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CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS:

RE-HISTORICIZING THE AMERICAN MUSICAL

by

BRUCE KIRLE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2002

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

October 5, 2001
Date

Jill Dolan, Chair of Examining Committee

October 5, 2001
Date

Pamela Sheingorn, Executive Officer

Marvin Carlson

Judith Milhous

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Abstract

CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS:

RE-HISTORICIZING THE AMERICAN MUSICAL

by

Bruce Kirle

Adviser: Professor Jill Dolan

"Cultural Collaborations: Re-Historicizing the American Musical" is a sociology of musical theatre--a mutual genealogy of influence--that posits that the text must be studied in conjunction with performance, reception, and cultural and social contextualization if historical meaning is to be created. I identify musicals as documents that reflect shifting arrangements of class, gender, ethnicity, and race in America during the twentieth century. Since musicals are the most collaborative of theatrical forms, I argue against histories which privilege the text, rather than the gaps and absences created by performance, reception, and historical relativism, the cultural moment that produced the product.

Musicals are cultural collaborations in the broadest sense. The text collaborates with performers, the performers collaborate in production, and all this is "read" by audiences during a given cultural moment. I contextualize the musical in terms of shifting leisure patterns, changing class structures, and socially constructed representations of identity to trace the musical's reflexive influence on American culture. Historians who try to understand the American musical through linking texts in a linear order miss the cultural

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interchange between performance and reception that helps create meaning.

Musicals are at once conservative and progressive, hegemonic and subversive. I frame the musical in terms of the Anglo-melting pot aesthetic, cultural pluralism, and muticulturalism. Like opera seria, the non-integrated musical venerated the performer as co-creator in a text that was never meant to be fixed. The playful theatricalist performativity of stars like Jolson, Cantor, Merman, and Channing transgressed perceived notions of essentialist identity. On the other hand, the integrated musical, which has been privileged along the Oscar Hammerstein model, borrows from realism, expressionism, and epic theatre. It often tackles serious social problems, as in the concept musical, but offers utopic solutions that hegemony itself can provide, which reflects neo-Gramscian cultural theorists like Richard Dyer and John Fiske.

Using both cultural studies and performance studies approaches, I argue that musicals thrive on ambiguity, incompleteness, and openness. By privileging only the text, historians destroy what makes musical theatre alive and vital: its complex relationship to its historical moment of creation and performance.

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experience of dissertating, Susan Tenneriello, with whom I tackled the second exam, and Alisa Roost for her friendship, valued support, and love of musical theatre. I'd also like to thank my own students at Roosevelt University, who constantly force me to reevaluate my positions and ideas about musical theatre. Their enthusiasm for the form does much to keep mine rekindled.

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throughout my career at CUNY, his feedback in terms of structure has been invaluable in the writing of this dissertation. He has the gift of clarifying the most puzzling of problems for me with a single sentence. I also want to thank him for his interest and enthusiasm for my work at Roosevelt, and for taking the time to attend a rehearsal for a project I directed. His work has been inspirational to my own M.F.A. students, as well as to me.

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Finally, this dissertation is for my grandfather. My love for theatre and music is his doing.

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Introduction

Historians documenting the American musical from the 1920s through the 1990s tend to trace the development of the form along two continua: operetta and musical comedy. These sub-genres then intersect with "integration" (an integrated book and score) at various points in history, namely with the Princess Theatre Shows beginning in 1915, or with Show Boat (1927), but certainly with the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals (1943-1959). Histories in the field have generally fallen to journalists, musicologists, and even a medievalist like Gerald Bordman, and tend to be primarily text-based, reiterating the same litany in different ways: when did operetta and musical comedy fuse? Were Rodgers and Hammerstein responsible for the revolution in integration of book, dance, and score or did it happen earlier with Kern, Bolton, and Wodehouse? These historians write passionately, even hyperbolically, about their enthusiasms and convictions, but, unfortunately, they tend to focus on the same question of integration. Value judgements about the respective worth of musical comedy, operetta, and the integrated musical abound, which at times makes the historians' conclusions suspect and feeds skepticism about the objectivity of the scholarship. At a time when theatre studies recognizes the importance of performance analysis and reception, it seems to me that new questions need to be asked if one seriously is to examine the development of the form and to question how musicals have evolved or where they are going.

Musicals are the most collaborative of theatrical forms; it is reductive to study them as a series of linear texts. How can one trace the development of the form without

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taking into consideration performance, reception, and historical relativism, the cultural moment that produced the product? The text collaborates with performers, the performers collaborate in production, and all this is "read" by audiences during a given cultural moment. Limiting the study of musicals to a linear series of texts ignores the collaborative terms around which the form depends. Musicals are "read" by their audiences in performance, not by audiences pouring through scripts in a library. I am by no means advocating abandoning the study of the text, but the text in itself is incomplete without considering performance and reception.

Linear histories of the form need to be seriously questioned and augmented with a paradigm of collaboration: how do musicals collaborate or interact with the rest of the theatre community and with the cultural community at large? It is impossible to evaluate musicals of the past without examining the cultural context that produced them. We can look at Oklahoma! (1943) or Show Boat, or Lady in the Dark (1941), with an early twenty-first century critical eye; we can't receive them as they were originally mounted. Not only do we live in a different time and culture, it is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the conditions of performance. It is certainly impossible to reconstruct the audience. Historians of musical theatre need to recognize that the text by itself is not a reliable vehicle for meaning. Rather than agonize over which texts were responsible for Oklahoma!'s integration of book, music, and dance, the musical theatre historian needs to recognize that Oklahoma!, mounted during World War II, was a product of its cultural moment in much the same way that Hair (1968) was the product of a different cultural moment twenty-five years later, and the revival of Chicago (1996) was able to exploit the

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headlines from the O.J. Simpson trial. Musicals are cultural collaborations in the broadest sense. What do performers, directors, composers, arrangers, and designers bring to the text from the larger theatrical, musical, and cultural communities? How do stars and their public personae collaborate with a text and affect reception? How do shifting leisure patterns, changing class structures, and socially constructed representations of ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality influence the production and reception of musicals? As popular culture, the history of American musicals documents changing notions of American identity throughout the twentieth century.

American musicals are collaborative in terms of text, production, reception, and their positioning in the cultural landscape of their historical moments. If the form is to survive, new productions must adapt to new cultural moments. As such, the musical is innately open, subject to a plurality of readings. Cultural Collaborations, then, is a sociology of musical theatre--a mutual genealogy of influence--that posits that the text must be studied in conjunction with performance, reception, and cultural contextualization if historical meaning is to be created.

Categories: The Non-Integrated Musical (Musical Comedy and Operetta)

For the purposes of this dissertation, and, unfortunately, because some distinctions and categories are inevitable, I have labeled early musicals (musical comedy and operetta) with no drive toward integration as "non-integrated"; those that strive toward integration of dialogue, song, and dance I refer to as "integrated" or "serious." Even these categories become arbitrary. Is Rose Marie (1924) an integrated musical or an operetta? Is New

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Girl in Town (1957), George Abbott and Bob Fosse's reinvisioning of Eugene O'Neill's Anna Christie, an integrated musical or a musical comedy? Categories, unfortunately, become a question of taste as well as scholarship. I acknowledge that I am lumping together musical comedy with operetta, which no doubt will disturb excellent musical theatre historians like Richard Traubner, Stanley Green, and Gerald Bordman, who have intelligently addressed valid differences between the genres. At the same time, musical comedy and operetta are often difficult to differentiate, as I'm sure these historians would concede.

Historians have tended to assume one knows how to define a "musical comedy" as opposed to an "operetta," whereas, in truth, the terms are full of ambiguity, as Richard Traubner suggests in his book on operetta: "Part of the difficulty [in pinning down a definition of operetta] rests not only with the half-truths in many definitions but also with changes in meaning over centuries and from country to country of terms that scholars have used (or should use) in defining the genre."[1] As Traubner implies, French operetta in the 1860s differs radically from Viennese operetta, which, in turn, differs from the work of England's Gilbert and Sullivan. How closely does American operetta, whose heyday was really in the 1910s and 1920s, evolve from these three sub-genres?

Defining musical comedy is no less perilous.[2] Are the political satires of the

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[1] Richard Traubner, Operetta: A Theatrical History (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1.

[2] Actually, there are three forms of non-integrated musicals, if one includes the musical revue, whose popularity peaked during the 1920s and 1930s. The distinction between the revue and musical comedy is perhaps even more difficult to delineate than that between musical comedy and operetta. Supposedly, musical comedy was fashioned

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1930s, like Rodgers and Hart's I'd Rather Be Right (1937) and the Gershwins' Of Thee I Sing (1931), musical comedies or direct descendants of Gilbert and Sullivan? Most critics would agree that Cole Porter wrote musical comedies rather than operettas; yet, how much influence do Gilbert and Sullivan exert on Porter's famous list songs? Is Hello, Dolly! (1964) a musical comedy or a descendant of 1920s French operetta? Are contemporary British poperettas related to the escapist fantasy of Viennese or American operetta, or are they more akin to opera, since they are sung-through? Do they evolve from experimental sung-through works, such as segments of John Murray Anderson's Greenwich Village Follies in the 1920s or Jerome Moross' Ballet Ballads (1948) and The Golden Apple (1954)?[3] These questions are not easily answered. In trying to neatly pigeonhole these musicals, one inevitably does them a disservice. More than one influence is at work in each of these shows, which is logical in a collaborative medium.

According to the accepted paradigm, musical comedies were usually star vehicles

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around a book, thus the term "book musicals," no matter how slim or frivolous these vehicles may have been. The revue was sometimes fashioned around a unifying theme, such as Irving Berlin's As Thousands Cheer (1933), which presented a sequence of scenes and songs that reflected the newspaper headlines of the day. At other times, the revue was glorified vaudeville, with no unifying dialogue to link the skits and songs together, a famous example being the Ziegfeld Follies (1907-1936). For a comprehensive study of the form, see Lee Davis, Scandals and Follies: The Rise and Fall of the Great Broadway Revue (New York: Limelight, 2000); also Gerald Bordman, The American Musical Revue from the Passing Show to Sugar Babies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

For the purposes of my work, I link the musical revue with musical comedy. Both forms were often star vehicles and neither tried to integrate dialogue, song, and dance into a unified whole. I am more interested in studying the non-integrated musical alongside, rather than underneath, the integrated musical, and contextualizing both in their given cultural moments.

[3] There were annual editions of the Greenwich Village Follies from 1919 through 1925 and a final edition in 1928.

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(Jolson, Cantor, George M. Cohan, Marilyn Miller, Ethel Merman), where songs and comedy routines were devised to fit the specialties and talents of star performers. The songs were commonly strung together by a thin, frivolous book full of topical references and jokes. Though romantically escapist, musical comedies usually took place in the here and now, often in New York, and were filled with the popular music of the day, a mixture of European music and jazz that became the vernacular for show music for nearly fifty years.[4] Operetta implies a different horizon of expectations. The plots typically concerned European royalty, rather than the average New Yorker. Settings were exotic and varied to provide spectacle. Plots were romantically escapist, and the music had a distinctly European, if not Viennese, flavor.

If musical comedy was characterized by the star comic, there were always important comic characters in the operettas as well: Lutz and Gretchen in The Student Prince (1924), Susan and the reporter in Desert Song (1926), and Hard Boiled Herman and Lady Jane in Rose-Marie (1924). To underscore the fragile boundary between

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[4] The New York locale is important to musical comedy. The Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart, Berlin, and Gershwin musicals of the 1920s and 1930s appealed to an audience that yearned to be urbane and sophisticated. Much of the humor involved the out-of-towner who is helpless in the face of New York sophistication, or, in shows like Girl Crazy (1930) that took place outside of New York, the New Yorker who must deal with the hayseeds one supposedly encounters outside New York City. Interestingly, the humor in operetta stems from much the same premise. Although operetta plots often took place in remote, romantic European settings, the comics were often displaced New Yorkers, like the reporter in Desert Song (1926), lost in a barbarous world outside Manhattan. Again, the humor in musical comedy and operetta is remarkably similar, reinforcing the case that the two genres are not easily distinguishable. Even by the 1950s, a show like Call Me Madam (1950), where Ethel Merman played a mythical United States ambassador to a middle European country, boasts elements of both musical comedy and operetta in its humorous culture clash between the brash, warm-hearted Merman and the crafty middle-Europeans of the mythical Lichtenburg.

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musical comedy and operetta, often the comic material in operetta is patterned after vaudeville and musical comedy types: Hard Boiled Herman, for example, is typical of the Dutch/Jewish dialect comic. The Red Mill (1906) is considered one of the classic Victor Herbert operettas, but was fashioned as a star vehicle for comics Dave Montgomery and Fred Stone, who played Kid Connor and Con Kidder. According to Stanley Green, The Red Mill is "closer to musical farce than to operetta."[5]

To complicate the distinctions even further, operetta and musical comedy were not always musically disparate. The finales and finalettos of musicals are often difficult to distinguish from operetta. In a typical 1920s finaletto, new material is introduced, while principal characters recap bits of major songs, and elaborate choral arrangements are sung at the close of each act. How is the structure of the finaletto to an operetta like The Desert Song significantly different from the finaletto to Rio Rita (1927) or, for that matter, No, No Nanette (1925)? Is Floradora (1900), a turn-of-the-century piece, an operetta or a musical comedy? I did some work reconstructing the latter and it's not that easy to classify.[6] Similarly, The Red Mill, although boasting the operetta-like "Moonbeams," was also filled with musical comedy routines and numbers to suit the talents of its star comics.

Actually, operetta and musical comedy often shared the same composer. Sigmund Romberg, who along with Rudolph Friml was probably the most well known operetta

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[5] Stanley Green, Broadway Musicals Show by Show (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1985), 43.

[6] See tape of Floradora, Bandwagon Productions, 1983, Directed by Lester Malizia, musical direction by Bruce Kirle, Bandwagon Productions, 1983. Videotape collection at the Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts.

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composer of the 1920s, not only composed Desert Song and The Student Prince, but also composed the scores for several Al Jolson vehicles at the Winter Garden, including Sinbad (1917), and collaborated with George Gershwin on the Marilyn Miller vehicle, Rosalie (1927). When Russell Janney secured the rights to If I Were King (1901), he offered the musical adaptation, The Vagabond King (1925), to Rodgers and Hart, who are identified with musical comedy. Janney couldn't raise the funding because of the relative inexperience of the team, so he offered the show to Brian Hooker and Friml.[7] Furthermore, although Hart was noted as a musical comedy man, he was heavily influenced by Gilbert and Sullivan, not to mention the European operettas he translated early in his career.

A final problem in distinguishing between "musical comedy" and "operetta" is the inference that the genres attracted different audiences. We have no reason to believe this was true. As late as the 1920s, Al Jolson, whose vehicles are considered musical comedies, "had found that the way to keep the audience was to transport it into a world of waltz-time fantasy."[8] Again, the line demarcating musical comedy and operetta was thin and tenuous. According to Julie Jenner, who appeared in The Earl Carroll Vanities (1928), The Ziegfeld Follies (1931 edition), At Home Abroad (1935) with Beatrice Lillie, Take A Chance (1932) with Ethel Merman, and who was married to Monte Proser, producer of High Buttoned Shoes (1947), audiences during the 1920s and 1930s were

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[7] Green, Broadway Musicals Show by Show, 48.

[8] Peter Bauland, The Hooded Eagle: Modern German Drama on the New York Stage (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 104.

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much more heterogeneous than today, in terms of age and class. The 1920s and 1930s lacked the youth culture that has become so prevalent in America since the 1950s, claims Jenner: "There's so much variety [types of entertainment] today--so many choices. Back then, everybody went to everything."[9] It's obvious from texts of the period as well as from reviews and clippings describing stars in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s that much of the humor in both musicals and operettas was based on ethnic jokes: the Dutch or Jewish dialect comedian, the Italian or Irish comic, Jews or Irish donning blackface. Jenner claims that second generation Americans loved watching this kind of thing, although their parents "worked too hard to pay for a ticket to a show."[10] Jenner's comments are logical and are supported by the sparse information available about musical theatre audiences in the early part of the century.

Michael Marks Davis produced one of the few surveys of the demographics of theatre audiences in 1911. Davis surveyed gallery attendance at fourteen Broadway theatres at Wednesday and Saturday matinees during the early spring of 1910. His statistics separate musicals from straight plays, but make no distinction between musical comedy, revue, or operetta.[11] According to Davis, 13% of the audience consisted of young people under eighteen. The leisure class represented 51% of the audience, while the clerical or business class constituted 47%. The working class comprised 2% of the

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[9] Julie Jenner, Personal Interview, 2 March 1998.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Michael Marks Davis, Jr., The Exploitation of Pleasure: A Study of Commercial Recreations in New York City (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), 38-9.

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patrons. Marks is somewhat vague in his terms "working class" and "clerical class." One infers from his statistics that he is differentiating the day laborer from the office wage earner, which, in terms of theatre going, often included secretaries. By differentiating the working class from the clerical workers, Davis supports Jenner's assertion that first generation laborers probably couldn't afford the price of a ticket, but that their offspring did attend the theatre.[12]

By the 1920s, articles in Theatre Magazine argue that spectators in the gallery, as opposed to the more well-to-do audiences in the orchestra, contributed heavily to the success of musicals. Indeed, a full balcony ensured profitable runs.[13] Annie Marion MacLean, writing during the same period as Davis, argues that wage-earning women were capable and desirous of appreciating the best in dramatic art and music, and found ways to make theatregoing an affordable habit. To MacLean, a third of Jewish working girls in 1910 earning four or five dollars a week gave theatre as their favorite amusement.[14] The People's Institute of New York cooperated with theatre managers to provide half-priced tickets on week nights to Broadway plays. Tickets were distributed through settlement houses, YMCAs, unions, schools, and libraries.[15] The practice of making discount tickets

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[12] Ibid., 30.

[13] See W. Lee Dickson, "The Audience Upstairs" Theatre Magazine 32 (September 1920): 100. Also F. C. Russell, "Confessions of a Gallery God," Theatre Magazine 30 (December 1919): 378

[14] Annie Marion MacLean, Wage-Earning Women (New York: MacMillan, 1910), 52, 83, 137.

[15] Richard Butsch, The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 128.

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available to wage earners continued during the 1930s and 1940s with Gray's Cut-Rate, a basement counter at a Times Square drugstore which posted discounted tickets for Broadway shows "on a board that changed like stock market quotations."[16] Marks, MacLean, Butsch, and Laurents support Jenner's claims that audiences during the early part of the century were heterogeneous and desirous of attending theatre. The genres of musical comedy, operetta, and revue were far less important than theatregoing itself.

Categories: The Integrated or "Serious" Musical

During the dissertation, I often refer to the integrated musical and the "serious" musical interchangeably. The integrated musical was often characterized by its tackling of serious social subject matter, as opposed to the frivolous plots of the non-integrated musical. The aspirations of the integrated musical, an Americanization of the Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk*, also led to more serious or highbrow expectations from audiences.[17] By serious, I do not mean "realistic," which is a word that increasingly has been used to describe integrated musicals. Cultural Collaborations stresses that musicals are the result of a mutual genealogy of influence; they borrow from everything. The development of the integrated musical, serious as its subject matter may be, is not inextricably linked with realism.

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[16] Arthur Laurents, Original Story by Arthur Laurents (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 15.

[17] Wagner's *gesamtkunstwerk* was a complete or master work of art, in which every element--music, poetry, dance, architecture (of the theatre), painting (scenic design)--would serve the dramatic purpose of the whole.

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Serious musicals often tend to negotiate realistic book scenes with presentational conventions of song and dance; as a result, the genre is difficult to pin down. During the rehearsal period of Paul Simon's Cape Man (1997), a musical about a teenage gang murder in New York's Hell's Kitchen in the 1950s, director Mark Morris urged his lighting designer to be more gritty. Morris wanted the colors to look like vomit and the set to be ugly. After all, he argued, musicals are a realistic medium. I assumed Morris' point was that if musicals are to be taken seriously, they should mirror social concerns and instigate some sort of social change. I think "serious" has become erroneously equated with "realistic" for a generation raised on film and television. The realistic conventions of the screen and television, as William Demastes points out, help define the horizon of expectations of contemporary theatregoers, many of whom don't quite know what to expect when they attend the theatre.[18] The conventions of theatre, however, differ from the often realistic conventions of film and television; moreover, the conventions of musical theatre, are, if anything, less realistic than those of much non-musical theatre produced on Broadway. Although aspects of Cape Man can be considered realistic, there is nothing real about a character breaking into song or dancing. The song or the dance may be based on truthful emotion, but the conventions of singing and dancing are not realistic.

In a May, 2000 New Yorker article, Joan Acocella compares choreographers Susan Stroman and Kathleen Marshall. According to Acocella, Marshall is "an utterly

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[18] See William W. Demastes, Beyond Naturalism (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 30.

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convinced realist."[19] Acocella defines what she means by "realist":

> In the "Music Man" [choreographed by Susan Stroman], farm boys do multiple pirouettes on library tables if that's what Stroman thinks she needs in order to goose up the dance. In "Kiss Me, Kate," nothing like this ever happens. No character does in a dance anything that he or she couldn't do as that character in that setting. In "Wunderbar," the lead couple, remembering a show they were once in, and reprising its waltz in their dressing rooms, are made to negotiate doorways, chairs, cold-cream jars. In "Brush Up Your Shakespeare," the two gangsters don't do much that gangsters couldn't do. The big ensemble piece, "Too Darn Hot," includes not just the dancers but also the musicians of the "Taming of the Shrew" production that "Kiss Me, Kate" is about. One musician is fat, another klutzy, and they dance fat and klutzy. Marshall thinks we'll understand the joke, God bless her.[20]

Acocella's logic is puzzling. What is realistic about waltzing in a dressing room, indeed jumping over sofas and furniture? Marshall has staged "Wunderbar" like an old Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers ballroom routine; the result is not realistic. True, the gangsters during "Brush Up Your Shakespeare" *can* sing and *can* tap, but does that make the number realistic? Do gangsters typically croon and waltz clog? Moreover, Acocella's

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[19] Joan Acocella, "Stagestruck: What the Broadway Revivals Have Wrought," New Yorker, 15 May 2000, 100.

[20] Ibid., 100.

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samples are biased. One of the numbers she ignores in the Kate revival is Marshall's choreography for "Bianca," in which Michael Barresse as Bill Calhoun athletically concludes his dance by climbing up the wall to reach Lois Lane's dressing room. The number takes place in a backstage corridor and there are three flights of stairs available to access the dressing room. Climbing up the wall elicits audience applause, but it's hardly realistic. Moving on to Stroman, Acocella argues that "she is the major purveyor of Broadway's current Rousseauvianism: if we'd all just be natural, and dance, we would have good lives and maybe even get laid."[21] I understand the comparison between being natural and being Rousseauvian, but isn't being natural also being real? And what *is* natural about dancing, unless one is Fred Astaire or Gene Kelly?

I would be grateful if critics like Acocella qualified their use of terms like realism in terms of musical theatre. According to John Gassner, the conventions of realism demand that there be a fourth wall, that the play be "overheard" by the audience.[22] Once the fourth wall is broken, the play is no longer realistic. William Dean Howells, champion of realism, argued much the same thing in the nineteenth century, but also advocated colloquial, realistic dialogue that an audience could reasonably expect to overhear in a realistic representation of life. Consequently, Howells condemned the declamatory style and rhetorical flourishes of Romantic theatre, most particularly, the conventions of the aside and the soliloquy:

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[21] Ibid., 100.

