City* creates competition in regard to the body as a performance value.

Hair styles for female performers in *The City* are simpler than *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light*. Jocelyn, a lawyer, with red hair, wears a rather short, blunt cut which looks professional in a court scene or over lunch in a downtown restaurant. It also serves her well for a winter walk on a windy street. Sydney Chase is blonde with longer shoulder length hair, almost straight, and it appears to take little care whether she is conducting business at her apartment desk or going out for a night on the town. Angie's long black hair is pulled up high on her head with curls hanging down, fashionable, but out of the way as she treats patients. Allie has a shoulder length body wave, brown at the roots with blonde strands.

A greater amount of body movement sets apart *The City* since the characters walk about more than in *Guiding Light* and *Days of Our Lives* as they converse, and in some scenes, body movement moves the story apart from any spoken word.

An example of movement during conversation occurs in Sydney's great room scene, January 16, 1996. She remains seated at her table since the story of the scene is about her, and Samuel, her butler, driver, and house manger, moves from the far left of the screen toward her as the conversation begins. Then Richard, her son, appears close to her at the far left. As they begin to talk he walks upstage into the kitchen to get a glass. Then he walks back to the counter and pours orange juice for himself and finally walks away as he says that he will go and read the newspaper.

A creative use of movement is expressed in the elevator scene in *The City* January 16, 1995, with Sydney and Nick. With no words spoken, movement is used exclusively to

tell the story; the scene is underscored by instrumental music. In that scene Nick walks past both doors of the elevator and pushes the button. His facial movement suggests that he is deep in thought. As the door opens, Sydney is facing him. They both reflect, with slight facial movement, that they do not want to be meeting there, and did not expect this to happen. By facial movement they say, "You stood me up last night; I don't want to see you again." The evening before, they were to meet each other on the roof, but because it was foggy, they did not find each other. Since he thought she deliberately failed to show up, he went to Buck's bar in the bottom of the building to perform. Because Sydney believed that Nick had stood her up, she started back to her apartment, and walking past Buck's bar, in her building, she heard Nick singing. She went in to verify that it was he. Therefore, the next morning's elevator meeting was obviously unpleasant. Their relationship dates back to the birth of their adult son, Richard.

Equally creative was the street scene with Jocelyn and Alex in *The City*, January 10, 1996. Only one minute and thirty-five seconds long, there are more than twenty-five frames which give a montage like feel to the scene. Alex and Jocelyn step out of the building and walk briskly through the business district, and scenes show them stopping at a sidewalk sale to try on hats and sunglasses. From a rack of blouses she holds up a blouse sleeve to her face as though to say, "How do I look in this color?" They move on, step into a coffee shop, come out with styrofoam cups of coffee and continue their walk. He slips out of sight, and her face shows, "I've lost him." He had slipped around the corner, and when he sees her, he grabs her. Her shock turns to pleasure as he pulls her up

to his face for a kiss. As they move on through the street sale, he sits in a sofa to test its comfort. She playfully pulls him up from it, and they continue their walk back to the building from which they started. No dialogue occurred; lyrics of background music supported the story told by their movement.

Vocal quality and tempo in *The City* creates the impression that life is moving faster than in *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Lives*. Even with characters in conflict in *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light* there seems to be a smoother flow to the speech, a more civil attitude. Dialogue in *The City* has much emotional intensity; voices are pitched higher and some scripting is staccato and brusque.

Two scenes represent this style. In the bedroom scene Danny and Allie are arguing over their relationship because she is feeling guilty over their one night stand since her late husband has been gone for less than year. Danny is upset that she cannot move on and be freed from the past. With a shrill vocal quality, Allie says, "Every time I'm with you I think about Casey." He replies, "I thought we were past all that." Allie counters him with, "Yeah, well, there's some things you never get past." "You're still blaming me for his death, aren't you!" Danny exclaimed. Though there are a few calm moments in the scene, the overall atmosphere is harsh and intense.

