The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

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Cover photo: A. Brian Humphrey in Damn Yankees, 1999.
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Synopsis: Damn Yankees

As the musical opens, Meg Boyd sings with the other wives “Six Months out of Every Year,” as Joe Boyd and the other husbands continue their seasonal obsession with America’s national pastime, baseball.

After Meg goes to bed, Joe goes out on the porch to ruminate about the appalling fate of his beloved Washington Senators, actually offering his soul in exchange for “one good long ball hitter.” Mr. Applegate materializes immediately and offers to make Boyd twenty-two years old and a genuine sports superstar—in exchange for his soul. Boyd agrees, with the stipulation that, should he choose to return to his wife, he has an escape clause he can exercise before the end of the final game of the season. As Meg drifts off to sleep, Joe sings his goodbye to her in “Goodbye Old Girl,” while Applegate changes the middle-aged fan into young Joe Hardy, the great baseball player.

Meanwhile, the hapless Washington Senators can’t seem to do anything right. Applegate arrives just then with his protégé, Joe Hardy, and gets him to practice and eventually play with the team. Joe immediately becomes the darling of the media, alarming Applegate, who begins to see Joe demonstrating more independence than is wise. He calls up his trusty and beautiful helper, Lola, who assures him she knows just how to captivate Joe.

Joe, however, is lonely and misses his wife. He goes back to his home on the pretext of renting a room. Applegate tries to interfere but only manages to set most of the kitchen on fire, and Joe remains to rent the room and help Meg with chores, something he never attempted before as her husband.

In the meantime, Lola’s attempts to seduce Joe fail; and, enraged, Applegate decides to launch a smear campaign against Joe to prevent him from winning.

Act Two begins just days before the end of the season. Washington is leading the league. If they can win the next game, they will clinch the pennant one full day before Applegate’s contract matures, and Joe can escape with his soul intact. To prevent the win, Applegate coerces sportswriter Gloria Thorpe into writing a story accusing Joe of accepting a bribe. To defend himself Joe appears before the baseball commission, and misses this one game—a game the Senators lose without him. The Senators now have one more game—a must win situation—and Joe’s contract says his soul goes to Applegate at nine o’clock, whether the game is over or not.

The next morning he tells Applegate and Lola he will play as much of the game as possible, and rack up winning runs before exercising his escape clause and going back to his wife. Furious and bent on revenge, Applegate sends Joe into limbo, hoping to immobilize him during the final game, but Lola follows him, exhorts him to play, and then stalls Applegate.

While Joe plays desperately for Washington, Applegate attempts to foil Joe’s final attempt at the bat as the hand of the clock moves toward nine o’clock. At nine exactly, Joe throws down his bat and is instantly transformed into middle-aged Joe Boyd again. Then, taking a final swing at the oncoming ball, he manages to hit one over the wall, winning the pennant for his team.

Back at home, Applegate, with Lola in tow, interrupts Joe’s reunion and reconciliation with his beloved wife, Meg, and attempts to seduce him back with promises of the World Series to come. Joe, now locked securely in his wife’s arms, escapes the devil’s clinches, singing a joyous finale of “A Man Doesn’t Know.”
Characters: *Damn Yankees*

Joe Boyd (later called Joe Hardy): A middle-aged baseball fanatic, Joe would do anything to help his beloved Washington Senators take the pennant, including selling his soul. In fact, he does strike a deal with the devil, who transforms him into a young slugger who saves the season for the Senators. However, the deal also requires Joe to give up his life, including his beloved wife, Meg.

Meg Boyd: Joe’s wife, Meg is devoted and understanding. When Joe disappears, she continues to hope against hope that he will return.

Mr. Applegate: The devil, Applegate is consumed in this play with winning the soul of Joe Boyd, and makes the deal with Joe that the play hinges on: Joe being transformed to a great baseball player for the Washington Senators, in exchange for his soul at the end of the season.