[22] John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre (New York: Dryden, 1956), 26-7.

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> The soliloquy prevailed, as I notice that it does in most plays new and old. Its prevalence is the most discouraging thing in the work of the playwrights, for it ought never to be, and the smallest art would eliminate it. The soliloquy is of course supposed to represent what is going on in the character's mind; but it always, and at its best, sounds as if he were talking to himself, which would be imaginable and fit in a lunatic like Don Quixote, but in no sane man. It is a little less disillusioning than the aside, but not much less.[23]

If Howells condemns Don Quixote talking to himself, what would he think of Tony singing "Maria," or Billy Bigelow musing about "My Boy Bill" for seven minutes? Song and dance tend to be presentational; as such, they break the fourth wall and violate the conventions of realism. Furthermore, rhymed lyrics are not colloquial.

What is realistic in the serious musical and what is endemic to the serious musical that subverts realism? According to Howells, "The primary purpose of a [realistic] play is to illustrate life or to reproduce it."[24] For Howells, realism is about the individual as a product of his environment. Critic George Becker agrees, "The ultimate subject of a realistic work is a milieu."[25] Both Howells and Becker attribute two qualities to realism: one is a deterministic social milieu, while the other involves a common vision that shows

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[23] William Dean Howells, "Life and Letters," Harper's Weekly 39 (28 December 1895): 1237.

[24] William Dean Howells, "The Plays of Eugene Brieux," North American Review 201 (Mary 1915): 407.

[25] George Becker, Realism in Modern Literature (New York: Ungar, 1980), 64.

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middle class characters struggling against their social and physical environment:

> The terms of life are the individual's problems and motives within that milieu, for the realist's investigation has two axes. One is horizontal, directed outward toward problems in the social environment; the other is vertical, boring into the individual's inner being and examining moral and psychological motives. The thought in realistic drama moves along both axes, producing a dynamic tension central to the play's structure.[26]

Realistic plays then are characterized by psychologized characters, usually of the bourgeoisie, struggling against their deterministic environment; the purpose often is to instigate some sort of social change.

Certainly, the subject matter of musicals can be as weighty as the theme of the most realistic play. Harold Prince argues that in a commercial theatre where the non-musical play is at economic risk, musicals provide the best opportunity for making a serious social statement:

> Now, because of economics, you can't really deal with issues in a musical, when I got started in the fifties you could. In fact, you could do more in musicals about politics, social issues dealing with a sense of importance, because music is a placebo, a way of sugarcoating your statement but not erasing it. By the mid-fifties, straight theatre seemed to be losing its

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[26] Brenda Murphy. American Realism and American Drama, 1880-1940 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 26.

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serious voice, and our shows took up the challenge.[27]

The sugarcoating still exists, but the serious, socially relevant subject matter of musicals like Company (1970), Follies (1971), and Sweeney Todd (1979) hardly classifies them as realistic; these musicals employ techniques of Meyerhold and Brecht, and are descendants of epic theatre and theatricalism, rather than realism. Serious subject matter does not *necessarily* suggest realism, except perhaps to audiences raised on the conventions of television and film.

In fact, Stephen Sondheim argues that the serious musical is artificial rather than realistic:

> In any realistic terms, the musical is hilarious . . . and as an artificial medium the musical requires consistent stylization, speech and song between normal movement and dance. To protect the fact that its characters express themselves in ways that in life might get them arrested for disturbing the peace, a musical production has to be detached from any semblance of being "merely" natural.[28]

Musicals have appropriated the serious content of realistic plays as well as realistic dialogue scenes, while borrowing the presentational styles of burlesque, vaudeville, music hall, and the circus in song and dance sequences. The serious content of musicals has also been appropriated from epic theatre, expressionism, and theatricalism. Indeed, the musical

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[27] Quoted in Foster Hirsch, Harold Prince and the American Musical Theatre (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5.

[28] Ibid., 5.

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borrows from everything. The form is a bastardization of genres: consequently, any reference to musicals as realistic must be carefully qualified: realistic in subject matter, realistic in social relevance, realistic in a deterministic environment, realistic in psychologized characters, realistic in a focus on the middle class. The tendency to refer to the serious musical as realistic, which is exemplified by Acocella (and Acocella is writing about Kiss Me, Kate and The Music Man, which hardly tackle serious problems) is inaccurate and confusing. My use of the term "serious musical," throughout the dissertation, is meant in a considerably broader framework. It merely connotes the strive toward integration and the increasingly serious subject matter the integrated musical chooses to tackle as the century progresses and the form becomes more refined.

The Privileging of the Integrated Musical

Why has the integrated musical, generally attributed to Rodgers and Hammerstein, become the privileged model? Why has the non-integrated musical, the product of a different aesthetic, where the performer is recognized as co-creator, been denigrated and generally deemed unworthy of major Broadway revival? The party line has been that older musical comedy and operetta have glorious scores but silly, frivolous books. Since they often were fashioned as star vehicles, they are dismissed as unrevivable except in concert versions or as museum pieces. The same was argued in terms of opera seria until the mid-1960s by musicologists. Like early musical comedy, opera seria was constructed around the virtuoso talents of star castrati, who were co-creators in a form that was never intended to be fixed or complete. Postmodern musicologists, like Richard Taruskin, argue

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that there is something wonderful and new in refashioning a piece that was never intended to be closed in the first place. A new generation of singers, like Renée Fleming, has regenerated a form that was fundamentally abandoned for over one hundred and fifty years. The situation is analogous to the non-integrated musical. There are plenty of performers capable of carrying these older musicals if the shows are rebuilt to suit their talents. I doubt a postmodern musicologist would argue that a Verdi opera is innately superior to a Handel opera. The two are different. Why then do historians of musical theatre argue that the integrated Rodgers and Hammerstein musical is superior to a Cole Porter or Gershwin musical from the 1930s? One can certainly argue that the plots of non-integrated musicals are silly and frivolous, but filled with glorious songs. One can make the same argument about opera seria. How did this privileging of the integrated musical occur?

With the enormous success of Rodgers and Hammerstein in the 1940s and 1950s, the autonomy of the writers, rather than the performer as co-creator, became privileged. Critics like Gerald Mast have likened the integrated musical, particularly the Rodgers and Hammerstein model, to an Americanization of the Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk*, where dialogue, music, and dance flowed seamlessly together.[29] The privileging of integration implies a highbrow/lowbrow argument. Perhaps, Americans have privileged integration because it borrows from European high culture, which traditionally has been the model to emulate. As the form became popularized, certainly increasingly serious subject matters

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[29] Gerald Mast, Can't Help Singing: The American Musical on Stage and Screen (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 197), 203.

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were tackled. But the Hammerstein model, as I've mentioned earlier, was not the only model used. Weill experimented with the form in the 1930s, as did the political satires of the Gershwins and Irving Berlin. The concept musical of the 1970s borrows a bit from Rodgers and Hammerstein, but also from Weill and expressionism.

Almost no historian will argue that Rodgers and Hammerstein refined the integration of the book, score, and dance. Various historians disagree about when this integration actually began. Many, like Gerald Bordman, have written about the innovations of the Princess shows. Beginning in 1915 with Nobody Home, the Princess musicals, mostly composed by Jerome Kern with book and lyrics by P.G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton, featured songs that furthered plot, while the characters were "everyday people--neither cartooned clowns nor cardboard lovers."[30] Writing of Leave It To Jane, a Princess musical of 1917, Alan Dale, drama critic of the New York American, praised the innovations of the series and of Leave It To Jane in particular:

> The old timers will soon begin to grieve sorely, to tear their hair and gnash their teeth, as they view the new form of rational musical comedy actually "getting over" and pushing the old style where it belongs. No more are we asked to laugh at the bottle-nosed comedian, as he falls down stairs; no longer is the heroine a lovelorn princess masquerading as the serving maid, and no more is the scene Ruritania or Monte Carlo. Today is rationally

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[30] Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 312.

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American, and the musical show has taken on a new lease of life."[31]

Dale and others who venerate the groundbreaking nature of the Princess shows fail to say that much of the innovation stemmed from practical considerations.

However one feels about the contribution the Princess Theatre shows made to the integration of book, song, and dance, it's important to realize they were conceived by Elizabeth Marbury, a literary agent, to fill a small, struggling 299-seat house and were mounted on a $7500 budget, a shoestring even for 1915. The Ziegfeld Follies of 1915, by way of comparison, was capitalized at over twenty times that figure.[32] Consequently, the one set to an act, lack of stars, small cast, and modest physical production were a product of economic necessity, rather than artistic impetus.[33] Even Bordman, an avid champion of the Princess shows, concedes that it was Marbury who publicized the opening of

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[31] Quoted in Miles Kreuger's album notes for Leave It To Jane, 1959 revival. Music by Jerome Kern, lyrics by P.G. Wodehouse and Guy Bolton, Strand records SL 1002, 30 July 1959.

[32] Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 305.

[33] Although many historians credit the Princess Shows as the first examples of integration of dialogue, song, and dance, one needs to treat their claim with caution. The original script for Very Good, Eddie boasts characters with names like B. Ava Little and May Anne Ayes. I supposed one needs to define what one means by integration. Although historians claim that the series boasted seamless integration of dialogue, song, and dance, according to Bill Gile, who directed the Broadway revival of Very, Good Eddie for David Merrick, there were several interpolations not integral to the text in the original 1915 production of Eddie, including one by Cole Porter. Bill Gile, Personal Interview, 26 January 1998. Nobody's Home included at least six songs by composers other than Kern. See Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, 306. The practice of interpolating songs by a variety of composers, common during this period, furnished additional comedy or novelty material as well as songs that presumably were destined to become popular outside of the context of the show. Interpolation then does not support the idea of a seamless integration of song and dialogue, in which music serves to further character or plot.

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Nobody's Home, the first of the Princess Theatre musicals, as the beginning of something new and important.[34] It's not surprising that this publicity was self-generated, since the stars and spectacle necessary for enthusiastic reception were missing from the series.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, composers like Friml, Kern, and Rodgers and lyricists like Hammerstein, Hart, and Otto Harbach perpetuated publicity that their scores were so integrated with the plot that individual numbers would not be listed in the programs. This claim was made in the programs of Rose-Marie (Friml and Hammerstein), Chee-Chee (1928; Rodgers and Hart), The Cat and the Fiddle (1931; Kern and Hammerstein), and Music in the Air (1932; Kern and Hammerstein).[35] Why was it of such importance for these men to claim that their scores were integrated, particularly at a time when hit songs were typically written to be extracted from musicals, recorded, and popularized on radio? My hunch is that the American appropriation of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, in which drama, music, movement, and spectacle were united in one package, gave musicals a highbrow credence they had lacked before. Incorporating middle or lower class Americans into mythologized American musical folk plays like Oklahoma! and Porgy and Bess combined highbrow and lowbrow elements into an intriguing Americanization of European high culture. At the same time, experiments with integration during the 1920s are subject to speculation and, like the Princess shows, were

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[34] Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 305.

[35] True, there is a direct line tracing these claims to either Hammerstein or Rodgers. Although they are credited with refining integration of song, dialogue, and dance during their collaboration (1943-1959), each of the partners had experimented with integration with other collaborators previous to their work on Oklahoma! in 1943--again, a mutual genealogy of influence.

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publicity strategies, at least to some degree. For example, one has to doubt the claims toward integration of Hammerstein and Friml in Rose-Marie, when forty-five chorus girls dressed as Indian totem poles performed "Totem Tom Tom."[36] If this is an integrated number, what does integration mean? On the other hand, the model for the classic integrated American musical for many years was My Fair Lady (1956), whose libretto Alan Jay Lerner unabashedly pilched from George Bernard Shaw. My Fair Lady is a wonderful musical; on the other hand, it also skillfully Americanizes a highly respected work by a highbrow English playwright.

Hierarchical categories invite hyperbole, which is often the enemy of scholarship. As I've suggested, many historians suggest the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon is of greater value than the work of Rodgers and Hart. Similarly, Stephen Sondheim scholars write hagiographies to his genius, while dismissing the works of Jerry Herman. This is a matter of taste. Histories of musical theatre abound with prioritization and privileging of categories. These categories become reductive in that they form adjectival borders, much like the term "periodicity" in theatre studies. Whatever does not fit into proper categories becomes dismissed. On the one hand, categories and terms must be acknowledged; on the other hand, they often raise more questions that they answer. For instance, are we to assume that the integrated musical, since it has been privileged, is more progressive in terms of dealing with issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender than earlier, non-integrated musical comedy? Ironically, the integrated musical, despite its often serious

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[36] Ethan Mordden, Make Believe: The Broadway Musical in the 1920s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46.

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subject matter, tends to be far more conservative and utopic in its solutions to serious social problems than the frivolous non-integrated musical, where both male and female stars often subverted perceived, hegemonic notions of gender, race, ethnicity, and class to assimilate into an Anglo melting pot, from which they had no desire to be excluded.[37] Musicals have always been both conservative and progressive, reactionary and subversive. I am far more interested in how musicals are reflective of both conservative and subversive hegemonic forces during their cultural moments than in making value judgements based on taste about which genre, or composer, or production, is better. Assigning hierarchical borders to musicals compromises the potential for serious comparison and study.

Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Musical as Popular Culture

As I've suggested, the privileging of the integrated musical inevitably raises a

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[37] For a thorough discussion of the concept of the "melting pot," see chapter two. By Anglo melting pot, I am referring to the distortion of Israel Zangwill's aesthetic, taken from his 1908 play of that title, that American identity is inevitably dynamic and ever-changing. Zangwill's dream embraced a nation teaming with a multiplicity of races and ethnicities living together, sharing customs, intermingling and inevitably intermarrying, eventually producing a new, exciting, if unpredictable notion of American identity. This unpredictability, with its racial and ethnic bleeding over, was unacceptable to many, including the white, Anglo hegemony which controlled the great crucible. By the 1910s, Woodrow Wilson and Henry Ford were instrumental in creating a new, distorted, but widely accepted version of Zangwill's melting pot aesthetic, one which lasted until the 1960s. In this version, the melting pot was a process of Anglicanization or "whiteness," where racial exclusionism prevailed. European immigrants who entered the crucible, emerged in the image of the hegemonic Anglo ideal of the time. They were assimilated, but they were also expected to abandon their pasts and emerge "white." In the process, they risked losing much of their heritage. Jews, in particular, were caught between identifying themselves as an ethnicity, which promised Anglo assimilation, or as a race, which enabled them to cling to their heritage, but excluded them from the white hegemonic power structure.

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highbrow/lowbrow argument. Part of my premise in this dissertation is to show that musicals are documents of popular culture that reflect shifting representations of identity throughout the twentieth century. At the same time, one must acknowledge that Broadway musicals are hardly mass culture; they are far too expensive to appeal to the kind of mass audience that television and films draw. One must also recognize that theatre has been regarded as decreasingly vital to Americans since the invention of talking films and radio in the 1920s and 1930s and the popularization of television in the 1950s. Broadway musicals are still big business; however, they don't have the mass exposure they had fifty years ago, when a new Rodgers and Hammerstein musical was a major national event, covered on the front pages of Life, Time, and Newsweek, and performed in tantalizing bits and pieces on weekly variety series like the Ed Sullivan Show or Your Hit Parade. As Broadway audiences have become increasingly elitist and homogeneous, one must question if musicals can be "read" in the same way as film, radio, television, and video as significant documents of popular culture.

I am frustrated when I realize the limitations of theatre's impact on America today, particularly musical theatre. The reasons are certainly partly economic. $100 Broadway tickets are more appropriate to political fund raisers than to mass culture. Apart from the obvious financial drawbacks to the commercial Broadway theatre as a compelling force in mass culture, however, is the tendency for American scholars and journalists to marginalize theatre by drawing borders of highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow in defining culture, its appeal, and its influence. In 1949, Russell Lynes, managing editor of Harper's, published an article entitled "Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow" that neatly slotted

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entertainment into niches, like mail slots at the post office. Western films were lowbrow, ballet was highbrow, theatre was upper middlebrow, and musical films were lower middlebrow.[38] Middlebrow has traditionally been regarded as a derogatory term, and, of course, is the one Lynes applied to musicals. Perhaps antipathy toward the term "middlebrow" derives from Virginia Woolf's letter, intended for the New Statesmen, in which she attacks a presumably middlebrow critic for labeling her as highbrow.[39] Woolf asserts her love for both highbrows and lowbrows, but condemns middlebrows as pests. She defends her status as highbrow with fighting words: "If any human being, man, woman, dog, cat, or half-crushed worm, dares call me 'middlebrow,' I will take my pen and stab him, dead."[40] Where then does this leave musicals?

The integrated musical seems to combine both lowbrow and highbrow elements. According to Paul Filmer, Val Rimmer, and Dave Walsh, the film musical has inspired several sociocultural studies, while the stage musical has depended on historical accounts of the development of the form and musicological studies: "One reason for this may be the uncomfortable way in which the musical straddles the high/low cultural divide. It is too 'lowbrow' musically and dramatically to interest high-art critics, yet it is too conventional

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[38] Michael Kammen, American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

[39] Virginia Woolf, "Middlebrow," in The Death of the Moth and Other Essays by Virginia Woolf (New York and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1942), 176-86. For a less vituperative, more sympathetic approach to middlebrow culture, see Janice A. Radway, A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[40] Ibid., 186.

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and mundane for culture critics of popular musical forms such as jazz and rock."[41] Andrea Most concedes that South Pacific, like most of the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, has been labeled middlebrow: "As the quintessential example of what mid-century critics called 'middlebrow' culture, South Pacific sits uncomfortably between the 'low' culture of Tin Pan Alley and the 'high' culture of legitimate theatre and opera."[42] Most argues that South Pacific combines lowbrow and highbrow elements in a provocative mix. Certainly, this was the party line in terms of artists like Jerome Robbins and Leonard Bernstein, who built on the Rodgers and Hammerstein concept of the integrated musical play that combined popular culture with European notions of high art.

Early in Robbins' career, both he and Bernstein combined highbrow and lowbrow elements in a deliberate stew with On the Town (1944), which was based on Robbins' ballet Fancy Free (1944). One year after the opening of On the Town, Robbins espoused a kind of cultural manifesto melding the commercial with the classical in an article for the New York Times Magazine entitled "Ballet Puts on Dungarees":

> Offering historical and social analysis of theatrical dancing and sounding like one of the left-wing populist critics of his day, Robbins described how ballet was becoming a 'people's entertainment.' As an elitist, classical art form imported from Europe, ballet was to become accessible to the masses,

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[41] Paul Filer, Val Rimmer, and Dave Walsh, "*Oklahoma!*: Ideology and Politics in the Vernacular Tradition of the American Musical," Popular Music 18.3 (1999): 381-95.

[42] Andrea Most, "'You've Got To Be Carefully Taught'" The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific,'" Theatre Journal 52.3 (October 2000): 307-37.

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> he argued, by embracing American culture and absorbing popular music and social dances. At the same time, according to Robbins, the traditional American musical as light entertainment was destined to incorporate more serious subject matter and classical aesthetic principles. It was to be a two-pronged revolution, and he placed himself at the vanguard.[43]

Robbins' cultural manifesto predates the eclecticism of postmodernism in its deliberate attempt to fuse highbrow and lowbrow and blur the distinctions between the two in a form that is uniquely American. His goal was to apply all that was vital to both highbrow and lowbrow culture and create a totally integrated theatrical experience.

> A choreographer can justifiably look to the ballet as a medium in which he can say pertinent things about ourselves and our world, no less than a playwright or a novelist or a movie scenarist. For its part, the audience will come to expect as much of ballet as it does of a play, a novel, or a film. And as the ballet and the theatre draw closer to each other, an exciting prospect opens in which not only musicals, but theatre pieces with vital ideas will combine drama, dance, and music, to the benefit of all three.[44]

Robbins is preaching a totally integrated theatrical experience, an American *gesamtkunstwerk*, which mythologizes World War II America much like Wagner mythologized Germanic culture. By using a European model, Robbins' manifesto

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[43] Greg Lawrence, Dance With Demons (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001), 82-3.

[44] Quoted in Lawrence, 83.

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becomes provocative and dodges the derogatory connotations of middlebrow. The assumption is that the integrated musical can tackle compelling social problems within a popular vernacular. Robbins still sought hegemonic, communal solutions to class warfare and discrimination in musicals like The King and I (1951), West Side Story (1957), and Fiddler on the Roof (1964). The solutions to social problems tackled by the integrated musical, however, have since become increasingly commercialized and utopic, particularly as Broadway audiences in the last quarter of the twentieth century have become more homogeneous and elitist.

Robbins and Bernstein were instrumental in developing something new and interesting with On the Town, a mixture of ballet and musical comedy, and with West Side Story, a popular culture retelling of Shakespeare with ballet in an American jazz vernacular. But their goal of an American *gesamtkunstwerk* lent their musical aspirations a highbrow patina.[45]

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[45] Ironically, Wagner was aware of the importance of performance as well as text in his *gesamtkunstwerk*, since elements like movement, dance, music, and stage decor are all communicated through performance. See Richard Wagner, Opera and Drama, trans. Edwin Evans (New York: Charles Scribner, 1913). At the same time, these elements of performance had to be carefully controlled if they were to contribute to the larger dramatic meaning or concept. There is a duality in the *gesamtkunstwerk* between Wagner's realization of the importance of performance and the authority of a controlling, guiding artistic hand to make sure all elements of performance combine to reinforce the dramatic purpose of the text, as Carl Dahlaus notes:

> When Wagner, in *Oper und Drama*, spoke of music as a function of the drama, he by no means understood "drama" to mean the literary text--which likewise had to serve the drama. Rather, he was referring to the events on stage as a whole, including not only the stage action but also "melodized" speech . . . and "verbalized orchestral melody." In his Beethoven essay of 1870 he expressly states that "drama alone" is capable of "determining" the music, by which he meant "not the poem of the drama but rather the drama that actually unfolds in motion before our eyes." For

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Ironically, contemporary Europeans are attracted to American mass culture: rock, punk, MTV, film, video, even jazz. Where but France would Jerry Lewis attract a highbrow critical following? Americans, on the other hand, have traditionally appropriated what they perceive as highbrow culture from European models. In 1927, Charles Edward Russell theorized that the demise of Theodore Thomas' American Opera Company in the 1880s, was the result of the name of the company: "American Opera connoted bad opera. To this day, 'American artist' means, to the average American soul, inferior artist; 'American composer' means inferior composer."[46]

The same has been true of theatre. Americans denigrate their most distinguished playwrights, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Edward Albee, while these same writers are celebrated and widely produced in Europe. Miller has had a

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> Wagner, artistic status was to be found not in the "fixed letter" but in the "externalization of the poet's intentions for the sensory faculties," this externalization being the property of the music and the stage setting.
>
> All the same, Wagner, viewing himself maniacally as the heir apparent and sole custodian of the classical legacy in both literature and music, as a "classic in his own time," attempted to ground the artistic status of the music drama in thematic and motivic manipulation, a technique and aesthetic ideal derived from the classical symphony. This would seem to stand in glaring and unresolved contradiction to the stress he placed on the drama as a theatrical event. See Carl Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 196.

A strong, guiding artistic hand is consequently necessary to reinforce the intentions of the composer. Much the same can be said of the integrated musical, where the performer is no longer co-creator, but serves the larger dramatic intentions of the text. The strong, guiding artistic hand in musical theatre turned out to be Robbins, who protected the autonomy of the text.

[46] Quoted in Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 145.