In the great room scene Richard and his mother, Sydney, begin the morning conversation on a sour note. As the scene builds she says, "You can check out of this little hotel anytime you want." Richard responds, "And give up this warm family atmosphere." Later he says, "I take it that the meeting didn't go very well last night."

“The meeting went fine,” she said. Richard blurted back, “Oh yeah, then why are you acting like such a” “Like such a what?” she snapped. Richard walks away to read the newspaper. The conversation had a staccato feeling and they tended to interrupt each other.

The directors and producers of *The City* have cast this soap opera in such a way as to present a yuppie community in physical appearance, and their vocal style was chosen to express relational conflict in the direct and blunt manner of the nineties. This approach to treating relationships may blunt the competitive edge which *The City* has in performance values.

CAMERA

Though *The City* uses much ordinary camera work such as alternate close-ups, full body establishing shots, and reaction shots, there are four noticeable differences in contrast to *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light*.

Longer shots are used more frequently and for longer periods of time in contrast to close shots and close-ups in *Guiding Light* and *Days of Our Lives*. Also, more aerial shots are used as establishing shots, and vertical shots are more common, especially since outside shots of the setting, urban New York, are frequently used. The subject matter also lends itself well to montage, which is used daily to move the audience into the episodes.

Long shots are used more frequently than in other productions. Four of the five representative scenes in *The City* begin with long establishing shots. In the great room, January 16, 1996, Sydney and Samuel appear on the far right and far left of the screen with a full view of the living-dining area of the room and five large windows which reveal the high rise across the street. Angie, the physician, her receptionist, and the social worker are in a full shot view in the clinic scene. The restaurant establishing scene shot is aerial; this scene will be described further in this section. In the elevator scene Nick walks past the elevator doors and presses the button before close shots begin.

During dialogue in which conflict is intense, long shots are used frequently for both persons to be in view, and this reveals their body language well. For example, Richard and Sydney have their morning confrontation in the great room with very few close-ups. In contrast to this, in *Guiding Light* Hart and Dinah have thirty consecutive close-ups during their argument on January 22, 1996. In Allie's bedroom she and Danny in *The City* are often shown together with considerable exposure of the set. This is the one scene which does not open with a long establishing shot. In *The City* elevator scene, January 15, 1996, as the elevator door opens, following a close-up of Nick, Sydney and the full interior of the elevator are seen from a long shot; only one close-up of Sydney is used in this scene. The clinic scene both begins and ends with long shots. The street scene lends itself ideally to long shots; there are only two single close-ups of Alex in twenty-six frames.

Aerial shots in the clinic and restaurant scene, January 16, 1996, effectively reveal both sets which are large. Jocelyn and Alex are first seen from above while sitting at a round table near the center of the restaurant. Then the camera moves in to a two-shot position. In the clinic scene, immediately following the establishing shot, the camera moves up for an aerial view and shows Angie and the social worker walking from the reception area into Angie's office and being seated there. Then the camera moves into a two-shot position for their discussion.

Though vertical shots rarely appear in *Guiding Light* and *Days of Our Lives*, they are frequent in *The City*. In the opening of the restaurant scene, a vertical shot pans the exterior of the building down to the restaurant sign before showing the interior with the establishing aerial shot. For the street scene, immediately before Alex and Jocelyn step out of the door, the camera moves vertically downward from the top of the building to the tall doors and cobblestone street. At the end of that scene when they go back inside the same doors, the camera moves vertically up to the top of the building. The elevator scene, a confined set, uses a vertical shot to show the elevator door, the control buttons, and Nick.

Montage is a distinguishing characteristic of *The City*. The street scene, for example, is a series of twenty-six shots with no conversation between Jocelyn and Alex. The camera, supported by background vocal music, tells the story. The lyric will be presented in the section of this chapter on sound and music. At the beginning of the restaurant scene, six montage images appear before Jocelyn and Alex are shown inside the

restaurant. Much more interesting camera work is used in *The City*, and the variety of vertical shots and montage gives the impression of a much faster moving storyline. For example, *The City* street scene with Alex and Jocelyn, January 10, 1996, has twenty-six frames during one brief song as they walk in Manhattan; full body and close-up shots show them kissing, drinking coffee, trying on hats and sunglasses, and admiring each other. The scene begins and ends with vertical shots of the building they leave and enter. The sophisticated lens work in *The City* places it in a clearly competitive position among soap operas.