Sister: Meg’s friend

Doris: Meg’s friend

Henry: A player for the Washington Senators

Sohovik: A catcher for the Washington Senators

Smokey: A pitcher for the Washington Senators

Linville: A player for the Washington Senators

Van Buren: The manager of the Washington Senators

Rocky: An outfielder for the Washington Senators

Gloria Thorpe: A sportswriter that covers the Washington Senators for the local newspaper

Lynch: A reporter

Welch: The owner of the Washington Senators

Bryan: A player for the Washington Senators

Lola: A sexy and beautiful home wrecker on Applegate’s “staff,” Lola is assigned to seduce Joe and take his mind off his wife, thus fulfilling his contract and losing his soul to the devil.

However, deep inside, Lola has a soft heart, especially for Joe.

Bouley: A player for the Washington Senators

Lowe: A player for the Washington Senators

Mickey: A player for the Washington Senators

Baseball Commissioner

Postmaster

Guard

Other Ball Players

Baseball Fans

Singers and Dancers
Damn Yankees was a true collaboration. Following the huge success of their previous work together, three professionals decided to repeat the success by sticking to a now proven formula. In the earlier production, George Abbott, Richard Adler and Jerry Ross had taken a novel entitled 7 1/2 Cents, and with the help of its author, Richard Bissell, turned it into a Broadway musical called The Pajama Game. By joining up with author Douglass Wallop, Abbott, Adler and Ross hoped the new musical would be as big a hit as The Pajama Game had been.

They weren’t disappointed. Based on Wallop’s novel, The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, Damn Yankees opened in New York on May 5, 1955, to pronounced success. After 1,019 performances, the original production closed October 12, 1957. It was immediately followed by a national tour and a film version from Warner Bros. in 1958. In 1994, the play was revived on Broadway in a production that featured comedy legend Jerry Lewis in a leading role.

The premise of Wallop’s novel was simple. There was a time when the Yankees won the baseball pennant almost every year. From 1949 to 1958, the Bronx team won the American League pennant nine times. While it seemed the Yankees couldn’t lose, it seemed the Washington Senators couldn’t win. The Senators, a team that disappeared from the American League in 1960, were usually terrible. To win against the Yankees, especially in a pennant race, the Senators would have needed supernatural help. And that is what Wallop gave them: a fan willing to sell his soul to the devil to see his favorite team beat the Yankees.

It sounded like a promising story: romance, intrigue, souls in peril, and America’s favorite pastime, baseball. But absolutely no one believed the show would be a success. For nearly sixty years, playwrights and producers had tried to turn the national sport into Broadway theatre, but they invariably failed. No play on Broadway about baseball had been a success. Damn Yankees was not only a tremendous success for the four collaborators, but it also broke a long standing jinx against baseball plays on Broadway.

Douglass Wallop was a devoted and frustrated fan of his hometown team, the Senators. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1920, Wallop graduated from the University of Maryland and began a career as a journalist. Because of his exceptional skill at short-hand, he was commissioned in 1948 to record General Dwight Eisenhower’s memoirs from the general’s dictation. His own first novel was published in 1953, and was soon followed by a second novel, The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, which he wrote as a personal protest to the poor record of the Senators. After helping write the musical version of his baseball novel, Wallop wrote until his death in 1985, completing nine more novels; each novel was written in shorthand, never on a typewriter.

Nicknamed “the old Master” by his comrades on Broadway, George Abbott was a true showman. He began his career as an actor, and between 1913 and 1934 he appeared in several productions. He later became famous as a playwright, director, and producer, contributing in some way to nearly a hundred Broadway productions. His name can be found in the credits of some of Broadway’s biggest shows, including On Your Toes (1934), Pal Joey (1940), Sweet Charity (1942), and Damn Yankees (1955 and 1994). The winner of a Pulitzer prize in 1960 and several Tony awards, Abbott returned at age 106 to oversee the
revival of Damn Yankees in 1994. He died a year later at age 107.

Richard Adler was born in New York in 1921. He graduated from the University of North Carolina, where he studied playwriting; served in the navy during World War II; and, after a brief career in marketing, quit to devote himself exclusively to song-writing. He teamed with Jerry Ross, and the two wrote music for several productions of stage, television, and film before making their fortunes with their two biggest hits, The Pajama Game and Damn Yankees. Adler also composed several orchestral numbers; his 1980 symphonic composition, “Yellowstone Overture,” was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize.