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difficult time securing Broadway productions of his later plays, but he is virtually guaranteed major new productions in London. Albee's newer work has generally been introduced abroad since the 1970s, until his American rediscovery with Three Tall Women in the 1990s, which was produced off-Broadway. At the same time, mediocre plays by British writers like Patrick Marber and David Hare have little trouble finding commercial backing and critical raves in New York.

During the late 1980s, columnist Gerald Nachman, in the San Francisco Chronicle, questioned why opera goers would tolerate the silliness of the Barber of Seville, while theatrical producers refused to revive musicals by Kern, Berlin, Gershwin, and Rodgers and Hart on the basis of their creaky, dated libretti. According to Nachman, if Italian operas had been written by Americans, "They'd be dismissed as moronic. . . . I realized it must be the American reverence for all things European and our tendency to take for granted all things quintessentially American."[47] As Levine notes, "Is the idea of a serious comparison of American musicals and opera really so outrageous? Are we certain we would learn so little about opera, musicals, and our own culture from making it?"[48] Unfortunately, the privileging of the serious, integrated musical has skewed the study of the musical and its reflexive relationship with American culture. I am not denigrating the accomplishments of the integrated musical. I am denigrating the tendency to prioritize different genres of musical theatre. Like the terms highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow, or categorizations like musical comedy versus operetta, historians tend to argue about

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[47] Ibid., 1-2.

[48] Ibid., 2.

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adjectival boxes that obstruct a serious study of the form.

In Eastern Europe, theatre rivals football in popularity. At a 2000 conference in Dortmund, Germany, I watched high school students, dressed like characters from Starlight Express (1987), not only skate all over the conference center, but also throughout the town. The American musical is part of the German high school curriculum. It is not regarded with the same reverence in the United States. Sadly, theatre does not have the effect, influence, or impact of film, television, video, music, or sports in America. I don't know how to fix this. I do know that those of us who would like to see musical theatre taken more seriously have every reason to approach the form seriously, apply scholarly methodologies to its study, contextualize it in terms of historical relativism, and given the parameters of popular culture versus mass culture, do the best we can to analyze musicals as documents that reveal valuable information about shifting cultural moments. The first step in increasing the impact of theatre in America is to take it seriously, and it seems to me, this is one contribution around which scholars of varying persuasions can rally.

Jill Dolan has acknowledged the problem of theatre's marginalization, both in terms of its impact on mass culture and in terms of its status in the academy:

> In the now classic, defining volume on cultural studies, called simply *Cultural Studies*, none of the forty articles included is about theater, although many look at popular culture forms like music, detective fiction, porn magazines, book clubs, and dancing. These exclusions and absences indicate theater is still marked as "high" art, in an academic moment which,

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> through cultural studies, in particular, is privileging the "low": the absence of theater examples here also indicates the academic marginality of the field. But such presumptions fail to account for the history and efficacy of American popular entertainments, for one example, as bearers of cultural meanings, even though their effects are primarily local, rather than "mass." Cultural studies has been quite useful to performance and theater scholars--among them Joseph Roach, Bruce McConachie, Elin Diamond, and Sue-Ellen Case--determined to set out the larger historical and social context for the work they examine; cultural scholars might profitably consider the wide application of these proliferating models.[49]

Dolan implies that the effects of musicals may be more local than mass, but, as popular culture, musicals are still bearers of cultural meanings. In marginalizing musical theatre, the academy tends to dismiss not only a valuable source of information about popular culture and how it has changed, evolved, and reinvented itself over the course of the twentieth century, but also a source of documentation about shifting notions of identity and hegemony--both dissonant and status quo--during given cultural moments in which influential musical works were mounted.

Collaboration verus Linear Histories

The collaboration between Rodgers and Hammerstein serves as a fitting example

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[49] Jill Dolan, Geographies of Learning (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 68.

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for the paradigm of a mutual genealogy of influence replacing linear, textual histories. When Rodgers and Hammerstein supposedly integrated the musical in 1943, Rodgers was associated with musical comedy from his collaborative years with Lorenz Hart, while Hammerstein was associated with the operetta tradition from his work with Kern. But Rodgers and Hart, working with director Rouben Mamoulian, developed an integrated book and score, with films like Love Me Tonight in the early 1930s, which were precursors of the kind of work Rodgers was to continue with Hammerstein and Mamoulian in Oklahoma!. The development of the musical is a history of collaboration. Mamoulian, Rodgers, and Hart worked together in the early 1930s, even before Mamoulian and the Gershwins collaborated on the original production of Porgy and Bess (1935). Mamoulian later reteamed with Rodgers on Oklahoma!, when they were joined by Hammerstein. It is the collaboration, the mutual influence of varied artists who have contributed to each other's work over a period of years, that seems significant to me. Without that genealogy of mutual influence, Oklahoma! would never have happened.

Similarly, Hammerstein borrowed elements from American realism and melodrama of the 1920s, and was heavily influenced by Ned Sheldon and Dorothy Donnelly. His work with Kern was the foundation for his eventual partnership with Rodgers. Hammerstein also mentored Sondheim, when the latter was gopher for Allegro (1947); the experience had a significant effect on Sondheim's own work. At the same time, Sondheim's affiliation with Prince was influenced by Weill's experiments in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, including Love Life (1948), as well as Prince's self-proclaimed affinity for the work of Meyerhold. The political satires of Kaufman and Hart in the 1930s also

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influenced Weill's American work during the same period. Collaboration extends beyond a group of creators working on a single project. It involves long-standing relationships, mentoring, and mutual influence.

Ethan Mordden, on the other hand, implies that the development of the form is linear, as is evident from his series of books about the Golden Age of the American Musical, each volume dedicated to a decade from the 1920s through the 1960s:

> There had been a time, remember, when a "musical" meant Fred and Adele Astaire and a Gershwin score; or Ziegfeld and les girls: inconsequential fun. Of course, Rodgers and Hammerstein changed that. But it is my notion that West Side Story and Gypsy changed that again. I don't see these shows as climaxes of the Rodgers and Hammerstein era as much as the first strikes in the next era, one in which the musical finally gives up its membership in the popular arts to confront its audience.[50]

Mordden assumes an ever upward spiral in the development of the serious musical, based on the privileging of the integrated musical and its increasingly highbrow aspirations; consequently, the spiral is linear and ever-improving. In that sense, Rodgers and Hammerstein are superior to Ziegfeld and his revues, just as West Side Story and Gypsy mark an *improvement* over Rodgers and Hammerstein. What Mordden fails to acknowledge is that there is more than one thing happening at the same time. In reality, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals are influenced by the work of Rodgers and Hart,

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[50] Ethan Mordden, Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 253.

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Kern and Hammerstein, Romberg and Hammerstein, Mamoulian's previous work as a director with Rodgers and Hart, Agnes De Mille's previous work in ballet, and George Balanchine's choreography for Rodgers and Hart in On Your Toes (1936). They are also the result of a post-war mythologization of America. Similarly, Gypsy is the product of Jerome Robbins' fascination with the world of vaudeville, Stephen Sondheim's mentoring by Oscar Hammerstein, Jule Styne's experience crafting hit parade tunes to suit star performers like Frank Sinatra, and Arthur Laurents' previous experience as a serious playwright, in addition to his experience as librettist for West Side Story. It is also the result of a 1950s cultural climate fascinated by psychiatry, where parents, most particularly mothers, were perceived as responsible for their children's problems. A mutual genealogy is at work here. Categorizing the development of the form as linear and ever improving is simplistic and inaccurate. I would argue that musicals are documents of their time--products of their given cultural moments--rather than linear texts that spawn one another.

Previous Scholarship: Text versus Performance and Reception

Previous scholarship in the field has been varied, alternating between journalists like Stanley Green, Ethan Mordden, and Mark Steyn, historians like Gerald Bordman, and musicologists like Benny Green, Stephen Banfield, and more recently, Geoffrey Block. The academy has begun to address issues of race, gender, and class in relation to the American musical, particularly Bruce McConachie in his work on Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oriental" musicals, Andrea Most in her contextualizing Oklahoma and South Pacific in terms of Jewish assimilationist strategies, and Stacy Wolf and D.A.

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Miller, who have explored issues of gender and sexuality in relation to musical theatre performance.[51]

More often, however, the scholarship devoted to the development of the musical remains largely text-centered. Even historians who pay lip service to performance issues often seem to rely on text for their insights and information. For instance, writing of comedian Bobby Clark's appearance in a revival of Sweethearts in 1947, Mordden ostensibly discusses Clark's performance: "As with most comedians, you loved him or you didn't get it; in a typical gag in Sweethearts, Clark entered pulling a cart, got to center stage, turned to the audience, and in his businesslike squeal called out, 'Has anyone seen a horse?' I don't get it. Nevertheless, Clark still had a public, and they made Sweethearts a hit."[52] It is no surprise that Mordden doesn't "get it." He is too young to have ever seen Bobby Clark in Sweethearts. A script with stage directions does not reveal what Clark actually *did* onstage to garner laughs. According to Willie Howard, an equally legendary comic who performed concurrently with Clark, the text is the least of the tools of a great

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[51] See Bruce McConachie, "The Oriental Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia," Theatre Journal, 46 (October 1995): 385-98; Andrea Most, "'We Know We Belong to the Land': The Theatricality of Assimilation in Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!," PMLA 113.1 (January 1998): 77-89; Andrea Most, "'You've Got To Be Carefully Taught': The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific," Theatre Journal 52.3 (October 2000): 307-337; Stacy Wolf, "'Never Gonna Be a Man / Catch Me If You Can / I Won't Grow Up': A Lesbian Account of Mary Martin as Peter Pan," Theatre Journal 49 (December 1997): 493-509; Stacy Wolf, "The Queer Pleasures of Mary Martin and Broadway: The Sound of Music as a Lesbian Musical," Modern Drama 39 (Spring 1996): 51-63; D.A. Miller, Place For Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[52] Ethan Mordden, Beautiful Mornin': The Broadway Musical in the 1940s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139.

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clown:

> To succeed, comedy must be tricked. Mugging, gestures, tempo, and vocal pyrotechnics play important roles. When you cannot get over with a line, you must trick with an absurd facial expression or a burlesque movement of some part of the anatomy, or by a surprise pitch of the voice either up or down the register. The veteran stage comic knows these tricks and uses them every second of the time he is facing an audience. Not for an instant does he relax from the broad caricature he has drawn. If he does, the illusion is gone.[53]

Though Mordden seems to be acknowledging the importance of performance, his chronicles of the American musical assume a disturbing "I was there" tone. He wasn't. Much of his information, particularly since his work documents only scripts, apparently comes from text and stage directions.

In privileging the text by itself, scholars tend to neglect the cultural interchange between performance and reception that is crucial to meaning, despite their protestations to the contrary. This is certainly true of Gerald Bordman and Gerald Mast, who have both made significant contributions to the field. Bordman tends to idealize Kern and the Princess Theatre shows as the beginnings of the integrated musical, while Mast glorifies Oscar Hammerstein II as the hero of the development of the American musical. The implication in the work of both these men is that the integrated model is the one to follow

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[53] Stanley Green, The Great Clowns of Broadway (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 100-01.

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and that its glory lies in the text alone.

Similarly, Joseph Swain tips his hat to the importance of performance in musical theatre, but spends the bulk of The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey examining how the songs in a musical serve text, themes, and ideas.[54] The approach is similar to Joseph Kerman's in Opera as Drama, where Kerman rightly argues that music in nineteenth century opera helps define character and that arias are often sung in moments of heightened dramatic emotion.[55] The twentieth-century integrated musical, however, is not nineteenth-century opera. Swain tends to be modernist in his veneration of the nineteenth century concept of *werktreue*. But how accurately can one trace authenticity or authorial intent, even in nineteenth century music? A similar aesthetic holds true in musical theatre, where few authentic texts exist before Oklahoma!, and the authenticity of any text is subject to its historical moment of production. The presumption on the part of many musicologists, borrowing from modernist opera criticism, is again that the goal of the musical is integration, which negates the contribution of the non-integrated musical or musical comedy, whose songs are often extraneous to the plot. It also oversimplifies the complexity of the development of the integrated musical, which was a confluence of many influences, both musical, non-musical, and cultural. Everything didn't spring magically from Oklahoma!, nor did it spring from the text by itself. Undeniably, the text is most accessible to study, particularly the texts of integrated musicals from the past fifty years.

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[54] See Joseph P. Swain, The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[55] See Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (New York: Vintage, 1956).

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Equally important, however, are the gaps and absences that must be filled in by studying performance and reception in both integrated and non-integrated musicals.

Methodological Approaches

My methodological approach will be both practical and ideological. Since I am arguing that the text by itself is not a reliable barometer of meaning without looking at performance, reception, and historical relativism, my methodology will be eclectic. I will borrow from performance studies, cultural studies, postmodern musicology, postmodern literary theory, as well as performance analysis and historical and cultural contextualization. Particularly helpful is the work of Roland Barthes on the death of the author, Richard Taruskin's challenging of authenticity in terms of postmodern musicology, arguments by directors like Peter Brook and Jerome Savary that there are no definitive productions of theatre, discourse on the performativity of identity, particularly by Judith Butler and Jill Dolan, Susan Bennett's work on reception theory, Michael Quinn's work on the semiotics of star performers, and Marvin Carlson's argument about ghosting in "The Haunted Stage," as well as his argument in Theatre Semiotics about the need to negotiate the relationship between semiotics and reception. Carlson's argument is easily applicable to musical theatre, particularly in the changing conventions of the form and the audience's acceptance or rejection of those conventions. In looking at musicals as products of specific cultural moments, my approach will also be ideological, since it is impossible to isolate a musical from the cultural moment that produces it.

In studying elements of performance of musicals of the past, I will look at evidence

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including photographs, interviews, recordings, tapes (both video and aural), films, kinescopes, reviews, oral histories, and available statistics about audience demographics. I acknowledge that some of this evidence is limited. Autobiographies tend to be self-serving, while show business biographies tend to be hagiographies. Much of the material that has been written about star performers and Broadway productions is anecdotal, which makes for entertaining reading, but is often pretty thin as history. Since the integrated musical is relatively new, biographies and histories have carefully evaded elements of the personal lives of the creators and performers for a variety of reasons, not the least of which are potential lawsuits. Unfortunately, much of the knowledge in the field of musical theatre has been passed down through word-of-mouth, but cannot be authenticated, although it is potentially revealing. For example, Jerome Robbins was such a powerful figure in the field, no one dared tackle his biography until after his death. Although Greg Lawrence has done an admirable job, much of what made Robbins so enigmatic and fascinating is buried with him. If I am arguing that the form of musicals is innately open, ambivalent, and enigmatic, privileged by gaps and absences, unfortunately, so is much available source material that cannot be authenticated.

Personal Perspectives

My interest in musical theatre embraces several perspectives, which hopefully will allow me to make some contribution to the field. I spent most of my life as a musical director and worked on several Broadway shows (alas, all failures), as well as in national companies of many hits. As a musical director, I had the opportunity to observe and learn

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from performers like Bobby Morse, Mimi Hines, Chita Rivera, Ann Reinking, and Ruby Keeler, writers like Fred Ebb, choreographers and directors like Ron Field, Tony Stevens, Marc Breaux, Rudy Tronto, Danny Daniels, and Mary Ann Niles. My fascination with musicals was mostly performance centered: why does one number work and another fail in performance? In addition to my work on commercial musicals, I collaborated with Tom Eyen on several musicals that were produced at LaMama during the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, Eyen and I wrote the opening musical, Caution: A Love Story, for the theatre at 74 East 4th street in 1968. I also wrote and directed other musicals at this venue. My perspective on musical theatre is heavily colored by my work at LaMama and my observation of what was, in 1968, an incredibly colorful, vibrant theatrical community that included work by Rochelle Owens, Paul Foster, Megan Terry, Julie Bovasso, Sam Shepard, Ron Link, and Tom O'Horgan. Working on musicals at LaMama, I felt part of a larger community experimenting with non-musical theatre. My time at LaMama was characterized by incredible artistic freedom and great humor: many of the references in these plays were to commercial theatre as well, and most particularly, to performances in commercial musicals.[56]

In addition to my work in commercial and experimental theatre, I spent ten years as conductor for Ann Corio's This Was Burlesque, a recreation of the form that was played on Broadway, across the country, and on an HBO television special. I had the opportunity to observe the work of comics like Steve Mills, Harry Connolly, Pinkie Lee,

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[56] See Tom Eyen and Bruce Kirle, Kama Sutra, in Ten Plays by Tom Eyen (New York: Samuel French, 1971), 201-271.

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Jerry Lester, and Maxie Furman and learn about a form that has much in common with vaudeville and the non-integrated musical. I've also been a professional musician since I was fifteen, when I played Mendelssohn's G-Minor Piano Concerto with the Boston Pops after winning a competition. My perspective as a musician tends again to focus on performance.

As a student of theatre history, my interests involve more current concerns of the academy: issues of reception and semiotics as well as ideological issues concerning class, gender, race, and ethnicity. For the past two years, I have been Associate Professor of Theatre at Roosevelt University in Chicago, where I direct both the M.F.A. and B.F.A. Musical Theatre Programs. My concerns here are again with performance, since I teach a four-course sequence of acting for the musical stage and am actively involved with curriculum decisions for musical theatre students. As a working musical director, survivor of the experimental New York theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, and current student and teacher, I'm interested in contextualizing the form and reading musicals as important cultural documents that reveal shifting notions of American identity.

Format

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first two deal with the non-integrated musical or musical comedy, while the third and fourth chapters trace the development of the integrated or "serious" musical, and show how musicals, as popular culture, can be markers for shifting notions of identity throughout the twentieth century. The final chapter argues that the musical, like postmodern theatre studies, postmodern

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musicology, and postmodern literary studies, is innately open, subject to a plurality of readings which are dependent on historical relativism.

Chapters one and two focus on pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein musical comedy, which I define as the non-integrated musical, where the performer served as co-creator of a text that was never meant to be fixed or complete. Like pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein musical comedy, opera seria, which relied on the virtuoso musical talents of its star castrati rather than on a fixed text, has been unfavorably compared to its more integrated successors, such as opera *verismo*, Verdi, and Wagner. Gluck's reforms of opera seria are analogous to Rodgers and Hammerstein's integration of song, dialogue, and dance. Oscar Hammerstein's contribution to the development of the musical is unquestionable; at the same time, there is no need to denigrate the non-integrated musical, which was never meant to rely on a closed text, but on the often tricky collaboration between author and performer as co-creator. Opera seria had been virtually ignored until the early music revival during the latter third of the twentieth century, when musicologists realized that something new and exciting could be created from a text that was never meant to be complete. I argue that the same may be true of the non-integrated musical. The star turn in musical comedy functioned similarly to the performances of the virtuosi in opera seria. Just as there is no authentic text of a Handel opera, there is no authentic text to the non-integrated musical, which relied on the improvisations, ad-libs, interpolations, and songs of its star clowns and performers. Rather than focusing on text, I am taking a performance studies approach that privileges the gaps and absences so difficult to retrieve from the history of a form that is intrinsically a product of its cultural moment.

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Chapter two is a star study that focuses on the role of the musical comedy performer, both male and female, as co-creator during the melting pot aesthetic, which roughly coincides with the Golden Age of the American Musical, from the 1920s through the 1960s. Ironically, in a form that is often regarded as hegemonic or reactionary, the transgressive strategies of these star performers subverted stable notions of Anglo-American identity. The strategies involved self-conscious theatricality, impersonation, playfulness, and performativity that destabilized essentialist perceptions of identity while promoting acculturation and assimilation. The chapter examines varying notions of the American melting pot and the strategies performers in the non-integrated musical negotiated with their audiences to assuage anxiety about assimilation. Jews, in particular, carefully had to negotiate the line between ethnicity and race. The former enabled Anglo assimilation, while the latter precluded access to the Anglo-American power structure. The chapter also engages Judith Butler's theories about performativity to show how these stars were able to negotiate and promote dynamic, fluid performances of identity. Both male stars (Jolson, Cantor, Bobby Clark, Willie Howard, Bert Lahr) and female stars (Marilyn Miller, Mary Martin, Ethel Merman, Carol Channing) played with ethnicity, race, gender, and class in constructing their star personae.

In chapter three, I debunk the notion that the development of the integrated musical implies a linear progression from the Hammerstein model. The serious musical is a history of collaboration, a mutual genealogy of influence, rather than the result of a linear timeline, where one text spawns another in a continuous upward spiral. More than one influence is happening at the same time. In effect, the musical is a product of its cultural

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moment, which reflects the non-musical theatre as well. The 1920s are characterized not only by American realism but by romanticism, while the 1930s provide political satire and farce as well as theatricalism, epic theatre, and realism. The post-war mythologizing of America by Rodgers and Hammerstein leads to a glorification of the counterculture by the 1960s. The concept musical borrows not only from the Hammerstein model but from the epic theatre of Brecht/Weill, Harold Prince's fascination with Meyerhold, and the theatricalism of Lady in the Dark (1941). While the Hammerstein model was undoubtedly influential, other equally important influences have contributed to the development of the form.

In chapter four, I frame examples of the integrated musical in their given cultural moments and show how the form often offers utopic solutions to social problems. As Broadway audiences become more elitist and as class arrangements shift over the course of the past sixty years, musicals become markers that document and reflect shifts in attitude toward class, which is often inextricable from ethnicity and race. I have chosen to look at four musicals that mirror significant moments of cultural change: Oklahoma! (1943) in the 1940s, Fiddler on the Roof (1964) in the 1960s, A Chorus Line (1975) in the 1970s, and Les Misérables (1987) in the 1980s. Each of these musicals were financially successful. Their popularity helps make them significant markers of change, because it indicates a wide and broad range of appeal. Although each of these shows reflects its cultural moment, each negotiates and renegotiates the tension between dominant hegemonic forces and forces of resistance, although the utopic solutions many of these musicals suggest tend to be those that hegemony itself can provide. In examining these

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four musicals. I will also look at changing leisure patterns and patterns of consumption that help explain the needs and desires these musicals addressed for audiences of their time. In so doing, I frame the musicals in terms of neo-Gramscian cultural studies theorists, like Richard Dyer and John Fiske, since these methodologies are consistent with the study of musicals as documents of popular culture.

The final chapter bookends the opening. In chapter one, I argue that the non-integrated musical, like opera seria, historically has not been privileged because no authentic texts exist to explain the role of performer as co-creator. The text of the non-integrated musical was meant to be incomplete. In this chapter, I argue that even where authentic texts survive, notably with the integrated musical, their authenticity is linked with performance and reception, which is a function of their historical moment of production. In essence, musicals are innately open and incomplete, whether non-integrated or integrated. No matter how privileged the text, it is still subject to performance and reception, framed by its moment of cultural conception, to create meaning. In arguing the innate openness of the musical, I cite Roland Barthes and his essay on the death of the author, as well as postmodern musicologists like Richard Taruskin, who question the authenticity of musical texts long held sacrosanct and verifiable by modernists in the field. I then choose to look at the representation of gender in three musicals that opened a year after the Stonewall riots: Company (1970), Coco (1969), and Applause (1970). Each of these musicals involves or suggests homosexual characters, but the texts are left open, subject to a plurality of readings which will inevitably change with time. I have made the issue of homosexuality salient here because

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the three musicals are so obviously products of a cultural marker, the Stonewall riots. Although the texts of each survive, they are incomplete, subject to performance, reception, and historical relativism. The collaboration between these theatrical elements provides audiences with answers for "reading" and decoding the provocative issues these musicals raise in terms of gender and identity.