It needs to be mentioned that low ratings are still a factor for *The City*. One has to question why this happens when the camera work is more varied and the actors' bodies have a sleeker, more fit look. On these production values alone it is a more interesting show to watch because it is successful in producing the feeling that the viewer is watching a film. It is the opinion of this writer that most of the storylines and the characters within them represent a harder, selfish, mean attitude that is part of society in the 90's. There is little contrast in the half-hour episode between a hard story and then a softer story which would bring some variation. Therefore it is clear that along with the updated production values there is a need for the show to provide a certain amount of escapism for the viewer.

SETS

The principle difference between *Guiding Light*, *Days of Our Lives*, and *The City* regarding outside scenes is that *The City* shoots on location. Therefore, the shots of New York are realistic. Locale and period of time are established by the montage flashes of the Brooklyn Bridge, the Statue of Liberty, a 1993 Chevrolet taxi cab, the Empire State Building, the American flag, and sky scrapers.

The outdoor street scene with Alex and Jocelyn have the rich variation of bright sunlight, shadows from buildings, street sounds, passers-by, and merchandise at sidewalk sales. A viewer can sense that he or she is watching a real movie shot on location. As the restaurant scene with Jocelyn and Alex opens, the outside of the restaurant and its sign are quickly presented, which suggest a more natural feel of what people see when they go out to eat in New York.

The City establishes itself as a nineties' production by carefully using sets which reflect architecture and decor consistent with current trends and fads. *The City's* great room is an example of a nineties metropolitan apartment which has much more open space than comparable room areas in *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light*. A grand piano, formal dining table, desk, sofas, chairs, lamps, and large plants all fit in easily in this room. With one move of the camera to the right, the room continues on into a spacious kitchen, equipped well enough to cook and serve at restaurant capacity. The furnishings are bold;

a glass table, ebony grand piano, and leopard skin design in the dining chairs. Near the stairs which lead up to the bedrooms, are four pictures of Sydney done in a bold modern florescent style; they closely resemble posters. The kitchen is very slick and hi-tech in appearance, neither busy nor cozy, whereas *Days of Our Lives*, June, 11, 1996, and *Guiding Light*, January 22, 1996, are ornate and traditional.

The bar/restaurant scene, January 16, 1996, also has much more of an open space feel than the *Guiding Light* bar, January 22, 1996, or the *Days of Our Lives* restaurant, June 11, 1996. A most interesting decoration, and one of very few, is a multi-colored neon sculpture of a series of liquor bottles done in outline form.

The clinic set is close to being realistic in terms of its simplicity since it is supposed to provide medical help for low-income persons, though the clinic is in Sydney's building. The chairs are simple and not stylish, and are a cheap aqua blue color. The interior of the clinic has an open space design with only partial walls or moveable wall dividers. No paintings dress up the walls, and no luxurious plants grace the area; only medical posters are on the walls. It is strictly functional and low cost.

In terms of realism in sets for the soap opera genre, *The City* has used contemporary styles in an effort to help viewers who follow contemporary trends feel at home.

COSTUMES

Though *The City* uses some traditional and conventional costuming, there are clear contrasts with *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light*.