Jerry Ross died unexpectedly at age 30, shortly after achieving his greatest success with The Pajama Game and Damn Yankees. Born Jerold Rosenberg in 1926, Ross made a name for himself as an actor and singer by age thirteen. In his late teens, he turned to song writing, and had considerable success before meeting Richard Adler and forming their famous team. For his achievements, Ross won two Tony awards, the Drama Critics Award, and the Antoinette Perry Award. By the time of his death, Jerry Ross had scored with two huge Broadway hits, and had written more than 250 popular American songs.
Beating the Devil at His Own Game
By Heidi Madsen
From Midsummer Magazine, 1999

Anthony Trollope said in The Way We Live Now “If you make a bargain with the devil it may be dishonest to cheat him, and yet I would have you cheat him if you could” ([London: Penguin Books, 1994], 304). This may be a contradiction in terms if you consider that keeping faith with the devil—a renowned deceiver—may itself be dishonest. But, if the necessity arose, perhaps it would be best somehow to beat him at his own game.

Joe Hardy, the hero of Damn Yankees and a man immovably perched before the television set during the six infamous months of the baseball season, would at first seem an unlikely target for philosophical questions or any unusually life-altering temptation. But who can scent human weaknesses more keenly than the devil? Applegate, a.k.a. Satan, was well aware of how Joe’s peace of mind was bedeviled by the Yankees, how his love for the Washington Senators and his lust for their victory indeed held a great potential for demonic persuasion. His offers are so tempting, his arguments so tactful that it is nearly impossible to refuse.

“It’s not as though you’d be doing something so remarkable, you know. There’s nothing so unique about it. I mean, how do you suppose some of those guys in the Senate got their start?” These fiendishly clever arguments are straight from the pages of The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant, by Douglass Wallop ([New York: W. W Norton & Company, Inc., 1994], 31), on which Damn Yankees is based. Just one long-ball hitter, that’s all his team needed—and suddenly the opportunity was Joe’s! Sadly, his ambition to be a professional athlete had evolved into a spectator’sREAM. For years he had lived the life of a baseball player vicariously from the opposite end of the television, accurately diagnosing the illegality of the umpire’s call or the stupidity of a badly executed play. Now, it could be his turn to choke up on that bat, grind his feet and secure them in the spit-saturated soil, and take the assured swing of victory.

Some might condemn Joe for being so easily taken in. (Applegate does, aferall, light his cigarettes without matches.) But surely there are more daring souls who believe as Sigmund Freud believed that “the more magnifi-cent the prospect, the lesser the certainty, and also the greater the passion” (cited in Mary Renault, The Nature of Alexander [New York: Pantheon Books, 1975], ix). Even eternal repercussions mean next to nothing in this grander scheme of things. Perhaps Joe would wish to cheat the devil, resume his former place in the comforting clutches of his wife and Lazyboy, or perhaps there is more to him than that, a destiny hidden beyond boundaries he was surely meant to transcend. In this way of looking at things, as Marvin Kaye says, “Satan became something of a folk hero, an outlaw who promised those pleasures forbidden” (“Introduction,” Devils & Demons [New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987], xiv). He also became the subject of stories and the object of questions about the nature of humans and their tempters.

Who or what is the devil? For different people he has been a Promethean hero, the most hopeless of villains, or something carelessly disregarded between these extremes. “In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word Satan refers to an angel whose unpleasant duty, as in the book of Job, is to bring misfortune that will test mankind’s loyalty to the divine will” (Marvin Kaye, xiii).

Whoever he is, pacts made with the devil have proven an extremely adaptable theme, with protagonists ranging from a university scholar in Renaissance Germany, to a baseball (the sport of the true patriot) player in twentieth century America. Faust, as well as the
concept of him, originated in Dr. Johann Faust, or Faustus, an astrologer/charlatan who was born in Wurtemburg, Germany, and died about 1538. According to legend, Faust sold his soul to the devil, Mephistopheles, in exchange for pleasurable knowledge and knowledgeable pleasure (in essence he must have been a devout seeker of stimulation). Doktor Faustus, written by Thomas Mann between 1943 and 1947—published in the latter year—may have been a source of ideas for Douglas Wallop’s The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant and, of course, Damn Yankees). The first concerns a devil, a man, and his submission to hellish but seductive music; while the last concerns a devil, a man, and his temptation—set to music.