If American musicals are innately open, they are subject to a plurality of readings dependent on text, performance, and reception, and the way these elements interact within given historical moments. Musicals are cultural documents that reflect changing values and reveal how representations of American identity shift throughout the twentieth century. My goal is to create a sociology of musical theatre--a mutual genealogy of influence--that frames the development of the form and contextualizes it through significant cultural moments.

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Chapter One:

The Non-Integrated Musical: The Performer as Co-Creator

Musical theatre historians like Mast, Borden, Banfield, and Mordden have privileged integration to the point where most pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals are deemed unworthy of major Broadway revival.[1] What's astounding is that this privileging extends to historians of other theatrical eras. Curtis A. Price, in writing about Restoration drama, seems to carry over the same aesthetic:

> What is so striking about Restoration drama is the large number of plays in which music actually furthers the dramatic action rather than simply supplements it. Perhaps Edward J. Dent best expressed the musical "limitations" of Elizabethan drama: "Shakespeare and his contemporaries never show us speech intensified into song under stress of emotion, but only the emotional effect produced by music on the characters represented." In late seventeenth century plays, however, the protagonist may express himself musically; he is able to change his actions in the course of a song.[2]

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[1] Perhaps the most fertile organization reviving pre-1943 musicals is the Encore Series at New York's City Center; however, these revivals are done in concert versions. They are enormously popular, both with critics and audiences, and one reason behind their popularity is their ability to showcase outstanding performing and choreographic talents that would have no similar outlet in contemporary musicals.

[2] Curtis A. Price, Music in the Restoration Theatre (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), xv-xvi.

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Clearly, according to Price, music that furthers the plot or character is better than music that merely supplements plot.

Price is an expert on opera, and his privileging of integration in Restoration drama seems to borrow from opera history and criticism. Opera seria, the form of serious opera which thrived during the eighteenth century prior to Gluck's reforms, depended on the talents as well as the whims of individual singers and the audience's love for pageantry, rather than for a finished, revered text. Indeed, the texts (libretti and scores) for opera seria were intended to be incomplete; they were fleshed out by performers who were co-creators. As such, the genre was dismissed until fairly recently as basically unproduceable and unworthy of revival. The same prejudices seem to exist in the eyes of historians and musicologists about musical theatre prior to the collaboration of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Only a handful of pre-World War II musicals are deemed worthy of major Broadway revival, and those few are mostly thought of as precursors to the integrated musical.[3] Pre-1943 musical comedy often depended on the talents of its entertainers, whether comics or singers. Like opera seria, many of these musicals were window dressing for stars. Audiences paid to see these beloved performers ad lib and clown; the plots were jerry built and were meant to showcase the star performer. During the past thirty or forty years, musicologists and historians have rediscovered the values of opera seria, partly through pragmatic reasons. There is a new generation of countertenors and sopranos who can cope with the coloratura demands of the music. Whereas opera

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[3] Included in this short list are Show Boat, Pal Joey, Lady in the Dark, Porgy and Bess, and Of Thee I Sing.

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historians and musicologists of previous generations focused on textual criticism and, consequently, privileged the work of Gluck and Wagner, postmodern musicologists like Richard Taruskin and Jennifer Brown have rediscovered the excitement and creativity that opera seria can bring to the operatic stage.[4] As historians and musicologists begin to take performance issues rather than just the text into consideration when writing about pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein musical theatre, it is likely that a similar phenomenon will occur, particularly if gifted, charismatic performers are available to flesh out these star roles. The integration of drama and music is a great and worthy accomplishment of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play; it is equally worthy to revive non-integrated texts and create something new based on a text that was never intended to be complete or fixed.

Oscar Hammerstein II dominates post-World War II histories of the American musical theatre. Mordden fixes Hammerstein's preeminence in a series of deductions: "The musical play is the most significant of all developments in the American musical. Show Boat was the first musical play. Hammerstein designed Show Boat. That makes him the most significant figure in the musical's history."[5] Mast, who also venerates Hammerstein as the most influential figure in the history of the American musical, does point out that Hammerstein's dominance in the post-war musical "ignores two corollary losses: the great song hits from Broadway shows (fewer and fewer with every passing

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[4] See Richard Taruskin, Text and Act (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jennifer Williams Brown, "On the Road with the 'Suitcase Aria': The Transmission of Borrowed Arias in Late Seventeenth-Century Italian Opera Revivals." Journal of Musicological Research 15.1-2 (1995): 3-25.

[5] Ethan Mordden, Broadway Babies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 142.

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season since Oklahoma!) and the great top bananas and belting mamas to put them over."[6] Mast is right when he asserts that the singer in a Hammerstein musical play is "a specific character living in a specific place at a specific moment in history. While the voice, the I, of a Gershwin, Hart, or Porter lyric is an undefined surrogate for the lyricist himself, the voice, the I, of a Hammerstein lyric is an Oklahoma rancher, or a nurse from Little Rock, or a Victorian British schoolmarm."[7] Indeed, the first three Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals eschewed the idea of star performers; actors were cast to fit the characters, not to sell tickets based on their star personae.[8] The choice Hammerstein makes is the choice of the book or the text as predominant, rather than the performer or the individual song. If one were to ask, "Who is in charge?" of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, it is clearly the authors.

Mast also draws an interesting analogy between musical theatre and opera. He claims that Hammerstein adapted Wagner's notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* into popular American musical theatre:

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[6] Gerald Mast, Can't Help Singing: The American Musical on Stage and Screen (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook, 1987), 203.

[7] Mast, 203.

[8] Alfred Drake, Celeste Holm, and John Raitt became stars, but not until they originated Curley, Ado Annie, and Billy Bigelow in Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. Starting with South Pacific in 1949, Rodgers and Hammerstein did use star names, but that is probably because their third Broadway musical, Allegro, was unsuccessful, and, after Carousel, they began producing their own musicals. As Mast suggests, "Songs became operatic arias for booming voices or 'art songs' for delicate interpreters of lieder. The most famous male star of a Rodgers and Hammerstein show, Ezio Pinza, was an opera singer, and the most famous female star of Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, Mary Martin, was capable of singing lieder" (203).

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> He envisioned a totally unified American music drama in which songs define the characters and drive the narrative, translating Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* into American theatre tastes and cultural terms. His stage works would be based not on Germanic myths but on homespun American characters, values, and ideals--combining Wagner's mythic seriousness with good old American fun. . . . After his forty years in the theatre, Hammerstein had not only demonstrated a theory but had forced everyone to adopt it. His vision of musical theatre triumphed for an obvious reason: it represented the noblest imaginable idea for a show that began in 1866 with some songs, some jokes, and a lot of leg [The Black Crook].[9]

Certainly, Hammerstein did create a kind of post World War II myth about what it means to be an American and about the democratization of American values.[10] He also was responsible, along with Rodgers, for refining the older, non-integrated musical into a more integrated form.

It seems to me, however, that a more valid analogy can be made between Rodgers and Hammerstein as musical theatre reformers and Gluck as a reformer of opera seria.[11]

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[9] Mast, 201.

[10] For more on Hammerstein's mythologization of America, see chapter four.

[11] For more information on Gluck's reforms of opera seria, see Herbert Lindenberger, Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 49-64; 110; 127. Also see Carl Dahlhaus, Esthetics of Music, trans. William W. Austin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; Carl Dahlhaus, "Ethos and Pathos in Gluck's "Iphigenie auf Tauris." *Musikforschung* 17 (1974): 289-300; Patricia

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Just as Gluck reformed opera seria and shifted the authority from performer and individual aria to the text, Rodgers and Hammerstein accomplished much the same for the American musical.[12] It is impossible to privilege or value opera seria without privileging elements of performance over the text; much the same can be said of pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein musical comedy.

Opera Seria and Its Reform

In order to pursue this analogy more fully, it's necessary to examine opera seria and the reforms for which Gluck was responsible. Perhaps the greatest librettist associated with opera seria is Metastasio, who was a reformer of sorts himself. Before Metastasio, seventeenth-century opera was characterized by recitatives, arioso passages, and arias, which were intermingled according to the composer's whim or fancy or according to his perceived requirements of the action. There was no set structure; consequently, often a scene would end with a recitative. Metastasio formalized the structure of serious opera. In a typical Metastasio libretto, a scene consists of two parts. The first involves dramatic action, expressed in a recitative. The second section of the scene involves an aria. In the first part, an actor is a character in a scene, often reciting dialogue with other characters in the form of a recitative. In the second part, the

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Howard, Gluck and the Birth of Modern Opera (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1963); and Donald Jay Grout with Hermine Weigel Williams, A Short History of Opera, third edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 258-81.

[12] Even Mast claims that Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote arias, rather than songs. Wagner negated the idea of individual arias; instead, he suggested that the music, words, movement, and action be seamlessly linked in a unified whole.

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singer/character expresses general feelings or reflections appropriate to the situation, often in a soliloquy to the audience. During the aria, which was often an excuse for the singer to show off his technique and prowess, the progress of dramatic action came to a dead stop. The tension here, of course, is typical of opera in general: what are the rights of the drama and what are the rights of the music? Metastasio formalized operatic structure by finding a way of making drama and music exist compatibly. As long as the limits of his structure were tolerable to audiences, the conventions lasted; when other, more sophisticated ideas about structuring the coexistence of drama and music prevailed, his work fell out of favor.

The typical libretto by Metastasio, filled with intrigue both amorous and political, often featured a stock figure of a magnanimous tyrant, who might mirror the aristocrat sponsoring the production. An example is Attilio regolo (1740). Attilio, a Roman, has been captured by the Carthaginians. He is offered his freedom and passage back to Rome if he will use his influence with the Roman Senate to obtain advantages for Carthage. He is permitted to return to Rome, but is told he must return to Carthage and die if he fails his mission. Refusing to betray his country, Attilio urges the Roman Senate to stand firm. Successful in his mission to be true to his native country, Attilio voluntarily boards the ship that will return him to Carthage, captivity, and certain death. Although the tragic ending was an innovation for Metastasio, the opera featured the magnanimous autocrat and furnished ample opportunity for bravura arias.[13]

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[13] Tragic endings had appeared previously in two other works of Metastasio before 1740: Didone abbandonata (17243) and Catone in Utica (1728), and is rare in earlier Italian opera. Businello's Didone (1641), with music by Cavalli, is one example. It

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The aria dominated Metastasio's operas; other elements like the recitative, the choral ensembles, and instrumental music fell to the background. In promoting the variety and stylization of aria types (the aria contabile, the aria di portamento, the aria di mezzo carattere, the aria parlante, the aria di bravura or di agilita), Metastasio also promoted a certain looseness of dramatic structure in terms of the opera as a whole. The composer's responsibility centered on the individual aria, rather than the dramatic effect of the entire opera as a unit. While there was a plot and libretto, the composer was generally concerned with requirements as to variety and pacing, rather than to a larger musical unit or concept that would complement the libretto. In a Metastasian libretto, the two most important arias would be placed at the end of each of the first two acts. Pacing requirements were similarly formalized. Each principal performer had at least one aria per act, but never two in succession. No aria could be followed by another of the same type, even if performed by a different singer. Subordinate singers/characters must have fewer arias than principal singers or stars. Obviously, the system was artificial and subject to exploitation on the part of the performer. What emerged from the Metastasian structure was the importance of the singer as co-creator and partner with the composer. If the singer was dominant, the chorus was similarly relegated to the background. Outside of occasional interjections, the function of the chorus was principally to assist at the festive celebrations which usually ended these operas.

Metastasio was a master at what he did, which included limiting the number of

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also remained atypical in Metastasio's libretti. See Donald Jay Grout with Hermine Weigel Williams, A Short History of Opera (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 214.

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acts, scenes, and characters in his libretti. He wrote twenty-seven musical dramas, which were given over a thousand musical settings in the eighteenth-century. Some were composed as many as seventy times. Among those contributing musical settings to his work were Leo, Vinci, Hasse, as well as Gluck, who would eventually reform the Metastasio aesthetic and find a more sophisticated way of making drama and music compatible in opera.

It was not unusual that more than one composer musicalized Metastasio's libretti. Indeed, it was rare that an opera was given in exactly the same form in two cities, let alone two performances. Composers freely substituted new arias for old in opera seria. If, for example, a Venetian opera were given in a new city, another composer would often substitute arias more in line with the artistic taste of the new city. More specifically, opera seria often consisted of pasticcios, a "patchwork comprising arias of several different composers fitted to a new or existing libretto."[14] Even critics of this practice, mostly toward the end of the eighteenth-century, had trouble countering two arguments in favor of "pasticcio": it brought variety and excitement to libretti which were often in need of these qualities and it provided an excuse for audiences to hear the latest and most fashionable singing styles.[15] There were basically two kinds of pasticcio. The first included a libretto which was originally musicalized by more than one composer. Muzio Scevola (London, 1721), for example, had a first act composed by F. Amadei, a second

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[14] Curtis A. Price, Judith Milhous, and Robert D. Hume, Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 29.

[15] Price, Milhous, and Hume, 29.

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act by Giovanni Bononcini, and a third act by Handel. The second kind of pasticcio involved an opera which had traveled from city to city and incorporated new arias and a patchwork musical quilt on route. In the latter case, the libretto might be a collaboration between Metastasio and Zeno, Goldoni, Stampiglia, and Rossi, while the music might include arias by Gluck, Ciampi, Galupp, Cocchi, Jommelli, Latilla, and Handel.[16] As Curtis Price, Judith Milhous, and Robert Hume note, the variety of contributors involved in a pasticcio raises the question, "Who is in charge?"[17] Increasingly, the authority belonged to the singer.

The art of singing reached its height during the eighteenth century. This is difficult to fathom today, since the greatest displays of skill were improvised, and for the most part, are lost to current scholars. The great Italian singing schools of the eighteenth-century encouraged composition as well as performance. Two kinds of improvisation were common. The first, coloratura ornamentation, reached its zenith as arias were given prominence in opera seria over dramatic action. The second, cadenzas, originated in sixteenth-century solo song and were revived in eighteenth-century opera.[18] Much of the success of the solo arias depended on castrati, who were most popular between 1650 and 1750. Again, it is difficult in the twentieth century to understand the phenomenon, which fell out of favor at the end of the eighteenth century, since it is almost impossible to approximate what they sounded like. We know castrati had a miraculous vocal technique

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[16] Grout, 219.

[17] Price, Milhous, and Hume, 30.

[18] See Grout, 226.

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which involved white voices, more powerful and flexible than the voices of women. According to Donald Jay Grout, the quality of their voices often went unimpaired, even after forty years of singing.[19] The greatest of the castrati was Farinelli (1705-1782), the friend of princes and emperors, and confidant of two successive Spanish kings. Some cadenzas sung by Farinelli in Giacomelli's Merope (Venice 1734) survive and indicate the kind of pyrotechnics that appealed to the public imagination. Added to the vocal virtuosity was a charisma that made the castrati perhaps the most cherished stars of their generation.

The absolute domination of the aria in opera seria presupposed the absolute domination of the singer. Hand in hand with the veneration heaped on the greatest vocalists of the eighteenth-century were the abuses composers and librettists suffered at the hands of these performers. Audiences and composers were not blind to the abuses of the singers, but tolerated them. Even an autocrat like Handel had to use tact, patience, humor, and threats of violence to curb their more outrageous demands. Certainly Metastasio recognized the danger of the singer as co-creator when he complained that his libretti were ruined by "those ignorant and vain vocal heroes and heroines, who having substituted the imitation of flageolets and nightingales for human affections, render the Italian stage a national disgrace."[20] His concerns were mirrored by the critics of his day.

The critical and satirical writings of the period draw a devastating, if hyperbolic,

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[19] Grout, 229.

[20] See Dr. Charles Burney, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio: in Which Are Incorporated Translations of His Principal Letters, 3 volumes (London: Robinson, 1796), 2:325; 3:43.

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picture of the virtuoso and his whims. In Il teatro all moda, Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739) instructs the opera composer to "hurry or slow down the pace of an aria, according to the caprice of the singers, and [to] conceal the displeasure which their insolence causes him by the reflection that his reputation, his solvency, and all his interest are in their hands."[21] Marcello also advises the director that "all the best songs go to the prima donna, and if it becomes necessary to shorten the opera he will never allow her arias to be cut, but rather other entire scenes."[22] In addition to his tongue-in-cheek advice to the composer and director, Marcello has instructions for the singer as well:

> [If a singer] has a scene with another actor, whom he is supposed to address when singing an air, he will take care to pay no attention to him, but will bow to the spectators in the loges, smile at the orchestra and the other players, in order that the audience may clearly understand that he is the Signor Alipi Forconi, Musico, and not the Prince Zoroaster, whom he is representing. . . All the while the ritornello of his air is being played the singer should walk about the stage, take snuff, complain to his friends that he is in bad voice, that he has a cold, etc. and while singing his aria he shall take care to remember that at the cadence he may pause as long as he pleases, and make runs, decorations, and ornaments according to his fancy; during which time the leader of the orchestra shall leave his place at the

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[21] Quoted in Grout, 222.

[22] Ibid., 23.

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harpsichord, take a pinch of snuff, and wait until it shall please the singer to finish.[23]

Although amusing, Marcello's satire verges on contempt.

It is not surprising that Marcello satirizes these abuses by singers. In opera seria, the composer furnished the singer with a blueprint; music was not the written score, just the way a building is not an architectural blueprint. A successful score depended on the individuality and creativity of the performer. The singer had an individual voice and individual mind. Music was composed to suit the performer's gifts, rather than vice-versa. As a result, composers learned to sing and singers to compose. The great Italian singing schools taught singers to be co-creators, rather than mere vessels through which the composer's music would flow. Dr. Charles Burney documents Metastasio complaining about these abuses, but even the great librettist was powerless to reform a situation to which his own work had contributed so much.[24]

It was Gluck who is credited with the reform of opera seria in the eighteenth century. He learned the French style of opera through the French opera comique, which he conducted at Vienna. Part of his job as conductor was to arrange music and compose new arias which would be more suitable to Viennese taste. During his early career, he collaborated with Metastasio on seventeen operas. In preparation for his later revisionist work, he composed music for Angiolini's ballet, Don Juan (1761). The ballet seemed to

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[23] Ibid., 25-27. It is worth noting that the singer was able to complain to his friends since spectators were seated on stage during the eighteenth century.

[24] Dr. Charles Burney, Memoirs 2:325; 3:43.

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be a manifestation of the new principles of dance advocated in print by Noverre in 1760.[25] Like the French comic operas, where music was subordinate to text, Gluck subordinated his score to dance. Rather than an accompaniment to movement, music becomes the partner of movement. It's the same sort of integration that Rodgers and Hammerstein achieved with Agnes de Mille in Oklahoma! (1943), Carousel (1945), and Allegro (1947) and that Rodgers had experimented with earlier in his career with George Balanchine.[26]

Just as Hammerstein is credited with refining integration of the musical when he began his collaboration with Rodgers, Gluck's reputation as a reformer was established when he collaborated with Calzabigi on three operas, Orfeo et Euridice (1762), Alceste (1767) and Paride et Elena (1770). Calzabigi persuaded Gluck to abandon coloratura passages and secco accompaniment, although Handel famously undersestimated Gluck as knowing "no more of counterpoint than Waltz, my cook."[27] The Preface to Alceste, published in 1769, contained Gluck and Calzabigi's ideals and reforms. Like Hugo's later defense of Romanticism in his Preface to Cromwell, this was a defense of a fait accompli rather than a defense of a new opera or theatre. These ideals had been stated before by others, most notably by Francesco Algarotti, an artistic advisor at the court of Parma where the composer Traetta was working. Algarotti's "Treatise on the Opera," published in 1755, influenced both Gluck's theory and practice and resembles the reforms Gluck

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[25] Grout, 261.

[26] Balanchine had choreographed ballets for On Your Toes (1936), Babes in Arms (1937), and I Married An Angel (1938), all three of which were Rodgers and Hart collaborations.

[27] Grout, 259.

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includes in his Preface to Alceste. Algarotti insists that "it is almost impossible to persuade him [the composer] that he ought to be in a subordinate station; that music derives its greatest merit from being no more than an auxiliary, the handmaid to poetry."[28] Gluck states his similar aesthetic in the Preface to Alceste:

> I have striven to restrict music to its true office of serving poetry by means of expression and by following the situations of the story, without interrupting the action or stifling it with a useless superfluity of ornaments; and I believed that it should do this in the same way as telling colors affect a correct and well-ordered drawing; by a well-assorted contrast of light and shade, which serves to animate the figures without altering their contour.[29]

Gluck's preface included arguments against the singers' capricious control of opera seria and against the domination of musical stereotypes (the da capo aria) over the requirements of the text. Never again would seventy composers set the same libretto to music. Gluck's reforms introduced a new kind of integrity and control by the composer. His aesthetics become even more sharply defined in the Preface to Paride et Elena (1770): "He who is concerned with truthfulness must model himself to his subject, and the noblest beauties of harmony and melody become serious faults if they are misplaced."[30] These reforms were based on subordination of music to the dramatic action, plainness of diction, and the importance of orchestration.

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[28] Quoted in Price, Milhous, and Hume, 16.

[29] Quoted in Grout, 269.

[30] Grout, 269.

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Gluck's ideas actually foreshadow Wagner's later reforms, much the way Hammerstein became the inspiration for Sondheim. Writing of Gluck's arias, Burney suggests, "It seldom happens that a single air of his operas can be taken out of its niche, and sung singly, with much effect: the whole is a chain, of which a detached single link is but of small importance."[31] Certainly this sounds like the beginnings of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Like Wagner much later, Gluck is concerned with orchestration to reveal dramatic action as well as subtext. Iphigénie en Tauride (Paris 1774) is one of the first uses of orchestration to reveal an emotional subtext that contradicts the actual words of the text.[32] Orestes, alone after Pylades is arrested by the temple guards, tries to promote his inner peace, but he only deludes himself: "Le calme rentre dans mon coeur." The orchestral accompaniment reveals his true state of mind with the agitated sixteenth note reiteration of one tone and the accented sforzando on the first beat of each measure. Gluck uses orchestration here to illustrate Orestes' true state of mind: an overwhelming anguish from his past crime. Wagner, of course, later develops an entire system of subtext and leitmotifs involving orchestration, although interestingly enough, Wagner dismisses Gluck: "The famous revolution of Gluck . . . really consisted only in the revolt of the composer against the arbitrariness of the singer."[33] Perhaps Wagner's dismissal involves

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[31] Dr. Charles Burney, The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and Provinces, 2 volumes (London: Becket, 1773), 2:262.

[32] Grout, 274-79.

[33] Grout, 270. Although Sondheim is ostensibly Hammerstein's protegée, he made a similarly dismissive remark about his mentor. After working rather unhappily with Rodgers on Do I Hear A Waltz?, Sondheim remarked that Hammerstein was a man of limited talent but infinite soul, whereas Rodgers was a man of infinite talent but limited

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practical considerations. During Gluck's reforms, orchestral technique seemed to be improving and the art of great singing seemed to be on the decline (he wrote for no one of Farinelli's caliber), although there was an incredible resurgence in great singing fifty years later with the rise of Rubini and Pasta.

According to musicologist Carl Dahlhous, at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, there were two continua in opera, Beethoven and Rossini.[34] If Beethoven was of Gluck's school, Rossini and the bel canto composers of the early nineteenth-century were continuing a virtuoso singing style that sprang from opera seria. If the two aesthetics were equal at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, by the time of Verdi and Wagner, the Germanic symphonic elements emerged triumphant. Certainly, both Verdi and Wagner continued Gluck's reforms. Verdi made it clear that the authority rested in the composer when he insisted on choosing his own librettists and picking his own singers. Wagner wrested even more control by deciding to write his own libretti. But the successful transference of control from the singers to the text began with Gluck.[35]

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soul. See Meryle Secrest, Stephen Sondheim: A Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 179.