Striking and solid colors are used more frequently in *The City* than in *Guiding Light* and *Days of Our Lives*. For example, in the great room scene, January 16, 1996, Sydney wears a solid aqua outfit with taupe high heels. Allie, in the bedroom scene, January 9, 1996, wears blue jeans and a solid dark purple sweater while Danny wears black jeans and a solid black button down shirt. In the restaurant scene, January 10, 1996, Alex wears dark pants and a rich solid brown shirt with an exposed white T-shirt. Jocelyn wears a white blouse underneath a brown jacket and matching shirt. Standing in front of the beige elevator doors, January 16, 1996, Nick wears an expensive solid black sweater with a black leather jacket which coordinates well with his dark eyes, gray and black hair and dark beard. In the clinic, Angie is wearing a red mini-skirt with some design with a solid black sweater, black tights, and boots. She wears her lab coat unbuttoned. Such bold colors stimulate the viewers and keep their attention more than some of the *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light* bland color choices. In contrast to *The City*, in the restaurant *Days of Our Lives* scene Shawn wears a plaid shirt, and his wife wears a flowered blouse. In *Guiding Light*, Hart wears a brown plaid sport coat in a fashionable restaurant/bar, January 22, 1996. *The City* is also more casual. Nick, a night club

musician, does not appear with a tie, nor does Alex, a detective. Jeans are common, though all the characters are well groomed.

An exception to casual dress exists in the costumes of Sydney and Jocelyn. They are professional women of power and position. They nearly always are dressed in quality business attire, which sets them apart. With men dressing down, though in high quality casual clothing, an impression is created of scenarios not dominated by males, which is representative of egalitarian nineties.

The costuming in *The City* appears to be up-to-date for persons in their thirties or forties. Young viewers could more easily identify with this choice in costumes.

LIGHTING

Though *The City*, *Guiding Light*, and *Days of Our Lives* have common lighting characteristics, one difference between *The City* and the other shows has to do with lighting intensity. *The City* seems to be the most natural, while some *Guiding Light* scenes appear to be brighter than real life settings, and some *Days of Our Lives* scenes are too dim to match reality.

In comparing the *Guiding Light* hospital scene, February 9, 1996, with *The City* clinic, January 16, 1996, the *Guiding Light* hospital nurses' station had the brightness not unlike that of a new car show room. *The City* clinic had adequate lighting and the

brightness felt there came from the aqua chairs and orange file folders on the desk, in contrast to the off white walls.

In *Days of Our Lives* in the restaurant scene, June 11, 1996, as Hope sits at the table and Shawn joins her, the lighting on him appears brighter than on her. Though technically the lighting may be equal, his hair is white and she has dark brown hair. The background behind her is darker than behind him. In the same scene where Bo sits at the bar with his mother standing behind it, more light seems to be cast in her direction than on him; his face is darker.

In the *Days of Our Lives* kitchen/living room scene, June 11, 1996, as Lucas steps through the door into the hall, both he and the hall are so dark that unless a viewer was gripped by the storyline, visual interest could be lost. This uneven and darker lighting does not appear in *Guiding Light* or *The City*.

The great room in *The City*, January 16, 1996, seemed natural in that the light inside the room looked authentic for mid-morning, and the light from the five windows was much brighter than indoor light, as outside light really is. Looking through the windows, the buildings across the street appeared sunlit.

Also *The City* street scene, January 9, 1996, had the variation of an early afternoon natural light. Some streets were bathed in sunlight, but as Jocelyn and Alex turned into another avenue, it was well shaded by tall buildings. It was as a winter New York street is when the northern hemisphere is turned away from the sun and the shadows are long and dark.

What gives *The City* a competitive advantage in lighting is that they often shoot on location.

The City has made substantial progress in creating lighting design which is realistic. Lighting designer Shawn Conklin (ABC) told me in a conversation, November 6, 1996, that *The City* great room is an actual room with windows letting in motivated light. Also they allow their actors to go dark. They will film in a darker stairway or hallway. They use more floor equipment, and not too many likkos. They attempt to use more of a film style in contrast to other soap operas.

Guiding Light lighting designer Brian McRae (CBS) told me in a conversation, November 6, 1996, that they use more soft lights, peppers, stik-ups, source four likkos, fresnels and Mal Richardsons. This seemed to produce a more artificial studio look to the scenes studied for this thesis.

As a production value, lighting would be helped if it went even further to bring more of a genuine look to the scene in all the soap operas.

SOUND AND MUSIC

The City makes more extensive and creative use of utilitarian sound and music than does *Days of Our Lives* or *Guiding Light*.