Earlier tellings include Christopher Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus (around 1592) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Faust (Part I, 1808; Part II, 1832). The most significant difference between these two versions is the legend’s outcome. Marlowe chose to damn the good doctor, while Goethe, first encircling Faust with the very fiends of hell, saves him at the last moment with transcending angels from above—his reward because of his constant striving after the knowledge of goodness and truth, and also his unassuming belief in the existence of something more elevated than himself. Here, then, are two different concepts of human life and its outcome. The two extremes are to live conservatively, or to risk your soul in adventures. However, included, of course, in the obvious moral entanglements are not only man and his tempter, the prince of darkness, but the tempter’s direct opposition, the Lord. In one passage, though, the Lord would seem to agree with Mephistopheles when he says, “man errs as long as he doth strive” (Goethe, Faust, Parts One and Two, trans. George Madison Priest [Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 19523, 8). But the Lord would also seem to value strife when he later says, “Mankind’s activity can languish all too easily, / A man soon loves unhampered rest; / Hence, gladly I give him a comrade such as you, I Who stirs and works and must, as devil, do” (9). So, after man succeeds or fails in his attempt to gain that thing desired above all else, can he then be content and rest quietly from his gluttonous brawl with the devil (at least for a time)?

Of all these versions Goethe’s Faust seems closest to Damn Yankees, and might most easily be compared to musical comedy, with its many comical passages, almost sarcastic contradictions and conflicts, and, of course, the German poet’s verse as its musical score. It comes closest to inhabiting the musical comedy world of Damn Yankees—a world with a kinder voice and gentler semblance, where even the devil keeps his word; Goethe’s play, unlike the versions of Marlowe and Mann, does not end tragically. Like Applegate, Mephistopheles possesses an almost morbidly endearing quality, cajoling his victims with unsubtle attempts at humor. One song Goethe included, means basically, “cease with your brooding grief to play” (39).

Perhaps, then, in these happier versions of the story, the devil is a symbolic embodiment of the more carnal impulses found inside most men (and women) and the battle is merely internal; perhaps we all have an impish element, an aptitude for brimstone. But perhaps the struggle is necessary, and, in the end, the fire is what shall make us divine, the chance to choose is what will bring us safely sliding home. In Stephen Vincent Benet’s words, humans “got tricked and trapped and bamboozled, but it was a great journey” (“The Devil and Daniel Webster,” A Pocket Book of Short Stories, ed. M. Edmund Speare [New York: Washington Square Press, 1969], 22).
Damn Yankees: But Bless Baseball!

By Jerry L. Crawford

In 1994, when I retired from the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, I also “retired” from writing articles for Utah Shakespeare Festival publications. However, this year, Bruce Lee, Festival publications director, and Ace Pilkington, literary seminar director, prevailed upon me for one return effort with Damn Yankees. Why did I agree to this brief return as essayist? The answer is in my love of both theatre and baseball, two diverse activities brought together in Damn Yankees.

In 1947 (when I was thirteen years old), my father introduced me to fellow Iowan, Bob Feller, destined to become a Hall of Fame pitcher for the Cleveland Indians. At that moment, I became a loyal fan of Bob’s team. In 1948, the Indians won the American League pennant and the World Series championship. There followed forty-one years of frustration and disappointment. In recent years, the “Tribe” has redeemed itself for those four decades of agony, an agony much like that felt by legions of Chicago Cubs fans and Boston Red Sox fans, for example, and, once upon a time, by faithful followers of the old Washington Senators, such as Joe in Damn Yankees.

In August 1955, I made my first journey to New York City and Broadway. My first theatre experience there was Cat on a Hot Tin Roof—I was enthralled. My second theatre experience there was Damn Yankees—another indelible experience. And this year at the Festival, you may share the agony and delight of baseball mixed with the best of musical theatre. I know you will enjoy it, especially if you happen to be a fan of baseball. (Should you just happen to be a fan of the Cubs, Red Sox, Indians, or the old Senators, you will also suffer just a bit. That’s perfectly natural, trust me.)