[34] For a discussion of the two continua in opera at the beginning of the nineteenth century, see Carl Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); also Carl Dahlhaus, Between Romanticism and Modernism, trans. Mary Whittal (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).

[35] For more on Gluck's transference of control from singer to text, see Lindenberger, Opera in History, 49-64 and Patricia Howard, Gluck and the Birth of Modern Opera (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964).

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Analogies Between Opera Seria and Musical Comedy

It's not hard to find an analogy between Gluck's reforms of opera seria and Rodgers and Hammerstein's reforms of musical comedy. Like opera seria, pre-1943 musicals were often vehicles for star performers, whether these were top bananas or belters like Merman, Fanny Brice, or Sophie Tucker. If audiences came to opera seria to see what embellishments Farinelli might create for a popular aria, audiences also came to the theatre in the 1930s to see Merman and Jimmy Durante ad lib and clown through a number like "It's All Yours" from Stars in Your Eyes (1939). The libretti of pre-1943 musical comedy (and operetta, for that matter) provided an excuse for comics to perform star turns and for beloved stars to sing great new songs by Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and Rodgers and Hart. As Mast points out, often the songs had little to do with the plot; they were not necessarily a reflection of the feelings of the character, but expressed emotions comfortable for the performers and songwriters.

In order to appreciate the kind of star window dressing musical comedy used to serve, it might be beneficial to look at three early musicals, all produced in 1915. In Robinson Crusoe, Jr., Al Jolson played the chauffeur of a wealthy Long Island magnate who dreams he is Robinson Crusoe; Jolson of course becomes his good man Friday. Jolson somehow encountered Spanish dancers, pirates, a goat, a crocodile, and dancing trees, while managing to disguise himself as Fatima as he sang Black spirituals, Stephen Foster melodies, and songs like "Yaka Hula Hickey Dula" and "Where Did Robinson Crusoe Go With Friday On Saturday Night?" According to Michael Freedland, the star's

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biographer, this was the closest Jolson had yet come to a show with a real plot.[36] Obviously, the attraction here was Jolson, both as a clown and as an incomparable singing performer, not the story. Indeed, Jolson was famous for cutting the last scene of a show he appeared in, explaining the resolution to the audience, and performing his most famous songs in concert, while the rest of the cast stood by and watched. Audiences were not drawn to a fixed, revered text, but to a great performer.

In 1915, George M. Cohan's Hello, Broadway was a satiric revue in the tradition of Weber and Fields and their Music Hall productions. Cohan's reputation for fast pacing sprang partly from this production, in which scenes were changed in full view of the audience. Songs were performed not only onstage, but in the auditorium itself. During "Down By the Erie" Louise Dresser sang a refrain onstage, after which a boy in the gallery and an older man in one of the boxes continued the song. As these supposed audience members sang, the set was changed to a green ribboned Erie Canal, on which a chorus dressed in purple velvet rowed gondolas. The attraction here is not dissimilar to the pageantry of opera seria, which was not only performed in opera houses, but at royal celebrations.

Obviously, much of this material was presentational, as it was in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1915, featuring W.C. Fields, Ed Wynn, Ann Pennington, Mae Murray, George White, Bert Williams, Ina Claire, Justine Johnstone, and Leon Erroll. This was the edition in which chorus girls were costumed as months on the calendar, while a tenor serenaded

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[36] Quoted. in Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 313.

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them with Berlin's "A Girl for Each Month of the Year."[37] The 1915 edition also introduced Joseph Urban to the Follies. Urban used Seurat-like spots of paint, as well as sophisticated layerings and spacklings, to introduce an art nouveau look to the revue. The 1915 Follies was color-coordinated in shades of blue.[38] The designs were meant to flow in a pattern toward a cumulative effect, which must have frustrated Urban enormously when numbers were shifted or cut. Like opera seria, these musicals value performance rather than a fixed text. If it was the pageantry and vocal virtuosity of the singers that drew audiences to eighteenth-century opera, it was the clowning, individual numbers by great performers, and the often sumptuous sets and costumes that attracted audiences to pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein musical comedy.

The text replacing the performer and spectacle as the ultimate authority is not the only parallel between Gluck's reform of opera seria and Rodgers and Hammerstein's reform of the American musical. As I mentioned previously, before Gluck's reform of opera seria he created music for Angiolini's Don Juan. Angiolini's work was a manifestation of the kinds of reform in dance Noverre had advocated in print in 1760. Agnes de Mille's contribution to the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon filled a similar

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[37] Stanley Green, Broadway Musicals Show By Show (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1985), 45. By 1917, Ben Ali Haggin was designing nude living tableaux to replace some of the more cumbersome objectifications of women in previous editions. Prior to Haggin's contribution and the later designs of John Harkrider, women had been costumed as taxi cabs, teapots, airplanes, and ingredients in a salad bowl. See Richard and Paulette Ziegfeld, The Ziegfeld Touch (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 298-99; Lee Davis, Scandals and Follies: The Rise and Fall of the Great Broadway Revue (New York: Limelight, 2000), 85-6.

[38] Ibid., 314.

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function. From the onset of the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration, Agnes de Mille was brought in to further the use of dance and ballet in telling a dramatic story, which she proceeded to do in Oklahoma!, Carousel, and Allegro.

In terms of orchestration, prior to Gluck, violins often played the melody while singers embellished the written vocal line with coloratura passages of their own creation. Early musical comedy and operetta was similarly primitive in terms of orchestration. Victor Herbert's first violinist was likely to orchestrate his shows, and the orchestrations often consisted of violins doubling melody. Just as Gluck used more sophisticated orchestral techniques that foreshadowed Wagner (namely the use of orchestration to highlight subtext, which Wagner embroidered into a system of leitmotifs), arrangers and orchestrators like Robert Russell Bennett and Don Walker, both of whom worked on the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, paved the way for the work being done today by Jonathan Tunick. Gluck also revolutionized the use of the choral ensemble, which prior to his reforms, consisted of occasional interjections and a chorale celebrating a festive finale. Prior to Rogers and Hammerstein, the chorus often appeared at the beginning of a musical either as merry villagers or, in a musical comedy, as chorus girls in abbreviated costumes, eye candy for the tired businessman. With their third musical, Allegro, Rodgers and Hammerstein incorporated, in addition to the two standard singing and dancing choruses, an additional third Greek chorus, who sang, pantomimed, and commented on the action. The chorus as commentator on the action can be seen in several Sondheim musicals, most notably Company (1970), Follies (1971), and Sweeney Todd (1979).

Whereas Gluck reformed the overture to opera seria, which had been unrelated to

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the body of the opera, Rodgers and Hammerstein reformed the overture of the musical play. Before Rodgers and Hammerstein, the overture basically consisted of a medley of individual songs. Traditionally, the overture tells the audience many things: it's time to settle down, the show is about to begin, here are some of the songs that will be heard in the play this evening. At the end of the overture, the orchestra ends on a huge chord, after which the conductor turns and bows, an easy sign for the audience to read. But Rodgers and Hammerstein reinvented the overture, making this presentational convention intrinsic to the structure of the evening. The overture to Carousel is choreographed; rather than an overture, Agnes de Mille introduced the audience to the principals and the setting, as the orchestra played "The Carousel Waltz." Rodgers composed a preludium for the Sound of Music (1959). No Strings (1961), Rodgers' first musical after the death of Hammerstein, dispenses with the overture and begins with a solo flute, played by an onstage musician, accompanying the two stars (Diahann Carroll and Richard Kiley) in their first song, "The Sweetest Sounds." In each case, the audience's horizon of expectations is modified and the overture contributes to the structure of the musical play.

If Rodgers and Hammerstein are jointly the Gluck figure of reform, one can draw an analogy between Lorenz Hart and Metastasio. Just as Gluck collaborated with Metastasio early in his career, Rodgers wrote musical comedies with Hart for over twenty years before collaborating with Hammerstein. Like Metastasio, Hart was a bit of a reformer himself and did much to refine the balance between plot, character, and song. Like Metastasio, he also knew how to pace his productions. There were numbers to showcase star performers, as well as ingenues. Two ballads rarely followed each other;

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instead, they were separated by comedy numbers or novelty songs.

Often there was no reason for the existence of a number except to provide a star turn to engage an audience. In his autobiography, Joshua Logan explains the genesis of "At the Roxy Music Hall," a number in I Married an Angel (1938). The show, a romantic fantasy, took place in Budapest, and the song was sung in act two during an all-night party:

> The song Rodgers and Hart wrote for the revenge party wasn't about angels, Budapest, banks, parties or anything even remotely connected with the show. It was a wild Larry Hart conceit, "At the Roxy Music Hall," to be sung by Audrey Christie and to be acted out by the whole cast as a takeoff on a Music Hall show. Bewildered and completely at a loss as to how to stage it, I asked them what it had to do with the plot.
>
> Larry began, "Oh, you can't just keep writing about old Budapest all night, so we though we'd do a takeoff on Radio City--you know, a divertissement. First, we'll have a big symphony orchestra with stages going up and down, then the Radio City male chorus behind Dennis King, a specialty for [Walter] Slezak, Vivienne [Segal] and Audrey as Rockettes, the ballet corps for [Vera] Zorina."
>
> "But how do we explain it to the audience?"
>
> Dick said, "The less you explain, the happier they are. Let's just do it."[39]

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[39] Joshua Logan, My Up and Down, In and Out Life (New York: Delacorte, 1976), 102.

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Logan was again astonished when he met with George Balanchine, the choreographer, to discuss the ballet section of the divertissement. At the time, New York was eagerly awaiting Salvador Dali's first trip to America. Balanchine based the ballet on surrealism:

> In despair, I asked Larry, "What's surrealism got to do with the Radio City Music Hall?"
>
> "Absolutely nothing. Why?"
>
> "Well, then, why is it in the show?"
>
> "So Zorina can dance and Balanchine can fry Dali's ass. What the hell are you trying to do? Make this Ibsen?"
>
> I kept telling myself all this is a scene in a Budapest living room. And when we go back to the plot the audience is coming with us because we damned well tell them to.[40]

Rather than focusing on the integrity of the plot, musicals like I Married an Angel existed to divert audiences by showcasing performers.

Like Metastasio, Hart occasionally complained about the abuses of his singers, but since he created numbers specifically geared to show off the talents of his star performers, the shows often encouraged such abuses. Logan recounts an amusing story about Hart attending a rehearsal of Audrey Christie singing "At the Roxy Music Hall." As she began the number, Hart started shouting incomprehensible phrases:

> "Hold the rehearsal. What is it, Larry?"
>
> He kept screaming hoarsely, but I couldn't understand the words.

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[40] Logan, 103.

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"Slow down, Larry. Say it a little slower."

Then he said very slowly and carefully, "No now-singers in this show! No now-singers in this show! No now-singers in this show!"

"What are now-singers?"

"*She's* a now singer! Did you hear how she began my chorus? It's 'Come with me' and she began "*Now* come with me!' No *now-singers*."[41]

The abuses may have been different from those of the castrati and virtuosi two hundred years earlier, but the fight for control was similar. It's important to realize that the audience's horizon of expectations for a Rodgers and Hart musical allowed for illogical plots and star turns. These were finely crafted divertissements, neither inferior or superior to later examples of the integrated musical. They were merely different.

Although Hart drew the line at Audrey Christie's insertion of the word "now" in a song, he nonetheless realized that audiences came to see star performers and wrote with specific entertainers in mind. The role of Vera in Pal Joey (1940) was fashioned for Vivienne Segal, whom he also cast in the 1943 revival of Connecticut Yankee and wrote a new song to showcase her talents, "To Keep My Love Alive." Hart was aware that audiences came to see star performances; furthermore, it was these star performances that did much to contribute to his fame as a lyricist. The struggle for control existed, but the horizon of expectations for audiences prior to Oklahoma! included star performers whose material was fashioned for them rather than for the character.

I Married An Angel was produced five years before Oklahoma! By that time,

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[41] Ibid., 104.

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scores were generally attributed to a single composer, or composer-lyricist team. But through the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, interpolated songs were common in Broadway musicals; indeed, the scores were often patchworks, not very different from the kind of pasticcio typical of opera seria. Just as there were two different types of pasticcio in opera seria, two types existed in the pre-1943 Broadway musical. Some shows, like some eighteenth century operas, were officially composed by more than one writer. For example, Rosalie (1927), a Ruritanian fantasy, was a composed by both George Gershwin and Sigmund Romberg. The reason was expediency. Since both composers were busy with other scores, Ziegfeld had no compunction about dividing the task between them. Sally (1920) boasted a score by Jerome Kern, but ballet music by Victor Herbert. As late as 1944, Billy Rose augmented Cole Porter's score for Seven Lively Arts with a ballet by Igor Stravinsky. Puzzled by Stravinsky's ballet music, Rose wired the composer: "YOUR MUSIC GREAT SUCCESS STOP COULD BE SENSATIONAL SUCCESS IF YOU WOULD AUTHORIZE ROBERT RUSSELL BENNETT RETOUCH ORCHESTRATION STOP BENNETT ORCHESTRATES EVEN THE WORKS OF COLE PORTER."[42] Stravinsky immediately wired back, "SATISFIED WITH GREAT SUCCESS."[43]

A second kind of pasticcio in opera seria involved arias interpolated from city to city and even from performance to performance. Musicals of the 1910s and 1920s often had a similar patchwork of interpolated songs. For instance, in a typical Al Jolson

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[42] William McBrien, Cole Porter (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 282.

[43] Ibid, 282.

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musical, songs were interpolated throughout the run. Although the score for Bombo (1921) was officially by Sigmund Romberg, the hit songs were all interpolations that Jolson introduced: "April Showers," by B.G. DeSylva and Louis Silvers, "Toot, Toot, Tootsie!" by Gus Kahn, Ernie Erdman, and Dan Russo, and "California, Here I Come" by DeSylva, Jolson, and Joseph Meyer. "April Showers," which earned the most enthusiastic applause on opening night, was not even listed in the program. "California, Here I Come" was not added until Bombo left New York for a national tour.[44]

If the composers of opera seria tailored their arias to the virtuosi who embellished them, something similar can be said of writers like Cole Porter, George Gershwin, and Irving Berlin. Porter, in particular, liked to write with specific performers in mind. Rather than hand Ethel Merman a score for Anything Goes that could be sung by any other performer, he wrote the songs specifically for her voice. According to Merman, "What Cole had done was to analyze my voice and turn out songs which showed off its variety."[45] In 1944, Porter met Delores Gray, who had never appeared before in a Broadway show, at the first rehearsal of Seven Lively Arts. He handed her a couplet which she was to sing in the opening number, which described why she had come to New York. When he handed her the new material, he was anxious for her reaction:

> "You made a wonderful impact at the Copa, Miss Gray. I was so happy to learn you were going to be in this show. How do you like the couplet I wrote for you?" "Just fine, thank you very much." He studied

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[44] Bordman, American Musical Theatre, 366.

[45] Ethel Merman, Merman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 72.

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her for a few minutes and then said, "Delores, I'd *really* like to know how you like your couplet." She stammered and fussed and finally said, "I have a powerful voice with unusual range, and I'm portraying a singer; but you've written my couplet all on one note." Porter stared momentarily, then said, "You're absolutely right. I'm going home and rewrite it completely." And he did.[46]

Performers expected composers to accommodate their voices and talents.

One of the most demanding was Ethel Merman. When Merman appeared in Gypsy (1959), she refused to allow producer Leland Hayward to hire Sondheim to write the score.[47] She had no objection to Sondheim's writing the lyrics, but demanded that Jule Styne compose the music, since he knew her voice and would capitalize on its strengths. Famously, she changed the rhythm of the triplets in "Everything's Coming Up Roses" and proceeded to sing it incorrectly for the duration of the run and on the recording. It's almost inconceivable that a performer would make these demands on Sondheim today or on the Rodgers and Hammerstein of the 1940s and 1950s. Both Rodgers and Hammerstein and Sondheim wrote material to suit characters, not stars.

Just as Gluck tried to wrest authority away from celebrated virtuosi, Rodgers and Hammerstein did much to dissipate the power and authority of the star performer, although certainly the Broadway musical stage still was filled with star performers during

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[46] McBrien, 282-283.

[47] Gypsy, a transition piece, is a curious mixture of the integrated musical and the older tradition of musical comedy--a vehicle fashioned for a star.

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the 1940s, 1950s, and even the 1960s. The residue remained. As late as 1964, did anyone think they were applauding Dolly Levi when she walked down the staircase of the Harmonia Gardens? The success of the "Hello Dolly" number had little to do with the character of Dolly, who was probably never financially secure enough to frequent the Harmonia Gardens in the first place. Audiences applauded Carol Channing, and their memories of her, as they later applauded Ginger Rogers, Martha Raye, Betty Grable, Phyllis Diller, Mary Martin, Pearl Bailey, Ethel Merman, Eve Arden, and Dorothy Lamour. These women did not necessarily ad lib or alter the text, but certainly, as Marvin Carlson and Michael Quinn point out about star performers, they brought their own baggage onstage as beloved entertainers.[48] Carlson stresses that semiotics and reception go hand in hand:

> We are able to "read" new works, whether they be plays, paintings, musical compositions, or for that matter any new signifying structures that make any claim to artistic expression or communication at all, only because we recognize within them elements that have been recycled from other structures of experience which we have experienced earlier.[49]

It's virtually impossible to see a beloved star onstage and not be cognizant of the recycling

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[48] Actually, Martha Raye and Pearl Bailey, both broad comediennes, did insert their own bits of broad business and ad-libs into the show, to the delight of their audiences.

[49] Marvin Carlson, "The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre," Theatre Survey 35 (May 94): 6.

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of the star's previous successes or failures or public persona.[50] The "Hello, Dolly" number, one of the most successful in the history of musicals, was about the star playing Dolly Levi and her previous associations with the audience, not about the character the star was playing. But Hello, Dolly!, although a phenomenal success, was part of an older heritage where the star was co-creator; it did not privilege integration like serious musicals that were fashioned according to the Rodgers and Hammerstein model, where songs were written for character, rather than for performer.

Harold Prince, whose fame, along with that of Stephen Sondheim, rests with this development of the integrated musical, turned down the direction of Hello, Dolly!. Realizing that producer David Merrick was offering him a star vehicle whose biggest moment was an unmotivated showstopper, he rejected the project because the title number was fashioned for the star, rather than for the character:

> The "Hello, Dolly!" number has nothing to do with Dolly Levi. She's a woman who has no money and scrounges around; she's never been to a place as fancy as the Harmonia Gardens, where the number happens. She's heard about it, and she goes there because she's heard about it and wants to have a good time. The way the number is now, you're talking about a woman who has lived her life at "21" [the nightclub].[51]

In 1964, the horizon of expectations for the Broadway musical theatre audience was

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[50] See Michael Quinn, "Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting," New Theatre Quarterly 6 (May 90): 154-61.

[51] Quoted in William Goldman, The Season (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969), 170.

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changing; nevertheless, it was still acceptable to see a musical whose raison d'être was the celebration of a star personality.

Ironically, the Rodgers and Hammerstein aesthetic that the musical play was a finished text written for characters rather than for specific performers was pushed to its limit during the 1960s with Harold Prince's production of Fiddler on the Roof (1964). Fiddler, even more ironically, *was* fashioned as a star vehicle for Zero Mostel. After the Broadway opening, the critics were qualified in their approval of the show, but ecstatic about Mostel's performance. Even before the show opened, Mostel started interpolating stage business and ad-libs. Robbins and Stein tried to rein in his performance, but to little avail. The shtick would grow from performance to performance. At one point, Mostel accidentally put his arm in a bottle of milk, and wrung his sleeve while in the midst of one of his monologues with God. Eventually, Mostel wrung his sleeve over the orchestra pit, which certainly got a bigger laugh. At the same time, breaking the fourth wall by acknowledging the audience with this antic stage business foregrounded Mostel's presence as star comic, rather as actor portraying the character of Tevye.[52] Tevye was no longer talking with God; Mostel was carrying on a conversation with the audience.

According to Sheldon Harnick, "One night in the tavern scene, at the moment when Tevye, while dancing, accidentally bumps into one of the Russians, Zero let out a stream of Yiddish ending with the word 'tuchus'. . . I was appalled."[53] When asked what it was like to work onstage with Mostel, Maria Karnilova, who played Golde, answered,

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[52] Jared Brown, Zero Mostel: A Biography (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 230.

[53] Brown, 230.

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"Dreadful . . . it was dreadful! Of course, he was a great artist when he was onstage, but it was dreadful."[54] During the dream sequence, in which Tevye tells Golde of the appearance of Fruma-Sarah's ghost, Mostel mugged broadly and burlesqued the scene.[55] The authors and director (not to mention Karnilova) tried to curb his antics, but he refused. Eventually, Robbins had his spotlight turned off, but he continued to clown in the dark.[56] Mostel was working out of a non-integrated tradition, indeed, a vaudeville tradition, whereas Robbins and Prince, although casting a star performer as Tevye, were working from the Rodgers and Hammerstein mold where material was created for the character and the text was sacrosanct.

Fiddler, caught between two traditions, marks a turning point in the struggle for power between the star who embellishes, even defies the text and the text itself. During the Tony ceremonies, none of the recipients thanked Mostel. When he collected his award, he announced, "Since no one else has thanked me, I will thank me."[57] Fiddler was announced best musical at the end of the telecast, but producer Harold Prince, while thanking his investors, neglected to thank his star. According to Karnilova, Mostel's antics and deviation from the script alienated the company, despite his brilliance as an artist. Fiddler opened on September 22, 1964.[58] Mostel took a two week vacation in

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[54] Maria Karnilova, Personal Interview, 29 September 1996.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Brown, 231.

[57] Ibid., 233.

[58] Ibid., 234

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January, 1965 and was replaced by Luther Adler. Originally, Mostel had signed a one year contract, which came up for renewal after nine months. When it was time to renegotiate the contract, his agent demanded a substantial increase in salary. Prince refused, and to the surprise of the Broadway community, Mostel was replaced by Luther Adler, a dubious box office draw for a musical. At the farewell party after his final performance on August 14, 1965, Harnick told Mostel he was sorry that he was leaving the show. Mostel replied, "You mean you're sorry to see the grosses fall."[59] Surprisingly, the grosses didn't fall when Adler replaced Mostel, nor did Adler command a comparable salary. At capacity, profits were actually higher than they had been with Mostel. Instead of a star vehicle, the star of Fiddler became the text itself. The power reverted from the performer to the property.

After Prince refused to renew Mostel's contract, the perception of a star's power as co-creator of a Broadway musical changed. When Danny Kaye starred in Richard Rodgers' Two By Two (1970), he tore a ligament in his leg during the run. Released from the hospital, he returned to the production at times in a wheelchair, at times on crutches. Since the show had not been well received to start with, Kaye used his new props to clown and ad-lib, much to Rodgers' displeasure: "Disregarding the text and staging, he turned Two By Two into what Rodgers disgustedly termed 'one-by-one vaudeville.'"[60] As recently as 1997, Whoopi Goldberg replaced Nathan Lane in the revival of A Funny Thing Happened On The Way to the Forum and was criticized for violating

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[59] Ibid., 235.

[60] Bordman, 667.