The montage leading into the restaurant scene has vibrant accompanying street sounds with three of the six frames. The swish of tires is heard as a blue patrol car fills the

screen and then honking horns sound as a bus stops on the street. These sounds occur together with the ongoing upbeat and loud pop music. This music bridges into the frame of an aerial shot inside the restaurant.

The elevator scene, January 16, 1996, uses mood music, with movement and not dialogue to express the feelings of Nick and Sydney toward each other. They failed to make connections at a planned meeting the night before; they both showed up, but failed to see each other. Now they are upset. In the elevator scene Nick comes into place first as he walks to the elevator to press the door button. Blues music is heard in the background, with the typical instruments of trumpet and percussion associated with bars. This serves as the underscore while Sydney, who happens to be in the elevator when the door opens, exchanges awkward and slightly hostile looks with Nick. The same music continues for an extended period of time into the next scene before new characters begin their conversation.

In the street scene of twenty-six frames, January 9, 1996, with Alex and Jocelyn, vocal music, with lyrics and actions well coordinated, pictures a developing romance. The story is sung with such words as, "I had no choice but to hear you. You stated your case (Jocelyn is a lawyer, Alex a detective). You've already won me over, in spite of me. Don't be alarmed if I fall head over feet. Don't be surprised if I love you for all that you are. I couldn't help it. It's all your fault." Then as the scene comes to an end and they go back into the building as he holds the door for her, the lyrics continue, "you are the bearer of unconditional things. You held your breath and the door for me." The scene ends.

The rhythm and tempo for this scene established a buoyant feeling and quick pace. This was in contrast to the elevator scene in which the music generated a contemplative pace and feelings of discomfort.

A novel use of instrumental music in place of words occurs in the living room scene, January 16, 1996, in a harsh conversation between Sydney and her son Richard. She is obviously still upset over the failed meeting with Nick the night before. Richard asks how the meeting went, and when she responds in an agitated manner that the meeting went fine, he shot back, “O yeah, then why are you acting like such a . . .?” At that moment a dissonant, lower register interval on the synthesizer is struck with a firm attack to match the harsh word. Some generic rhythm is added to the chord as she responds, “Like such a what?” She drew out the word “what.” The dramatic impact of what she meant was greater by using music than if he had spoken the implied word.

The City takes full advantage of sounds associated with outside shots, done on location, and uses music apart from dialogue to tell the story and convey emotional responses.

There is evidence in the performance values of *The City* that adjustments and improvements are being introduced in the creative use of music, in the diversity of camera work, and with more realism in sets and lighting. Though the viewing ratings for *The City* remain low, “This could still be a *City* of hope” (Logan 44).

Chapter IV

Conclusion and Recommendations For Further Research

Of all performance values, body receives the most attention and all other production elements support this emphasis. They are mostly lean, or carry only a few extra pounds, and have the typical high forehead, square jaws, narrow eyes, thin lips, angular nose, and a full head of hair. Since the audience expects such bodies, producers choose actors with those physical traits, and the actors must maintain their appearance. *General Hospital* star Steve Burton was recently the subject of an article in *Men's Fitness*.

When the lights come on and the tape rolls, soap opera star Steve Burton has to look perfect. Here's how he does it (He says), "You ask yourself some singularly uncomfortable questions: Is my body what she expected? Should I have done one more set of bench presses this afternoon, a little more cardio last week? . . . It's you, her, and a few million TV viewers." Sounds like your worst nightmare, unless you happen to be an exhibitionist. But it's an experience one client of mine fully understands Steve Burton plays Jason Quartermaine *on General Hospital*. Steve and I first started training together when he had to get in

shape for a storyline that involved him getting hot and heavy with one of the women on the long-running daytime drama. (Mauer 82,84)

Syndicated television series understand the importance of great bodies since the shows are sold to local stations one by one, and they lack the advertising push which major network shows have. “Syndicated hours have to go for reliable formulas that can quickly attract attention, and none is more reliable than watching beautiful people in action . . . The original *Baywatch* proved it could lure millions of viewers with beautifully photographed action featuring buffed hunks” (Miller E1).