Most of the popular facts regarding the origin, history, themes, and successes of Damn Yankees are readily available to you in various sources. Permit me, instead, the luxury and fun of offering you some of the lesser known information regarding this ever-popular musical theatre treat.

—The original version called for twenty actors, eleven principals, and extras stretching the total to forty.
—The original instrumentation called for violin, viola, cello, bass, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, french horn, percussion, guitar, and piano.
—The original scenic unit called for seven full stage sets (including two drops) and two partial sets, to be performed as two acts with twenty-two scenes.
—The original version called for costumes “sometime in the near future” (after 1955), including, baseball uniforms, streetwear, housedresses, business suits, a purple bathrobe, a “strip” costume, two “mambo” costumes, party dresses, evening clothes, and warm-up baseball jackets.
—The original choreography called for use of modern jazz, jazz mambo, patter dancing for “Heart” and “Those were the Good Old Days,” and a “light strip-tease tango for Lola, not offensive.”
—The original stage lighting called for flash pots and floodlights (as ballpark lights) facing into the audience.
—The title of Douglas Wallop’s novel (used as the basis for Damn Yankees) was The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant.
—Damn Yankees was the first successful musical comedy about baseball.
—Damn Yankees was the first play about baseball to utilize the Faust theme of regained youth and selling your soul to the devil.
—The producer of Damn Yankees was Harold (Hal) Prince; the director was George Abbott. The choreographer was Bob Fosse.

—Gwen Verdon (Lola) had appeared in Can-Can, but Damn Yankees was her first starring role.

—"Who's Got the Pain?" is a comic mambo; "Whatever Lola Wants" is a seductive tango. It also uses a vaudeville number ("Those Were the Good Old Days") plus a hoe-down ("Shoeless Joe From Hannibal, MO"), and a plaintive ballad ("Two Lost Souls"). The greatest hit song from the musical was, "You’ve Got To Have Heart."

—Damn Yankees won the Antoinette Perry Award (the Tony) as Best Musical.

—Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, the songwriting team, had a previous hit: Pajama Game. Damn Yankees was their last opus, as Ross died of a lung ailment in 1955.

—in the 1958 screen version, Gwen Verdon played Lola, but, Tab Hunter replaced Stephen Douglass as Joe.

—Gwen Verdon relied as much on stage manager, Robert E. Griffith, for moral support during rehearsals as she did on the director, George Abbott.

—The original tryout of Damn Yankees included a ballet with a gorilla dressed as a New York Yankee and dancers in bird costumes as the Orioles. (These were deleted!)

—"Two Lost Souls" originally used early "rock and roll" music; Abbott hated it and had it changed.

—The original opened on May 5, 1955, at the 46th Street Theatre. Reviews were favorable, except for laments that the play was too long; audiences also hated Lola turning into an ugly old crone at the end.

The day after opening, a major number was deleted, a second act number was moved to act one, and the Devil now turned Lola back into a beautiful temptress. The play then ran shorter by twenty minutes!

—Walter Kerr, critic for the New York Times, reviewed the play twice, liking the revised version better.

—Despite good reviews, the musical died at the for the initial four weeks ($250 a day in sales). Director Prince ordered that all ads change Verdon’s baseball costume to a sexy, revealing garment—sales immediately mushroomed! Thus, the early focus on baseball in ads nearly killed the musical; it took sex and the Faustian theme (regained youth) to market the musical successfully.

—Prince hired the star, Bobby Clark, to play the Devil in the national touring company (Ray Walston played the Devil on Broadway). This casting nearly ruined the touring production, turning the event into a vehicle for a comic. The ensemble factor diminished and the tour was unsuccessful. (Jerry Lewis played the Devil in a recent and successful revival.)

—Damn Yankees ran originally on Broadway for 1,012 performances.

—An actress cast as one of the "baseball fans" in the original would one day become a major star: Jean Stapleton.

—In December 1984, Hal Prince directed another musical about baseball, Diamonds, an off-Broadway venture at the Circle in the Square Downtown Theatre.