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the text. This is a far cry from the reception of audiences and critics for the antics of a Bert Lahr, Bobby Clark, Fanny Brice, Jimmy Durante, or Jackie Gleason. The idea of stars ad-libbing and co-creating a text is regarded as old-fashioned today, a relic of a different era, just as the abuses and excesses of the virtuosi performing opera seria fell out of favor after the reforms of Gluck in the eighteenth century. In both opera and musical theatre, the authority reverted back to the text.

Revaluing Opera Seria and Musical Comedy

Opera seria disappeared from the repertoire by 1800. Interestingly, it has recently had a revival. Perhaps this began with the Handel revival in the 1920s, but at that point, producers and performers looked at the libretti and scores as fixed texts. Musicologist Richard Taruskin makes a compelling case for reviving early opera.[61] He rebuts the publicity that went hand in hand with the 1920s Handel revival that new productions of opera seria are produced the way they were originally seen and heard. Since opera seria was seldom the same from performance to performance and certainly from city to city, a claim of authenticity seems ridiculous. Taruskin champions the revival of opera seria as exciting and creative; something new is being created that is based on a text that was always incomplete. Other current musicologists like Harry Haskell and Jennifer Brown agree. Brown even champions the revival of pasticcios, since often the arias make sense in the context of the libretto, and more often, they enliven a dull libretto.[62] Perhaps the

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[61] See Taruskin, Text and Act, 164-172.

[62] See Jennifer Brown, 3-25.

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revival of opera seria is a reaction against modernism and the tyranny of the composer. Perhaps it springs from the bel canto revival that Maria Callas and Joan Sutherland helped initiate in the 1950s and 1960s. Certainly, a new generation of singers exists particularly well suited to the form. The analogy with pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein, non-integrated musicals is compelling. Until we accept musicals in the same way that opera seria has been received recently, they will not be valued. Like opera seria, the excitement of musicals of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s was in performance, not in a fixed or sacrosanct text. After the integrated musical, we cast stars to fit texts; we don't create incomplete texts to serve the needs of performers. Star vehicles, in which the performer is privileged over the text, are an old fashioned concept today, as the complaints about Zero Mostel in Fiddler, Danny Kaye in Two By Two, and Whoopi Goldberg in Forum tend to prove. Musical theatre historians need to realize the value of an incomplete text that only came alive in performance.

In "The Haunted Stage," Marvin Carlson describes reception as a function of the semiotics of performance: "Another quite different sort of recycling, which has passed almost unremarked even by reception theorists, involves not the dramatic texts themselves, but the various physical elements required for their realization in the theatre, and here we move entirely outside the domain of literary concerns to the operations that make the theatre a distinctive art."[63] Carlson implies that if one ignores elements of performance, including star semiotics, the text by itself is not a reliable vehicle for

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[63] Marvin Carlson, "The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre," 9.

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meaning.[64] Until historians, musicologists, and practitioners recognize that performance is as important as text, early musicals will be dismissed, much as opera seria was dismissed until relatively recently. Just as Taruskin argues that it is impossible to revive opera seria the way it really was, we can't revive pre-1943 musicals the way they were. We need to realize that, and rethink and refashion them.

Indeed, we can't even revive post 1943 musicals with a great deal of authenticity. Producers regard them with a late twentieth-century critical eye and try to find something to market that is topical and relevant to our times. Both the current revival of Annie Get Your Gun (1998) and the recent Nicholas Hytner revival of Carousel (1995) are revisionist readings. The text for Annie Get Your Gun has been considerably altered to meet the needs of political correctness, but altered from what? Did the producers use the text from the original 1946 production, which involved a subplot with a juvenile and soubrette, Tommy and Winnie? Did they use the text from the televised version of the national company with Mary Martin and John Raitt, in which the Tommy and Winnie characters were eliminated? Did they use the script and orchestrations from the 1966 Lincoln Center revival starring Ethel Merman, which added a feminist element to Annie's character with "Old Fashioned Wedding," written for that production? Or did they mine the text from the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera version staged by Gower Champion and starring Debbie Reynolds? All these are different texts.

If one were to revive Show Boat, a pre-1943 musical that *does* basically integrate

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[64] For more on the semiotics of star performers, see Michael Quinn, "Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting."

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script and score, which is the authentic text? The 1927 production is markedly different from the reorchestrated 1946 Broadway revival. The published scripts for both these productions deviate from the 1966 Lincoln Center revival with Barbara Cook and Stephen Douglas, which was again reorchestrated, and that text differs from the recent Harold Prince version. To complicate matters, all these texts differ from the 1936 film with Irene Dunne, Helen Morgan, and Alan Jones, which, in turn, is different from the text of the 1951 MGM remake starring Kathryn Grayson, Howard Keel, and Ava Gardner. And if these varying texts aren't confusing enough, how can we attempt to fix the text from the original 1927 production, since much of it was ad-libbed around star performers?

Show Boat in 1927 was a backstager, a musical comedy about performers, which was reflected in its casting and in its songs and specialties. Magnolia, Ravenal, Julie, Captain Andy, Frank and Ellie are all performers on the show boat. Indeed the only important characters who are not performers are Parthy, Queenie, and Joe, although the latter two manage several showstopping turns and the original Queenie, Tess Gardella, performed in blackface. The novelty numbers, originally written for these performers, largely disappeared after the original production. Magnolia's act two specialty in 1927 was a reprise of "Why Do I Love You," in which she spent much time impersonating show business figures of the day. By 1946, Magnolia's impersonations were replaced by a character ballad, "Nobody Else But Me." Frank's 1927 dance solo, "Then I Might Fall Back On You," disappeared in 1946, as did Queenie's song and dance turn, "Hey, Feller."

Most importantly, Captain Andy lost his 1927 act one specialty in the 1946 revival, which he originally performed after two roughnecks interrupted the onstage melodrama,

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"The Parson's Bride." In the original production, Captain Andy stepped in front of the curtain, in one, and performed the complete melodrama by himself, including a fistfight with himself. This was dream material for a star comedian; indeed, it justified Charles Winninger's name above the title billing. No one today is quite sure of exactly what Winninger did or how long the specialty lasted; it wasn't scripted. In subsequent revivals, during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, star comics like Andy Devine, Mickey Rooney, Joe E. Brown, and Eddie Bracken all inserted their own specialties and ad libs during "The Parson's Bride." I did a production with Van Johnson as Andy in 1980 in which he inserted his own ad-lib version of "The Parson's Bride." Since Johnson was not particularly noted as a clown, but was a considerable box office star, he appropriated Magnolia's 1946 ballad, "Nobody Else But Me," as an uptempo song to fill out the sequence. In 1946, Hammerstein cut Andy's star turn. Instead of well known comedians playing Andy and Parthy, Hammerstein cast Ralph Dumke and Ethel Owen, two character actors who were not particularly well known at the time. In effect, Hammerstein trimmed the musical comedy elements from the piece, making Show Boat more in line with the integrated post-Oklahoma! musical play he was developing with Rodgers. The 1951 MGM film, however, restored much of the musical comedy elements, with stars like Joe E. Brown playing Andy and Marge and Gower Champion performing Frank and Ellie's dance routines. A Lincoln Center revival combined elements of previous productions, as did the Harold Prince revival in 1994. There *is* no authentic Show Boat text, just as there *is* no authentic text for a Handel opera.

The Encore series of concert versions of forgotten musicals, produced annually at

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City Center in New York, helps illustrate the problem of locating an authentic text for these older musicals. Encores leads us to believe they are producing these musicals the way they were originally performed. It's not true. Recently, the series revived the Ziegfeld Follies of 1936, a revue originally fashioned to suit the talents of Fanny Brice, Bob Hope, and Josephine Baker. Each of these stars was charismatic. In 1936, both Baker and Brice *were* legends. The material that survives on the written page probably bears little resemblance to what made the material work on stage. There is a recording of Brice singing "Becky at the Ballet" that reveals she used a heavy Yiddish accent and lots of ad-libs. When the Follies was revived by Encores, Mary Testa played the Fannie Brice role, without ad-libs and without the Yiddish accent. The Brice performance does not have to be duplicated, but Brice was a star; Testa is at best a journeyman performer, incapable of making the material her own. Similarly, when the show was first produced in 1936, Josephine Baker had just returned from Paris and was displaying her charms for the first time in years on a New York stage. In the Encores revival, a chorus girl was cast in the Baker role. The attitude seems to be that it is the extant material--the text--that is worth a hearing, rather than an incomplete text that needs charismatic performers acting as co-creators. The Encores Ziegfeld Follies is not what the 1936 audience saw, just as the 1920s Handel revival, despite the publicity and hype, was not authentic to eighteenth-century opera seria.

Early musicals are worth keeping alive, but they need to be rethought. It is impossible to cast one performer as another. What is possible is to fashion something new and "authentic" for a different performer, a different audience, and a different cultural

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moment. In the 1998 revival of Annie Get Your Gun, Bernadette Peters did not play Ethel Merman; she created her own concept of the role based on her unique gifts and talents. Similarly, Reba MacIntire did not "play" Bernadette Peters when she stepped into the starring role of the revival. Both created something new and memorable. In 2001, there is talk of a Broadway revival of Funny Girl (1964). If the producers can find a star personality that can "authenticate" the role by my making it new and exciting, there is no reason why the venture should not be successful. The existence of Barbra Streisand's performance on film, however, necessitates rethinking the vehicle and finding a performer who can make the role her own. Actually, Mimi Hines succeeded at this when she replaced Streisand in the original Broadway company and kept the show running for an additional two years. The New York casting pool is certainly privy to performers capable of refashioning Funny Girl to suit their talents and skills. What's needed is an appreciation and value for the excitement and creativity such a project can engender.

In a larger, historiographical sense, the same argument can be applied to texts which have survived intact and which some claim as authentic. Are any texts, stripped of performance, reception, and their cultural moment of production, authentic? It is the gaps and absences and the excitement of filling them in that creates a memorable theatrical experience, which is, by necessity, something new. If one concedes that the text, by itself, does not adequately convey meaning without taking performance and reception into consideration, the musical is innately open, given to a plurality of readings.[65]

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[65] For more on the innate openness of musical theatre, see chapter five.

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Chapter Two:

Performing Identity During the Melting Pot

With its star turns, emphasis on leggy chorus girls, and libretti riddled with jokes and risqué double entendres, the non-integrated musical-- musical comedy--served as fodder for the tired businessman during the Golden Age of musicals, roughly from the 1920s through the 1960s. As such, it is hegemonic, conservative, even reactionary. At the same time, however, the stars of musicals during this same period, which corresponds with the American melting pot aesthetic, served as models for performances of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality that were fluid rather than essentialized.[1] They enabled a diverse spectatorship to see that identity was a performance.[2] Through desire and will, perceived notions of identity could be transmuted or transcended; consequently, these stars and their non-integrated musical vehicles were far more transgressive and radical than is commonly thought.

In the preceding chapter, I stressed the role of performer as co-creator of a text that was never meant to be fixed or closed in the first place. It was the star performance,

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[1] See footnote 37 in the introduction for a definition of the melting pot. I address the derivation of the term and its importance to this star study later in this chapter.

[2] For theoretical literature about the performance of identity, see Jill Dolan, Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Performing Feminisms, edited by Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press), 270-82; Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

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rather than the libretto, that was privileged and that drew audiences. The openness of these texts enabled stars to perform with a self-conscious theatricality. The male comics challenged the essentialism of identity by adopting numerous racial, ethnic, and gendered disguises and impersonations, not only within the musical itself, but also within a given scene or song. Audiences, who were privy to these disguises, delighted in a star comic's bamboozlement of other onstage characters, most typically the straight white man or men whom the comic inevitably outwitted. The great female stars from the 1920s through the mid-1960s similarly subverted stabilized notions of gender, race, and ethnicity by creating playful, performative, fluid star personae. Icons like Mary Martin, Ethel Merman, and Carol Channing, although managing to confirm hegemonic, heterosexual values by winning a husband by the final curtain, also ridiculed essentialist notions of female identity through their often playful, comic commentaries on gender and sexuality. In melting pot America, such playfulness and performativity validated the possibilities of acculturation and assimilation during a cultural moment when American identity, particularly that of the Jew and of the female, was subject to debate. These performers deconstructed fixed notions of racialized and gendered "otherness" by performing identity as a construct, rather than as racial inheritance or biological fact.

This chapter, then, is a star study that focuses on musical comedy performers, both male and female, during the melting pot aesthetic. It examines the playfully theatricalist yet transgressive strategies these performers negotiated to subvert stable notions of Anglo-American identity for purposes of acculturation. The first half of the chapter will deal with the assimilationist strategies of the male star comics of the non-integrated

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musical, many of whom were Jewish, while the second half will focus on the strategies the female musical comedy icons employed to deconstruct fixed notions of gender. Before studying specific examples of these male comics and female stars and the often complex interrelationship between race, ethnicity, and gender in their performances, I will define performativity and fluidity of identity, the melting pot aesthetic off which non-integrated musical comedy feeds, and appropriation of identity and its performance and reception during the melting pot aesthetic.

Star Personae and Performativity

Alexander Doty and D.A. Miller both theorize that musicals are a feminized genre that inspires gay men to make feminine gender identifications.[3] Supporting this theory is the number of female musical theatre stars who have become gay icons: Ethel Merman, Mary Martin, Judy Garland, Gwen Verdon, Liza Minnelli, Carol Channing, Judy Holiday, Barbra Streisand, and Julie Andrews are but a few. Writing of Andrews, Stacy Wolf notes, "All of her acclaimed roles are characters who invert, transmute, and transfigure, who shift positions of class or gender, who show identity to be contingent and shifting and utterly dependent on desire."[4] Wolf's observation can be applied to any of the female icons mentioned above. It can also be applied to Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor, the two

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[3] For the Hollywood film musical as a feminized genre, see Alexander Doty, Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For the Broadway musical as inspiration for gay men to perform as women see D.A. Miller, Place For Us: [Essay on the Broadway Musical] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[4] Stacy Wolf, A Problem Like Maria, unpublished manuscript, 259.

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greatest male stars of musicals in the 1920s, as well as many of the male comics who starred in musicals from the 1920s through the 1960s. Comics like Bobby Clark, Joe Cook, Jimmy Durante, Willie Howard, Bert Lahr, Victor Moore, Ed Wynn, Phil Silvers, Danny Kaye, Zero Mostel, Jackie Gleason, and Sid Caesar all satirized essentialist notions of masculinity by playing with ethnicity, gender, and/or class. By performing or by burlesquing stereotypical versions of gender and ethnicity, these stars, both male and female, demonstrated that identity is a performance.

Writing about performance, Wolf also notes that stars incorporate a double self: the actor portraying a character and the person working as an actor.[5] Both Marvin Carlson and Michael Quinn have written about the baggage a star brings with him onstage: his offstage reputation or notoriety, the notion of intertextuality or the audience's association with previous roles or types of roles the star has performed, as well as a horizon of expectations based on the star's public persona.[6] For instance, during his later career, Eddie Cantor was perceived as a Jewish philanthropist and loving family man despite the fact that he habitually cheated on his wife. Libby Holman was equally famous as a singer of sultry torch songs and as an acquitted murderess. Marilyn Miller, the queen of musical comedy during the 1920s, created her own horizon of expectations through her onstage persona of Cinderella and her offstage marriage to Jack Pickford, brother of America's Sweetheart, Mary. This image was often at odds with her reputation in the

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[5] Ibid., 33.

[6] See Marvin Carlson, "The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre," Theatre Survey 35 (May 1994):6; also Michael L. Quinn, "Celebrity and the Semiotics of Acting," New Theatre Quarterly 6 (May 1990): 154-161.

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business as a tough, ambitious workaholic who almost destroyed Ziegfeld's marriage to Billie Burke. As Wolf notes, a star was a public figure defined by the "culture, politics, and social practices of her time."[7]

It's important to realize that the great musical theatre stars carried their personae from show to show. There were no Meryl Streeps in musical comedy from the 1920s through the 1960s. The 1920s predated the time when American acting training would be almost uniformly based on the Stanislavsky system. This did not occur until the 1950s and 1960s, with the fame and notoriety of the Actor's Studio. In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, musical theatre stars did not inhabit their roles; they performed them. Ann Douglas observes, "The goal on stage and off was less to be oneself than to pick and play oneself."[8] If a model existed for musical comedy acting training, it was closer to Diderot and Coquelin than to Stanislavsky. Perhaps this reflected a New York society characterized by Damon Runyon's assertion, "I know everyone. No one is close to me; remember that."[9] One could know another's chosen self-presentation, not another's real self. An actor on the musical stage maintained a certain distance from his role; his task was to perform rather than be the character.

As a result, it is not surprising that Brecht was an Ethel Merman fan and that Helen Wiegel incorporated Merman's "goon" take from Annie Get Your Gun into her

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[7] Wolf, A Problem Called Maria, 33.

[8] Ann Douglas, A Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 57.

[9] Quoted in Douglas, 56.

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performance as Mother Courage. Whatever her sexual orientation offstage, Merman, although Protestant by birth, played Jewish, brash, and butch onstage. Merman was always Merman, just as Mary Martin was always Mary Martin and Carol Channing was always Carol Channing.

Male stars, mostly comics, also were unique and immediately identifiable. Indeed, their personae, which varied from lecherous to effeminate, often satirized traditional notions of masculine pride and vanity; consequently, their characters were tangential to the main love plots of their vehicles. Neither Cantor nor Jolson figured prominently as romantic heroes. The same can be said of Willie Howard, Bobby Clark, Phil Silvers, Jackie Gleason, and Sid Caesar, all of whom performed concurrently with Merman, Martin, and Channing. At the same time, the star personae and charisma of these male comics demanded and received the bulk of stage time.[10]

The notion of performativity is crucial in exploring the personae of these stars, both male and female. In playing with fixed notions of identity, stars employed what I

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[10] Since the days of Chauncey Olcott, few male stars of musicals were romantic leads. There are exceptions: Dennis King in the 1920s, William Gaxton in the 1930s, John Raitt and Alfred Drake in the 1940s and 1950s, Richard Kiley in the 1960s. But it is undeniable that the majority of male musical comedy stars were comics. King was never the equal of Jolson and Cantor, Gaxton was never as beloved as Victor Moore, Raitt and Drake, popular though they were, never had the boxoffice appeal of a Danny Kaye or Jackie Gleason, and Kiley became a box office name through his association with Man of La Mancha (1965), whereas Zero Mostel was the star for whom Fiddler on the Roof (1964) was originally fashioned. Yul Brynner is interesting in that he straddles the line between romantic lead and comedian, since his character in The King and I (1951) was often comic and since he played race and gender as the often humorous, barbarous, chauvinistic yet virile king. The bulk of romantic leading men in musical theatre were WASPish and rather leaden, subject to the will and desire of either their strong-minded playful leading ladies or bested by the machinations of the ethnic star comics.

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term "fluidity of identity," by which I refer to Judith Butler's theory that identity, whether gendered, racial, or ethnic, is a social construct rather than a biological or racial fact. For Butler, gender and sexuality are not stable attributes, but constructed performances that become taken for granted in hegemonic discourse and regarded as natural through repetitive performance: "Just as a script may be enacted in various ways and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives."[11] Like race and ethnicity, gender is staged by cultural expectations. Performativity, then, is a theatrical metaphor that suggests identity is a social construct rather than essentialist; it also suggests that identity is dynamic, constantly reinventing itself in terms of reception and historical context. According to Jill Dolan, "Notions of performativity have been thoroughly integrated into queer theory, as they're particularly useful to the anti-identitarian stand of a methodology that refuses to assign sexuality an innate or stable status."[12] Similarly, Dolan argues that racial and ethnic studies are constructs in much the same way as gender: they are fluid and unstable, rather than essentialist, no longer the subject of the "imperialist white gaze."[13]

While Butler privileges transgressive performances of identity in society and in culture, she tends to minimize the transgressive implications for theatre, since, she argues, theatre is safe and protected by the notion of make-believe. For example, Butler argues

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[11] Butler, 277.

[12] Dolan, 65.

[13] Ibid., 71.

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that transvestites are more disruptive on a city bus than on a stage because theatre manages to enervate transgressive performances of gender through its stage conventions:

> In the theatre, one can say, "this is just an act," and de-realize the act, make acting into something quite distinct from what is real . . . On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act. indeed, on the street or in the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no conventions that facilitate making this separation.[14]

Dolan challenges Butler's argument that theatre is potentially less dangerous or subversive than real life in challenging social constructs of identity.[15] The playfulness and fluidity of star personae, in destabilizing essentialist notions of race, ethnicity, and gender through disguise, impersonation, and self-conscious theatricality, enabled musical comedy audiences to question what constituted an American. Citing Foucault, Dolan notes, "Theatrical representation is a place of 'perpetual reinvention,' wired by the danger of performing against the rules."[16] The playfulness and fluidity of star personae confirmed that identity was dynamic and ever-changing. From the 1920s through the 1960s, the more playful and performative the star personae, the more audiences realized, if only subliminally, that identity is a repetition of acts and behavior, rather than an immutable,

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[14] Butler, 278.

[15] Dolan, 83.

[16] Ibid., 84.

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biological or inherited fact.

The Melting Pot

The fluid approach toward identity taken by musical comedy stars from the 1920s through the 1960s reflects the notion of the melting pot, a complex cultural aesthetic concurrent with the non-integrated musical. The term "melting pot" has more than one connotation and reflects American anxiety about identity during this period. It also suggests several questions. What constituted an American, particularly during the era between the two world wars? How did European immigrants, like the Jew, negotiate the thin line between ethnicity and race? How were women encouraged to perform gender, "whiteness," and class in an America that still believed in turn-of-the-century notions of eugenics and "scientific" racism?[17] To what extent did race, ethnicity, and gender affect

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[17] "Whiteness," like other racial identities (and like gender) can be performed and is the function of white cultural production's imagery of itself. Linda Mizejewski argues that the glorification of the Ziegfeld girl meant that she performed both "whiteness" and class in a context of turn-of-the-century nativism and eugenics to achieve status as a gender icon that involved respectability. Ziegfeld's show girls were packaged by Lady Duff-Gordon, the high fashion couturier of the day, whose designs helped them perform class and refinement.

While southern and eastern European immigration and African-American migration to northern cities challenged nativist ideas of American identity, the Ziegfeld show girl (1907-1936), along with beauty contest winners, Hollywood glamour girls, and fashion models promoted Anglicized images of the ideal American woman. Occasionally, Ziegfeld speculated that all nationalities had the potential for fitting the model of great American beauty, but the final product had to be an act of will, desire, and physical transformation into the Anglo-American, "Nordic" model. Mizejewski stresses the show girl's portrayal of "whiteness": "Generally, the more democratic claims of Ziegfeld publicity ('You too can be a Ziegfeld Girl') contributed to grand erasures in the field of visibility through denials of difference or through the blind hope--no doubt shared on a large scale--that the melting pot would eventually serve up the face and coloring of Marion Davies." See Linda Mizejewski, Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and

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acculturation? None of these questions can be answered simply, particularly because of the connotations of the words "race" and "ethnicity" during this period.