The hair color of the male stars is usually dark brown or black, occasionally with some flecks of gray. The few older men usually have gray or white hair. The darker hair likely symbolizes strength, dignity, and authority, and gray or white hair suggests experience and wisdom. Red and blonde colors for men are noticeably absent.

Female characters have lovely faces, and perfectly proportioned bodies. Though women are usually not presented in an overtly erotic manner in soap operas, they do appear as normal sensuous human beings. More variety in hair color is present among the female characters than among males. Several have red hair, which lends expectations of character traits of intensity, excitement or perhaps bordering on being a vixen. This writer believes that all shows should have redheads to add vibrancy to the mix of characters. Blondes generate a more buoyant, lighter, free, and somewhat innocent set of character traits, whereas dark brown or black hair colors for women suggest elegance, calmness, and strength. Having some characters which exude strength is important when other

characters experience sudden and difficult life changes in the storyline. If I were a producer, I would always have women with specific hair colors to help audiences remember the characters and to suggest a mix of character traits.

In order to exploit the bodies of handsome men and beautiful women, I would recommend more action shots. For example, two women could be working out in the gym and having a discussion about relationship conflicts. They could be dressed in gym attire which accentuates their more alluring physical qualities. Men could be doing some gardening as a hobby or spending time near the swimming pool during the summer season. Their wives or girlfriends could show up in swim suits. Bodies, plus action, will go a long way in sustaining audience interest if the storyline is a reasonable one.

The age of the characters becomes important because identification with viewing audiences must occur within the framework of the American culture which idolizes youth and success. Though youth and success are combined in real life less frequently than among soap opera characters, audiences want to see the symbols of financial and social success with persons who are in late youth or only early middle age. Hence, most of the characters are from their late twenties to mid-forties. A few successful grandparents and other tentpole characters, special to the viewers for a long period of time, are sprinkled among the characters to give a full inter-generational exposure of families. During the summer viewing season when many teenagers are watching daytime shows, stories with much younger family members will appear frequently in the episodes.

I have no suggestions for improvement in the performance value of voice since voices match the characters well in almost all situations.

Costumes and sets reinforce the focus on attractive bodies, and they suggest financial and social success. Clothing and accessories are obviously expensive and stylish; the sets have large houses with elegant appointments. More diversity in settings is needed in all of the daytime shows. A winter ski scene, a Palm Springs spa, a classy department store, a ball park, or a casino would enhance the variety of settings, and would be consistent with most of the characters in the storylines. On very few occasions such settings will be utilized by some of the shows, but it seems to be an anomaly when it does happen. *The City* uses more diversity than other shows; street scenes, elevator scenes, hallways, and stairwells. For most shows too many scenes are in the living room, kitchen, and bedroom.

A fast paced production schedule impacts the time and attention given to camera work, lighting, sound, and music. Efficiency, in contrast to effectiveness, seems to guide decisions with regard to these production values. Linked to the pace of production schedules are the networks' financial decisions to use daytime serials as high income shows to fund prime-time ones which usually incur deficits.

Camera work in *The City* has much more variety than in *Guiding Light* and *Days of Our Lives*: montage, vertical shots, full body shots with action, and on location filming for most outside scenes. Therefore, I would make few suggestions for improvement by *The City*. "It's already won Emmys for editing and art direction, and its sophisticated lens

work has been ripped off by almost every other daytime sudser” (Logan 44). *Days of Our Lives* with a much higher viewer rating than *The City* and *Guiding Light*, would do well to employ more of the lens work common to *The City*. Based on my observation of these three soap operas, I have the following suggestions for two scenes.

In the *Guiding Light* restaurant/bar scene with Dinah and Hart, after the long establishing shot, there are thirty non-stop close-up frames of the two actors in dialogue. Early in this scene she threw a glass of water in Hart’s face, and the waiter came over to wipe his face; from that time until Hart stood up to leave the restaurant, there was nothing but dialogue with the close-up series of shots.