Race was associated with biology, eugenics, and other theories of "scientific" racism. Ethnicity stressed cultural attributes, rather than biological ones. The connotations of the words change over time. During the latter part of the twentieth century, according to Karen Brodkin, ethnicity has been used to describe the cultural heritage of Europeans, while race has been used for everyone else's heritage.[18] Ethnicity and race were virtually interchangeable during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. For example, Brodkin argues that the census during this period differentiated between "Negroes and other races" and "native" whites until it was reformatted in 1940, when the issue of Judaism as a race became sensitive because of the Holocaust: "It [the census] created a set of off-white categories by distinguishing not only immigrant from 'native' whites by country, but also native whites of native, white parentage and native whites of immigrant (or mixed) parentage (i.e., children of immigrants)."[19] In short, America regarded immigrant European workers as something other than white--as biologically different. The male star comics of musical comedy and the female icons both confronted and deconstructed this attitude about race and ethnicity through playfulness, self-conscious

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Cinema (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 110-11. Ironically, Ziegfeld's ethnic female *stars* did not have to conform to this Anglo-American image of beauty. Note the success of Fanny Brice and Sophie Tucker.

[18] Karen Brodkin, How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 189.

[19] Ibid., 60.

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theatricality, and performativity in an era where American identity was volatile and subject to multiple interpretations. As a result, they often played both sides against the middle to maintain their ethnoracial identity and to establish their financial success in show business, which comprised their limited access to the white hegemonic power structure.

The varying connotations of the melting pot suggest alchemy: turning lead into gold. The lead is one's past or heritage; the gold is what is gained by becoming an American. Here is where the connotations differ. For Israel Zangwill, whose celebration of the great crucible was voiced earlier by writers like Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Alexis de Tocqueville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville, Americanization is a complex process of becoming, in which a nation of many cultures and nationalities bleed into one another, intermarry, and dynamically reinvent themselves into a new and unpredictable identity. The more commonly held idea of the melting pot--the Anglo-American melting pot--was a hegemonic distortion of this process, in which the many immigrant nationalities were expected to abandon their past identities, become whitened, and gain acculturation. The reward was assimilation and limited access to the white power structure.[20]

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[20] Access was limited since Jews and other minorities like the Irish and Italians remained marginalized even after assimilation. One's ethnoracial background tended to define one's job opportunities by the 1920s: "Southern Italians and Serbs work[ed] primarily as general laborers, Poles in manufacturing and mechanical occupations, and Greeks in personal service. . . . Where Jews worked in smaller clothing firms with relatively less de-skilling, Italians were concentrated in larger factories with more degraded work. Polish women 'dominated' Chicago's restaurant and kitchen jobs" (Brodkin, 59). Financially successful Jews thrived in the garment trade, the media, the theatre, and the film industry, while they were denied access to the publishing industry. Jews were also subject to quotas at many Ivy League institutions through mid-century. Even successful Jewish comedians like George Burns, Groucho Marx, and Eddie Cantor

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The term melting pot was popularized by Zangwill in his 1908 play of that title.[21] Zangwill's belief that being American does not mean being whitened but rather a dynamic process of becoming can be traced as far back as Crèvecoeur, an eighteenth-century French immigrant, who described America as a new country, "where individuals of nations are melted into a new race of men."[22] In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville, another Frenchman, observed American identity with a mixture of admiration and trepidation in a letter to Ernest de Chabrol:

> Imagine, my dear friend, if you can, a society formed of all the nations of the world . . . people having different languages, beliefs, opinions: in a word, a society without roots, without memories, without prejudices, without routines, without common ideas, without a national character . . . What serves as the link among such diverse elements? What makes all of this into one people?[23]

If Tocqueville was puzzled about what unified such a diverse population, Ralph Waldo Emerson, later in the century, described a new race of diverse peoples who will eventually constitute America, suggesting both Crèvecoeur and Tocqueville's notion that American

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belonged to a Jewish country club in Beverly Hills, because Jews, in general, were denied access to Christian social clubs.

[21] See Israel Zangwill, The Melting Pot (New York: Macmillan, 1920).

[22] Quoted in Lawrence Levine, The Opening of the American Mind (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 106.

[23] Alexis de Tocqueville to Ernest de Chabrol, Letter, 9 June 1831, in Tocqueville, Selected Letters on Politics and Society, edited by Roger Boesche (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 38.

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identity is a dynamic process of becoming.[24] Herman Melville agreed that the American was constantly reinventing himself: "We are not a nation, so much as a world. . . . Our ancestry is lost in the universal paternity. . . . On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole."[25] Crèvecoeur, Tocqueville, Emerson, and Melville agreed that being American meant abandoning one's past and celebrating an exciting if unknown future identity.

In Zangwill's play, composer David Quixano, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, loves Vera Revendal, a settlement worker, whose father, Baron Revendal, was responsible for a pogrom that claimed the lives of David's mother and sister in Russia. Convinced that the bigotry of their ancestors has created an unbridgeable chasm, David breaks off his engagement to Vera. The two lovers are reunited in the final scene, which takes place on a rooftop settlement house with a view of the New York City harbor. Vera apologizes to David for the sins of her race, while David regrets judging her by the actions of her father. Abandoning the past, David looks out toward New York harbor and celebrates the dynamism of a nation which will eventually produce a new race of Americans:

> It is the fire of God round His Crucible. There she lies, the great Melting-pot. Listen! Can't you hear the roaring and the bubbling? There gapes her mouth (He points east)--the harbor, where a thousand mammoth feeders come from the ends of the world to pour in their human freight.

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[24] Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 299-300.

[25] Herman Melville, Redburn: His First Voyage (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1924), 189-90.

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Ah, what a stirring and a seething! Celt and Latin, Slav and Teutonic, Greek and Syrian--black and yellow.[26]

Note that Zangwill is all-inclusive in terms of ethnoracial groups. It is also significant that he does not dramatize the union between a Jew and a WASP, but the union between two immigrants, a Russian Jew and a Russian Christian. The offspring of that union will presumably contribute to the forging of a new American identity. The minor characters in the play exhibit a playful theatricalism in their appropriation of identity. For instance, Kathleen, the Irish servant, dons a false nose to resemble her Jewish employer, and dances in a Purim skit. She also learns to make potato latkes. Zangwill's play virtually ignores the white hegemony as a factor in creating the new American. Incredibly, there is only one Anglo/WASP character in the play, Quincy Davenport, whom Harley Erdman refers to as "an unctuous snob."[27] More to the point, as Erdman argues, "It seems naive for Zangwill to imagine an America not dominated by a hegemonic center, to assume such a blatant absence of power."[28] After all, the great crucible is an object that implies ownership, and the ownership belongs to the white hegemony.

Whereas Crèvecoeur, Tocqueville, Emerson, and Melville shared Zangwill's notion of Americanization as an ever-changing, evolutionary process, they were unfamiliar with the unrestricted immigration from eastern and southern Europe that threatened the Anglo

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[26] Zangwill, 198.

[27] Harley Erdman, Staging the Jew: The Performance of an American Ethnicity, 1860-1920 (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 138.

[28] Ibid., 138.

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hegemony by the time Zangwill's play was produced in 1908. Assimilation was easier before America's cities were dominated in number if not in power by marginalized ethnoracial groups.

Zangwill's melting pot was immediately subject to either attack or alteration. It produced anxiety in Jews and other immigrants who did not want to abandon their pasts, but were intent on protecting their heritage. The reaction of Rabbi Judah L. Magnes of New York's Temple Emmanuel was echoed by the Jewish press. The advocacy of intermarriage in Zangwill's play, according to Magnes, was "preaching suicide to us . . . for if all men will give up the particular traditions of their own history and be formed into a new people of freedom . . . Americanization means just what Mr. Zangwill has the courage to say it means: dejudaization." [29]

Similarly, Zangwill's melting pot was unacceptable to Anglo-Americans, who were not intoxicated by a dynamic process of intermarriage and evolution which would imply changing notions of racial and ethnic power in the United States. Theodore Roosevelt, to whom Zangwill dedicated his play, attended the opening night and cheered. He chose to ignore Zangwill's message that Americanization was a process of becoming and its implication of a new race of Americans, but championed the element in the play that was useful to his own policies, which condemned the hyphenated American: immigrants should abandon their loyalties to the past and become Americanized or whitened. In short, if massive European immigration was to persist, the logical solution for the Anglo-American

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[29] Stephen J. Whitfield, introduction to Culture and Democracy in the United States, by Horace Kallen (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1998), xx.

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was to whiten ethnoracial groups so they could be controlled.

Roosevelt had previously scolded Anglo-Saxon women for allowing "native stock to be outbred by inferior immigrants" and feared "race suicide."[30] These anxieties were legitimized by scientists who developed theories of eugenics--breeding for a better humanity--and scientific racism. Madison Grant's influential Passing of the Great Race (1916) popularized ideas developd by William Z. Ripley and Daniel Brinton that there were three or four major European races: superior Nordics of northwestern Europe to inferior southern and eastern races of Alpines, Mediterraneans, and, worst of all, the Jew.[31] For Grant, the idea of mixing races was anathema: "The cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew."[32] As long as one has a single drop of Jewish blood, one is contaminated. Kern and Hammerstein, both Jews, applied this mixing of the races to the bloodletting scene in Show Boat, where Steve pricks Julie's finger and sucks a drop of her blood so their marriage will not be subject to Southern laws of miscegenation. It is hard to believe Kern and Hammerstein were not aware that intermarriage between Jew and gentile was only marginally less condemned than intermarriage between African-American and white.

Zangwill's melting pot gradually was distorted by the Anglo hegemony for its own purposes. Its displacement became the widely accepted model through the early 1960s.

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[30] Quoted in Brodkin, 28.

[31] See Madison Grant, The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History (New York: Charles Scribner, 1916).

[32] Quoted in Brodkin, 28.

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This new version still insisted that the immigrant abandon his past heritage. In this modified melting pot, however, the immigrant would willingly abandon his past to be whitened, the hegemonic definition of the American. In this way, the immigrant's loyalty to America was assured. As massive waves of immigration persisted and as America entered World War I, Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson praised the hegemonic Anglo melting pot aesthetic, since it discouraged hyphenated Americans with mixed loyalties to America as well as to their European fatherlands. By world War I, the hyphenated American had become a subject of considerable concern. The German-American fighting for America on German soil, for instance, was worrisome. Where would his loyalty lie?

Perhaps the ultimate version of this Anglo/white melting pot occurred in January 1914 when Henry Ford insisted that all immigrant workers who wanted to partake in the profit-sharing plan of the Ford Motor Company had to enroll in the Ford English School. Like Roosevelt and Wilson, Ford was adamant that immigrants who wanted to be assimilated had to prove their patriotism by their willingness to abandon all past ties. He set up commencement exercises for his school in a large auditorium:

> On the stage in front of a model of an immigrant ship stood a huge pot, seven and a half feet high and fifteen feet in diameter. The graduating members of the class, dressed in clothes representative of the nations from which they had come and carrying the types of luggage they had brought with them when they first arrived in the United States, marched down the gangplank from the ship and disappeared into the pot. Six of their teachers then stirred the pot with ten-foot-long ladles. When the pot began to "boil

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over," the workers emerged, according to an eyewitness, "dressed in their best American clothes and waving American flags."[33]

Ford's version of the American melting pot was more palatable to the Anglo hegemony than Zangwill's far more sophisticated, unpredictable notion of a new American race constantly reinventing itself. Moreover, the threat to the Anglo hegemony was temporarily curbed by the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, which ended massive European (and Jewish) immigration to America. In 1923, Lewis Gannett commented on the conjoining of the melting pot aesthetic with Anglo conformity: "Anglo-Saxon Americans have small interest in the 'melting pot' except as a phrase. They do not want to be fused with other races, traditions, and cultures. If they talk of the melting pot, they mean by it a process in which the differences of the immigrant races will be carried away like scum, leaving only pure ore of their own traits."[34] With the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, as Erdman notes, "Both racialism and the melting pot then devised paradigms for preserving American purity, one by separating out impurities, the other by melting them away."[35] The hegemonic solution to Jewish or other undesirable immigration seemed to be to either stop it or to turn the immigrants white.

As I noted earlier, the term melting pot implies alchemy: turning dross into something of value. Not all European immigrants found this notion flattering. As early as

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[33] Levine, Opening of the American Mind, 111.

[34] Lewis S. Gannett, "Is America Anti-Semitic?" Nation (21 March 1923), 330-31.

[35] Erdman, 117.

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1915, Horace Kallen countered the notion of the melting pot by coining the term "cultural pluralism," which anticipated muticulturalism by sixty years.[36] By 1924, Kallen, a champion of the hyphenated American, suggested a different metaphor for a diverse society as a reaction to the new immigration laws and the new connotation of the melting pot as white and hegemonic. He argued that America was a symphony, with each diverse ethnicity blending its tonalities into a glorious harmony. Rather than an act of will, Judaism became a function of inheritance. According to Kallen, one can change one's dress, customs, and clothing, but one can never change one's grandfather.[37] Kallen's aesthetic implied a racial dynamic to Judaism that precluded "whitening." If Judaism was an off-white ethnoracial group, one could assimilate by will and desire. If Judaism was regarded as a biological racial legacy, the Jew could not abandon his past and was necessarily excluded from assimilation into the Anglo-American power structure. Kallen ignored the African-American in his theory, which only dealt with European ethnoracial groups, although W.E.B. Du Bois applied Kallen's theories to the identity of the African-American.[38]

During the melting pot years, the choice for the immigrant Jew was difficult. If he subscribed to the Henry Ford Anglo-American melting pot theory, he could achieve

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[36] See Horace M. Kallen, Culture and Democracy in the United States (1924; New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1998).

[37] Levine, Opening of the American Mind, 113; also see Horace M. Kallen, Culture and Democracy in the United States (New Brunswick and London: Transaction, 1998).

[38] See Stephen J. Whitfield, In Search of Jewish American Culture (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1997), 148-49.

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assimilation through desire and will. At the same time, he did not necessarily want to abandon his past heritage. If he clung to Kallen's "cultural pluralism," he was, by implication, racialized, which excluded him from being whitened and from the privileged world of the Anglo hegemony and its access to power. This is precisely the conflict the Al Jolson character negotiates in The Jazz Singer (1927), where Jakie Rabbinowitz is torn between becoming an American vaudeville performer in blackface and clinging to his Jewish heritage by replacing his father as cantor in a synagogue.

Jews, particularly those in show business, resisted racial exclusionism, which was not the ticket to financial success or social mobility. At the same time, they also wanted to retain their Jewish heritage, which did not conform with Anglo assimilation. According to Brodkin, cultural pluralism was both attractive and valued, since it cemented a Jewish sense of community:

> [Jews] had to invent ways of valorizing the different versions of Jewish identity and practice so that they could coexist in one community and within one shared moral universe at a time when they had nowhere else to go. The edifice of racial assignment forced differences and conflicts to be contained--spatially, discursively, and politically--by a kind of "us-ness," a negotiated, overlapping, and familiar range of practices, meanings, and values that were locally hegemonic.[39]

As a result, the stage Jew played both sides of the bargain. As Erdman observes, "The concept of a Jewish artist performing American idioms constitutes a tentative way of

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[39] Brodkin, 104-05.

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hinting at the possibilities of melting pot culture without engaging the issue of sexuality; it represents a way of eliding racial issues and exploring a middle ground between fusion and segregation."[40] Through their reliance on disguise, theatricality, and constantly fluid stage personae, they showed that not only ethnicity, but also race and gender were social constructs that were neither stable nor rigid. In this way, they negotiated the divide between assimilation into the whilte melting pot and the survival of their own cultural heritage. Rather than appropriate the behavior of the white hegemony onstage (a strategy female Jewish actresses used in the Parisian theatre of the nineteenth century), they chose to subvert that identity by performing and mixing racial, ethnic, and gendered identities. The male comics relied on disguises and impersonations to trick the straight white males on stage. The female musical comedy stars toyed with notions of gender, spoofed sexuality, and performed fluid notions of ethnicity and race for much the same purpose--to triumph over perceived, static notions of gender through will and desire. In the theatres of melting pot America, one could achieve whatever one wished through wit, cunning, will, and desire. Unlike Ziegfeld's show girls, who performed Anglo-Saxon "whiteness," the male comics and female stars performed subversive identities: the racialized other, a variety of ethnoracial impersonations, or a send-up of the ideal, Nordic American goddess. Rather than play into Anglo-American notions of identity, they deconstructed them. Their strategy was to show that identity was a performance.

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[40] Erdman, 142.

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Appropriation

In the 1920s, musicals starred men and women who often overlapped material and stole bits of business from each other. Both Ann Douglas and Eric Lott argue that theft between races, ethnicities, and genders defines American popular culture, of which the musical may be the crowning achievement.[41] Beginning with minstrelsy, Douglas points out that the idea of whites playing blacks and men playing women involved a dynamic of doubling and double doubling that carries over into vaudeville and the American musical:

> Nonetheless this double mimicry, whites playing blacks and blacks playing whites playing blacks was also art, and an especially American kind of art. Black minstrels not only imitated whites-playing-blacks, but also burlesqued them; minstrelsy involved stereotype upon stereotype, opponents as look-alikes, mocking and criticizing each other.
>
> Minstrelsy put the fooling techniques of black culture, the "puttin' on ole massa" routines of mimicry and role-playing developed in the days of slavery, at the heart of American entertainment. Blacks imitating and fooling whites, whites imitating and stealing from blacks, blacks reappropriating and transforming what has been stolen, whites making yet another foray on black styles, and on and on: this is American popular culture.[42]

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[41] See Douglas; also Eric Lott, Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[42] Douglas, 76.

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The non-integrated musical, with its roots in minstrelsy, encouraged appropriation.

It's easy to find evidence to support Douglas' theory. In the 1830s, T.D. Rice supposedly appropriated "Jump Jim Crow" from a Black stable hand. By 1920, Ethel Waters was called the ebony Nora Bayes. Al Jolson stole his famous line "You ain't heard nothing yet" from the black vaudevillian Joe Britton, while Ted Lewis appropriated his trademark, "Is everybody happy?" from black minstrel Ernest Hogan. Men also stole from women as women did from men. When Jolson interpolated "You Made Me Love You" into Honeymoon Express (1913), he famously dropped to one knee, while he stretched his arms heavenward to sing "Gimme gimme what I cry for." He stole the bit from Blossom Seeley, who had used it the previous year when she performed "Toddlin' the Todalo" in A Night with the Pierrots at the Winter Garden.[43] Later, Judy Garland, during her concert years, appropriated Jolson's trademark runway and much of his material; she also cross-dressed as a tramp and performed in blackface. George Gershwin appropriated black jazz and Jewish/black syncopation at Carnegie Hall with "Rhapsody in Blue," while he incorporated gullah spirituals from South Carolina in Porgy and Bess. Cole Porter confessed that his show tunes were really Jewish music, although he was a WASP. In the 1950s and 1960s, Elvis Presley sang black music. For at least the first six decades of the twentieth century, American popular culture relied on the appropriation of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. In melting pot America, one could be whatever one wanted; identity was subject to appropriation.

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[43] Herbert G. Goldman, Jolson: The Legend Comes To Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 76.

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Appropriation, however, lends itself to charges of racism. If a white appropriates black identity, as in Irish or Jewish blackface, the appropriation threatens to essentialize the African-American. Racial or ethnic stereotypes are rarely appropriated in the politically correct environment of 2001. An African-American performing caricatured black identity is justified because the possibility exists, hopefully, that there is irony in the stereotypical performance.[44] Michael Bronski, on the other hand, argues that, in the 1920s, Jewish blackface was an expression of outsider status through identification with the Black persona or conversely, blackface was a way to prove whiteness by the performer distancing himself from a race that could never be white.[45]

Indeed, blackface, from minstrelsy until its decline in the 1930s, is seen as a way Jewish and Irish performers ascended by masquerading as a more despised minority.[46]

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[44] Unfortunately, this is often not the case. The depiction of African-Americans in gangster rap and rock videos as pimps and whores, and the stereotyping visible in black situation comedies on television are incredibly racist, a point that Spike Lee makes in the film Bamboozled (2000).

[45] On the limits of assimilation and Jewish and Irish blackface, see Bronski, The Pleasure Principle: Sex, Backlash, and the Struggle for Gay Freedom (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 37-53. For Jewish blackface, see Michael Rogin, Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998).

[46] For Irish blackface, see Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White (New York: Routledge, 1995); Douglas C. Riach, "Blacks and Blackface on the Irish Stage, 1830-60,"American Studies 7(fall 1981):231-42; Lott, 94-97, 148-49; Rogin, 56-8; Bronski, 38-42.

For Jewish blackface, see Rogin; Lott; Bronski (38-52); Douglas, 73-107, 346-86; Thomas L. Riis, Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theatre in New York, 1890-1915 (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); Robert C. Toll, Blacking Up (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Mel Watkins, On The Real Side: Laughing, Lying and Signifying: The Underground Tradition of African-American Humor (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); William Torbert Leonard, Masquerade in Black

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According to Michael Rogin, it became an assimilation strategy, which essentialized African-Americans and reinforced their humiliation. Stephen J. Whitfield, on the other hand, argues that blackface was a strategy that Jewish performers (and other minorities) used to achieve nationality rather than racial transcendence:

> It does seem counterintuitive, however, that blacking up was the vehicle for becoming white, that the way to secure a place at the top of the racial hierarchy was to pretend to be at the bottom. It seems dubious that such performers would call attention to their own whiteness by showing how easily they could slip across the color line. But the allure of blackface was that through its artifice such entertainers could separate themselves from the Old World. What was at stake was not their race but their nationality. By walking and talking like Negroes, Jewish performers could transform themselves and the masses whom they represented, from outcasts into Americans.[47]

I would also argue that an Irish or Jewish performer during the late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century had to deal with the conventions of blackface and "coon shouting" if he wanted to enter the world of show business.[48] It is difficult to

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(Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1968). For a female Jewish performer's recollections of her days in blackface, see Sophie Tucker, Some of These Days (New York: Garden City, 1946), 33-42.

[47] Stephen J. Whitfield, In Search Of Jewish American Culture, 150.

[48] "Coon shouters" were singers of "coon" songs, which featured black protagonists taking on derisively stereotypical racial characteristics:

> "Coon" songs establish the black identity of their protagonists through

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theorize that all Jewish, Irish, or ethnic Americans who donned burnt cork had the same motivation unless that motivation was to succeed in their chosen profession. With the exception of Jolson, who clung to his blackface persona as long as he was able, most Jewish performers who engaged in blackface early in their careers, like Cantor and Sophie Tucker, eagerly shed burnt cork as soon as it went out of style. Whatever else it expressed, however, blackface was racial appropriation, and appropriation of racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes in musical theatre from the 1920s through 1960 showed that identity was a performance.

Reception

Reception is crucial to understanding the relationship between musical comedy stars and their transgressive strategies to destabilize perceived notions of identity. As popular culture, the non-integrated musical, with its roots in minstrelsy, variety, and vaudeville, was targeted for a heterogeneous audience. Indeed, the relationship between a star performer and a diverse spectatorship dates back to minstrelsy. During the nineteenth

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> various conventions of the popular stage: proper names commonly associated with African American characters (Alexander, Ephraham, Mose, Eliza); code words such as "honey" and "baby" as forms of address; lyrics purporting to reproduce the syntax and pronunciation of black speech; behavior associated in the public imagination with black Americans; and sometimes the visual representation of stereotypical black characters on the front cover [of the sheet music]. At the moment of performance, on the vaudeville stage or in the recording studio, singers tended to introduce even more exaggerated dialect than is found in the published lyrics. And the music of many of these songs invokes stylistic elements thought at the time, accurately or not, to derive from the music of African Americans.

See Charles Hamm, Irving Berlin: Songs From the Melting Pot: The Formative Years, 1907-1914 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 70-1.