To create a situation for a medium full shot two-thirds of the way through the scene when the dialogue becomes intense, have Hart stand and turn upstage to exit, but change his mind and turn back to look at her as the camera shows him in a profile medium full shot. Then he says, “He stole everything my grandfather had, and that’s what probably killed the old man.” I would have Hart stand and Dinah remain seated during the rest of the scene, and this would give opportunities for close-up shots and two-shot frames.

The lens work in *Days of Our Lives* could be enhanced by more actor movement and fewer close-ups. For example, in the kitchen scene with Kari and Lucas, she crosses from a chair and goes upstage to a table and takes her tea from Lucas as they begin their conversation. They remain there for a series of close-ups. I would have directed Kari to cross from where the chair was in the scene and go upstage where Lucas is pouring hot

water into the cups and have him accidentally miss one of the cups and pour the water on his hand. Kari would cross quickly to the sink to get a cold towel and place it over his hand. The camera would then move from a medium shot of both to a single shot of Lucas looking down at Kari as she puts the towel on his hand. He starts to squeeze her hand, and the camera focuses on their hands, and then moves to their faces as they look toward each other and contemplate kissing. This last frame would be a profile two-shot.

Among all production elements, lighting and music appear to be the most compromised.

Though lighting is better in *The City* than in *Days of Our Lives* and *Guiding Light*, in some scenes the warm colors turn to an orange hue rather than natural looking warm tones which come from the color of walls, floors, furnishings, bouquets, and paintings. Also *The City* has not overcome the problem of some shadows on faces and furniture. Often characters in *Days of Our Lives* have shadows coming from two directions on their clothing and faces. *Days of Our Lives* has problems with some sets being too dark; the first goal of lighting, visibility, falls short of being fully realized. Such dimness gives the sets a fake appearance. Soap opera producers need to give substantial attention to lighting design, and in order to do this it may be necessary to allocate more funding and to do more filming out of sequence, which is rarely done. For the shows which are more popular with audiences such as the number two *Days of Our Lives*, improved lighting could give a competitive edge.

Creativity in the use of music in *The City* is easily identified in terms of using current songs and allowing those songs to tell the story and express feelings independent of dialogue. However, much of the music for transition scenes is purely generic and boring. The music in *Guiding Light* and *Days of Our Lives* is nondescript and serves mostly as a vehicle to transition from scene to scene. Musical richness, balance, and diversity could be achieved by having more contrast in instrumentation, along with more tempo, meter, and key changes. It appears that much of the music is pre-recorded and used many times. Each scene and episode deserves some musical originality.

I believe that it would be advantageous for producers to move from the position of counting on relational conflicts to sustain the interest of viewers apart from some performance values, to a position of depending equally upon performance values to sustain audience interest because this is the area in which the different shows can compete with one another. For example, if *Days of Our Lives* would design lighting in such a manner as to make all scenes clearly as visible and as sharp as prime-time shows, *Days of Our Lives* would become more competitive; *Days of Our Lives* is especially weak in lighting. The evidences that some soap operas are copying the lens work of *The City* signals that competition has been generated in camera work as a performance value. Now that competition has begun, it could well build to a crescendo in the next few years as shows compete for both general and specific audiences.

Since my search for bibliography on soap opera performance values in the San Jose State University library yielded very few resources, I believe that all of the production

elements, with perhaps the exception of body and costume, need full research in order to give producers, music composers, lighting designers, and camera operators assistance for improving these elements. As recently as 1995, Jostein Gripsrud, in *The Dynasty Years*, wrote, “I think the role of music in film and television and in modern mass communication in general, for that matter has been overlooked to an embarrassing degree. I have only come across a single article which deals specifically with music in daytime soap operas” (Gripsrud 184-85).

Soap operas are viewed in forty million American households weekly; this is a vast marketplace for television drama to enhance its quality of storylines, dialogue script, acting, and performance values. Universities should play a role in research, especially in lighting and music, and in preparing students for acting and technical excellence within the framework of limited funding and demanding production schedules.

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Shadows in *Days of Our Lives*
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