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century, the less well known minstrel troupes in smaller towns played to the working class, while the more famous troupes, like Dan Emmett's, played in big cities to more middle-class audiences. African-Americans attended as well; at least, playbills of the time frequently state "colored prices,"which relegated blacks to the gallery.[49] Eventually, after mid-century, this kind of homogeneous audience disappeared and touring troupes had to control a diverse spectatorship. The material was at once ribald and chaste, racy and monotonous, in an effort to embrace different classes and both genders.[50] The working class had to be satisfied as well as the respectable and the fashionable. The improvisation of star performers was well suited to the formula of something for everyone. A similar aesthetic existed later in the century with vaudeville, where stars necessarily had to concern themselves with appealing to various groups within the same house. According to Richard Butsch, "These theatres offered mass entertainment. But also to a degree it was a segmented market, with different audiences in each house. In either case, no simple answer can describe the diverse audiences."[51] The Keith-Orpheum circuit stressed playing to multiple spectatorships within the large, big-time houses, so that "things must not be keyed too high, nor too low."[52]

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[49] Richard Butsch, The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82.

[50] Ibid., 81-94.

[51] Ibid., 115.

[52] Elbert Hubbard, In the Spotlight (East Aurora, New York: Roycrofters, 1917), 20. For more on diverse spectatorships within vaudeville, see Edwin Royle, "The Vaudeville Theatre," Scribner's Magazine 26 (1899): 487.

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Musical comedy stars like Fanny Brice, Ed Wynn, Bobby Clark, Eugene and Willie Howard, Sophie Tucker, Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor all built their reputations in vaudeville and learned how to control their audiences through improvisation and fluid, unique star personae. Strong audience response was encouraged. According to Alison Kibler, vaudeville slang institutionalizes this kind of audience response: "'Riot' described a successful act; an audience 'killed' an act, or it 'died,' getting no reaction from the audience; an act 'drew blood,' meaning enthusiastic applause."[53] Performers learned to maximize audience response. Indeed, when Jolson transferred his talents from minstrelsy and vaudeville to musical comedy he found he could create audience intimacy by extending a runway through the house.

If performers depended on audiences, they also depended on their ability to control these diverse audiences. As a result, coding was encouraged in vaudeville. The Keith-Orpheum circuit was known as the Sunday school circuit since management insisted on clean language to encourage women and children to attend. Coding and double entendres enabled stars to circumvent the house rules and be clean and risque at the same time, thereby controlling all spectatorships, according to Peter Bailey:

> Performers were caught between managers' desires for control and audience's desire for participation/inclusion. They had to balance both to succeed . . . In vaudeville, transgressions of managerial policy, with complicity between performers and audiences, were often of the nature of

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[53] Alison Kibler, Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 93-4.

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> sexual innuendoes. The shift in control and content produced a version of "knowingness" between them and a means to maintain the balance performers depended upon.[54]

In her autobiography, Sophie Tucker recounts fighting with the Keith-Orpheum circuit about double entendres in her act. According to Tucker, she was a big enough draw that she could do what she wanted--and what she wanted was to control her diverse audiences.[55]

This acknowledgment of audience control is typical of the stars who went back and forth from vaudeville to musical comedy, like Jolson, Cantor, Tucker, and Fanny Brice. Moreover, the diverse spectatorship was not limited to musical comedies that featured vaudeville performers. By 1910, the gallery girls could make or break a performer on the legitimate stage. Tallulah Bankhead's career first blossomed in London in the 1920s as a result of this worshipful claque. Moreover, Theatre Magazine published cartoons in 1924-25 that implied patrons in the orchestra and boxes were not watching the play, but came late, left early, slept, and talked their way through the performance, while the gallery gods were rapt spectators.[56] If affluent men and women were criticized for their lack of cultural appreciation, the gallery girls and gallery gods were evaluated in

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[54] Peter Bailey, "Conspiracies of Meaning: Music Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture," Past and Present 144 (August, 1994): 138-170.

[55] Tucker, 95.

[56] Theatre Magazine 36 (August 1922): 78; ; Theatre Magazine 39 (January 1924): 8, 25; Theatre Magazine 40 (August, 1924): 29; Theatre Magazine 42 (December 1925): 11.

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terms of their natural, sincere responses.[57]

Diverse spectatorships within a theatrical audience can be traced, then, from minstrelsy to the Broadway stage. During the late nineteenth century, black performers appearing in blackface entertained a multiple spectatorship during the same performance: white American Protestants; Western and Eastern European immigrants, often working-class; African-Americans, often physically segregated from the whites in the audience; and women from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds and classes. According to Roger Abrahams, black performers "operated out of a kind of double consciousness, knowing that they are called upon to present an image which will be interpreted as exotic to the outside world and not to the blacks in the audience."[58] The dynamic was incredibly complex. A black performer imitated a white man in blackface performing a black man or sometimes a black woman for an ethnically and racially diverse audience. For David Krasner, "this double consciousness [performing for blacks and whites simultaneously] in black theatre indicated multiple layers of racial, gender, and cultural interrelationships."[59]

Similarly, during the 1927 theatre season, the peak season in Broadway history when there were more shows produced and active theatres than at any other time, the spectatorship in the audience was no less complex or fragmented. Although opening

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[57] See Harriet Kent, "After the Play Is Over," Theatre Magazine 28 (November 1918): 286; Lisle Bell, "Look Around Now," Theatre Magazine 35 (March 1922): 148; F.A. Austen, "The Playgoers," Theatre Magazine 36 (July 1922): 16.

[58] Roger D. Abrahams, Singing the Master: The Emergence of African-American Culture in the Plantation South (New York: Pantheon, 1992), 155.

[59] David Krasner, Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre, 1895-1910 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 12.

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nights typically catered to the carriage trade, most audiences consisted of a variety of ethnicities and classes.[60] The star performer, by necessity, had to collaborate with his role to create a persona that could be mainstreamed to appeal to a diverse spectatorship. For a Jewish performer, blackface implied dancing for the white folk while simultaneously showing marginalized ethnicities within the audience that the clever servant could best his master. At the same time, the Jewish performer donning burnt cork suggested that he was superior to the African-American whom his blackface seemed to essentialize. The dynamic was similarly complex in terms of gender. The effeminate hypochondriac obviously read differently to male and female spectators, and to straight and gay spectators. The collaboration between performer and role that produced such a fluid performance of identity gave the different spectatorships a hopeful message of assimilation. By choosing to subvert perceived notions of stable identity, the Jewish comic or female star deconstructed the racialized or gendered "other." If race, gender, and ethnicity were constructs, assimilation was a question of will, not of birthright or biology. The negotiation of performed identity was tricky for such a diverse audience. In a carnivalesque twist, the WASP element of the audience came in for their share of ridicule, which managed to flatter them while flattening them. The aesthetic was a bit like the feast of fools. The Anglo melting pot was still controlled by a "white" hegemony, which also comprised many of the ticket buyers. The goal of appropriation of race, ethnicity, and gender as well as the deconstruction of essentialist notions of identity was assimilation, not

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[60] For audience demographics on Broadway between 1910 and 1930, see Butsch, 81-94; Michael Marks Davis, Jr., The Exploitation of Pleasure: A Study of Commercial Recreations in New York City (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), 30-39.

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the displacement of the hegemonic power structure. In this sense, the performances were conservative. At the same time, the strategy of deconstructing essentialist notions of race, ethnicity, and gender enabled Jewish performers to play both sides of the bargain. They achieved acculturation, while retaining their heritage.[61] The performances were then both conservative and subversive.

Performing Jewishness

The blurring of essentialist notions of identity by the stars of early musical comedy can be contextualized in terms of American demographics of the period. During the first decades of the twentieth century, finding an "American" identity was difficult, particularly in New York City. Whereas immigration had mostly been from northern Europe during the nineteenth century, the rate of immigration doubled in 1917 from what it had been during the previous thirty years, and these immigrants were mostly Jewish and Italian, from eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. These new immigrants challenged nativist attempts to define an American type, which according to the "science" of eugenics involved being blond, blue-eyed, and Anglo-Saxon.[62]

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[61] Sophie Tucker sang "My Yiddishe Momma" well into the 1950s, while Al Jolson was as well known for his recordings of "Kol Nidre" and "Cantor on the Sabbath" as some of his "Mammy" numbers.

[62] For more information on Eastern European and Mediterranean immigration during this period see Thomas J. Archdeacon, Becoming American: An Ethnic History (New York: Free Press, 1983), 112-71. For the influence of Social Darwinism and racism on the nativist movement and on eugenics, see John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 131-57.

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According to Will Rogers, "No Christian ever made good at the Winter Garden."[63] Presumably Rogers is pinpointing the Jews here, since the Irish, the Italians, and most other Western and Eastern European immigrants were Christians. Both Jolson and Cantor were Jews, as were many of the female stars of the 1920s who followed the coon-shouter tradition of Mae Irwin, most prominently Fannie Brice, Sophie Tucker, Nora Bayes, Elsie Janis, Blossom Seeley, and Libby Holman. Why were Jews in particular so successful as musical theatre performers? Italians had the same emotional catch in their singing; however, their fame centered in the opera house and in the nightclub, not in the musical. Certainly, the Irish had made their presence known in musical theatre during the late nineteenth-century. Harrigan and Hart did much to create what we now know as musical comedy. As is characteristic of the non-integrated musical, their shows playfully hinged on perceived notions of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. Harrigan was straight man to Hart's often drag or blackface persona. Their musicals underscored tensions between marginalized Americans, mostly between Irish and African-Americans, lower and upper classes, and perceived notions of masculinity and femininity. Before Jolson and Cantor, the most celebrated star of musical theatre was George M. Cohan, an Irishman, whose musicals also hinged on the assimilation of the Irish into the cultural and social hegemony.

The Irish were the first of the hordes of European immigrants to be assimilated, however, and by 1919, even Florenz Ziegfeld characterizes them as nativist American, rather than as a marginalized group. In "Picking Out Pretty Girls for the Stage," he notes that "there are more types of beauty among strictly American girls," and the one

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[63] Quoted. by "Rose" in Dramatic Mirror, 19 November, 1921, 743.

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nationality he singles out for praise are Irish women, because they often have "nice eyes, a good nose, pretty hair, and an expressive mouth."[64] Linda Mizejewski observes that Ziegfeld is categorizing Irish women as native Americans, rather than as an immigrant group, while Martha Banta hypothesizes that the Irish were the immigrant group that could assimilate most easily into nativist American thinking: "[The Irish were] at least imaginatively assimilable. . . these young Irish women were Northern European, Caucasian, and Christian, after all. . . It was all the others--the Indians, Negroes, Mediterraneans, Asians, Slavs, and Jews--who could not be conceived of as being Americans."[65] By 1920, the Irish had come closest to assimilation of the various European immigrant groups; the need to transcend perceived notions of identity was considerably less than for the Jews, Russians, or Italians. Once assimilation occurs, one doesn't want to be reminded of a marginalized status.

Although their assimilationist strategies differed, one can trace the connection between the prominence of Jews on the American musical stage to the prominence of Jews on the French musical stage, including Jacques Offenbach's dominance of French operetta in the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Jews thrived throughout the nineteenth century on the Paris stage. Rachel M. Brownstein theorizes that both Jews and actors were transgressive; neither group were respectable members of society. Inevitably,

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[64] Florenz Ziegfeld, "Picking Out Pretty Girls for the Stage," American Magazine, December 1919, 121.

[65] Martha Banta, Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 112-13.

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Jews would be drawn to perform on the stage.[66] Jews were probably the least accepted marginalized group in France in the nineteenth century. They were similarly the least accepted marginalized group in most Western and Eastern European nations, much like African-Americans in the United States. Just as the "non-respectable" Jew was drawn to performing in France, the African-American was drawn to the American stage, be it through vaudeville, minstrelsy, or musical comedy.

Thomas L. Riis provides census statistics to prove that by the turn of the century, musician and actor were the two principal professional employment categories for blacks in the United States besides teacher and clergyman. In both New York and Chicago, there were more musicians and actors among blacks than any other professional employment category. By 1910 the number of black actors nearly doubled, as a result of increased northern immigration and employment opportunities in traveling black musical comedies.[67] It is not surprising that Jewish immigrants would seek the stage and identify with the black minstrel persona. Jewish comics could transcend their marginalized status by performing both blackface and Jewish; the musical stage welcomed them far more openly than American society as a whole.

Some entertainers were less open about performing their Jewish identity. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Ziegfeld's first wife, Anna Held, built her star persona around her identity as a Parisian music hall performer, chic, glamorous, and

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[66] Rachel M. Brownstein, Tragic Muse: Rachel of the Comédie-Française (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 83.

[67] Thomas L. Riis, Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theatre in New York, 1890-1915 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 32.

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sexually knowing. She even managed to incorporate the coon song into a new category, the "Parisian Coon Song," which she performed without burnt cork, but with a chorus of blackfaced minstrel chorus boys. What Held avoided publicizing was that she was Jewish and born in Warsaw. Before her success in Parisian cabarets, she had worked extensively in Yiddish theatre both in London and in Paris and even performed with Jacob Adler. Held promoted her chic, French identity and subverted her lower-class, ethnic background. By 1907, when Ziegfeld addressed the issue of defining an American girl and what she looked like in the first edition of his Follies, she looked like Anna Held. In fact, the showgirls were labeled "The Anna Held Girls." One did not have to be upper-class or of a particular race or ethnicity to be the quintessence of beauty and sophistication; one merely had to "perform."

This is not unlike the kind of transcendence of class and ethnicity achieved by Rachel and Sarah Bernhardt in Paris, which Andrea Dworkin describes in Scapegoat. Like Anna Held, Rachel was able to use the stage as a means of "passing":

> Her talent, her style, subverted both French xenophobia and Jew-hate. Regarding the first, "Rachel was so good at passing for a young girl of good family. . . In effect, her play implied that manners, Frenchness itself, might be acquired, that a foreigner could get herself up to be absolutely *comme il faut*, as it were *plus française que les Françaises*, and breach the wall of French high society and undermine it."[68]

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[68] Andrea Dworkin, Scapegoat: The Jews, Israel, and Women's Liberation (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 318.

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Perhaps Bernhardt's performance of "passing" was even greater, since her mother was a courtesan. In addition to ethnicity and class, she was able to transcend gender. Eventually she would play at least twenty-five cross-dressed roles, including Zacharie in Racine's Athalie, Zanetto in Coppée's La Passant (1869), the title role in Hamlet (1899), the title role in the first staged production of Lorenzaccio, and the Duc de Reichstadt in Rostand's L'Aiglon (1900).

The notion that Jews were attracted to the theatre to transcend their marginalized status doesn't explain the particular attraction of Jewish comics for American audiences. Again, their assimilationist strategies were markedly different. Certainly Cantor and Jolson were not playing "whiteness" as was Anna Held, nor were female comic/entertainers like Fannie Brice and Sophie Tucker. To understand the dynamic that made these performers so successful, it's important to acknowledge that ethnicity and gender (not to mention class) are often inextricable. According to Laura Doyle, "hierarchies of race and gender require one another as co-originating and codependent forms of oppression rather than merely parallel, compounded, or intersecting forms."[69] Building on Doyle's assumption, one can say that Jewish men have a long history of being *perceived* as effeminate and sexually degenerate. Indeed, Shakespearean scholars like James Shapiro have pointed out that the antisemitic depiction of Shylock in The Merchant of Venice has much to do with the practice of circumcision, which during the middle ages was somehow perceived by gentiles to be connected to male Jewish menstruation.

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[69] Laura Doyle, Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21.

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Shapiro claims many gentiles believed that loss of blood produced a kind of vampirism that incited Jews to ritual murder of gentile children.[70] Marjorie Garber agrees with Shapiro that circumcision was perceived to mean the Jewish male was less of a man, and this effeminacy was responsible for the association of the male Jew with a perverted sexual identity.[71] According to Sander Gilman, circumcision, the act of making a Jew a Jew, was equated with castration.[72] Along these lines, Andrea Dworkin chronicles the belief that Londoners assumed Jack the Ripper was Jewish during his brief reign of terror and that racial vampirism caused him to feed off prostitutes.[73] Wilhelm Fliess theorized that the nose was a primary signifier of sexual neurosis. A "suspiciously" shaped nose was a sign of excessive masturbation. Fliess consequently performed operations to normalize "suspicious" noses and relieve neurotic symptoms. Large noses were perceived to be characteristic of Jewishness, which supports the notion that Jews were perceived to be sexually perverse.[74]

The supposed break in the voice, the emotionalism of speech, the sing-song vocal

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[70] James Shapiro, Shakespeare and the Jews (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 89-111.

[71] See Marjorie Garber, Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (New York: Routledge, 1997), 226.

[72] Quoted in Garber, 228.

[73] Dworkin, 319.

[74] Garber, 228. For Jewishness and its perceived pathology on the stage, also see Sander L. Gilman, Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Sander L. Gilman, Freud, Race, and Gender (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Sander L. Gilman, The Jew's Body (New York: Routledge, 1991).

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mannerisms, the shrug, the small hands, the softness of form and orientalism, the uncut hair and wild ecstatic dancing of the Hassidim, the traditional long gabardine gown all stereotypically feminize the male Jew. Another feminizing aspect of Jewish culture involves the intellectualism of the Jewish man. Masculinity in the Jewish culture is defined by the Talmudic scholar, not by the warrior, who is the typical role model in most other Western European cultures. That Jews venerate the intellectual over the physical is perceived as a sign of masculine weakness:

> There is a commonplace analogy, pre-Israel, between Jews and women. This analogy is based on the perceived nature not of Jews but of women as such; H.L. Mencken's biographer [Gary Wills] paraphrases him, but this formulation of the analogy is widespread in pre-Israel literature, psychology, and philosophy: "Jews, like women, are cunning in the attempt to make weakness overcome strength. Their moral code was framed to protect the weak, condemning, for instance, the quite natural act of destroying one's enemies."[75]

Responding to the dichotomy between Jewish intellectualism and the Aryan concept of the virile warrior, Zionist Max Nordau demanded during the second Jewish Congress in 1898 that all Jewish males become muscle Jews rather than coffeehouse Jews. When Israel became a state, Zionists wanted to remake the Jew into the Hebrew, replacing intellectualism with a more militant, virile notion of masculinity:

> While many Zionists wanted to turn Jews into peasant-farmers, the father

[75] Dworkin, 102.

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> of military Zionism, Zeev Jabotinsky, wanted to turn Jews into soldiers, "Because the Yid is ugly, sickly, and lacks decorum, we shall endow the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty. The Yid is trodden upon and easily frightened and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to be proud and independent. The Yid is despised by all and therefore the Hebrew ought to charm all. The Yid has accepted submission and, therefore, the Hebrew ought to learn to command. The Yid wants to conceal his identity from strangers and therefore, the Hebrew should look the world in the eye and declare: I am a Hebrew." This is an extraordinary expression of Jewish self-hate.[76]

Dworkin, of course, is right about the recloning of Jewish masculinity as a signifier of Jewish self-hate. Jabotinsky's suggested mandate for the metamorphosis of the Jew into the militant Hebrew sounds remarkably like gay rights activists in the early 1970s recycling outward gay identity into the superbutch leather queen and gym clones so much in evidence today. Indeed, gay icons like Garland, Streisand, Merman, and Channing ironically seem to embody Jabotinsky's suggested traits for the new Hebrew warrior: they are proud and independent, charming when necessary, commanding, and forthright.

In line with the perception that the Jewish male is effeminate, Dworkin cites Otto Weininger's Sex and Character, published after the author's suicide in 1903, as a remarkably influential (at the time) argument that all Jewish men were essentially women. Although Weininger's book seems deranged and incredibly racist today, it was well

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[76] Ibid., 95.

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received when it was read by Jews like Sigmund Freud and feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The Jew, according to Weininger, was a sign of the increasing effeminacy of the age.[77] Arguing that race and gender are interlocked, Jung supported Weininger's thesis about Jewish effeminacy: "The Jews have this in common with women; being physically weaker, they have to aim at the chinks in the armor of their adversary."[78] Dworkin builds on Jung's comparison of Jews and women: "Contempt for Jews is warranted because contempt for women is normative; both Jews and women have been locked in at night, Jews in ghettos, women in houses. Because like women, Jews have not fought back, the men are taken to be biologically deviant in having none of the violent pride that distinguishes men from women."[79] The personae of the male star comics of the non-integrated musical, many of whom were either Jews or performed Jewishness, fed into these sociological perceptions of the effeminate Jew. Their use of blackface itself was emasculating, turning the Negro into a sexless caricature, rather than a potent, sexually threatening male. By blacking up and incorporating Yiddish vocal inflections, Jewish comics linked their ethnicity with the emasculated African-American figure of minstrelsy. At the same time, these comics exploited the intellectualism of the Jew. They subverted the power of the Anglo hegemony through disguise and cunning. Ultimately, they triumphed through their wit and intelligence, rather than through brute force or Anglo hegemonic notions of physical power.

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[77] Garber, 306-08.

[78] Dworkin, 102.

[79] Ibid., 102.

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Gendered impersonation and the effeminacy of many Jewish star comics became a strategy for power. According to Marjorie Garber, female impersonation in itself can be empowering. She cites "If You Could See Her Through My Eyes," the gorilla number from Cabaret. Whereas the Jew is depicted as a gorilla, dark, hairy, and witless, the feminized emcee, with his painted lips and decadent leer, becomes the figure of power; he appropriates, along with the male/female transvestites in the chorus, the male and female space onstage, so the powerless Jew is left as a gorilla in a pink tutu. Garber also cites Milton Berle, a straight Jewish comedian who was not afraid to use drag. Berle's parody of gender, like the emcee's in Cabaret, similarly became a strategy for empowerment.[80] The same can be said of comics like Cantor, Jolson, Willie Howard, and Bert Lahr. They danced for the white folk by being sexually non-threatening. At the same time, they were subverting traditional deviant sexual associations of the Jewish male by deliberately choosing to parody fixed notions of gender.

This playfulness with Anglo virility was particularly transgressive during the 1920s. While Ziegfeld marketed a formula for what the American woman should look like, the huge immigrant population threatened the perceived WASP image of the American male. Tans and sun lamps were popular by 1925, marking a growing negroization of Manhattan culture. Dark Latino screen lovers like Valentino with their flashing eyes, flamboyant gestures, heavy eye shadow, and slave bracelets posed a threat to the more traditional Anglo-American ideal of stalwart, square masculinity. The negotiation of gender here was complex. Male star comics reassured WASP audiences that they were no threat to

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[80] Garber, 232-33.

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American masculinity; yet, by playing the racialized and gendered "other" and by inevitably outwitting the onstage Anglo-American males, they were suggested that previously fixed notions of identity were radically subject to change.

The Men

What separates the men from the women of the period is the structure of their vehicles. While the women incorporated fluid identities within one stage personae, the men tended to play a variety of different identities within a show, even within a scene. For example, Bobby Clark, whose persona was similar to Groucho Marx in his low-slung crouch, use of a cigar to stress his punchlines, grease painted eyeglasses, and lecherous ogling, was known as a master of disguises. In Streets of Paris (1939), he played four different characters within one scene, each tangential to the plot. Each of the characters Clark performed could not appear onstage simultaneously, so the scene revolved around Clark's impossibly quick offstage costume changes:

> First Bobby shows up as the senile father and then as the faithful butler of unhappy Marie (played by Louella Gear) who is pining away for her falsely imprisoned fiancé, Armand. Suddenly, the escaped prisoner (Bobby Clark) bursts into the room, followed by the hotly pursuing warden (Bobby Clark). The humor develops from Bobby's increasing difficulty in making his changes quickly enough (conveyed to the audience by the amplified thump-thump-thump of his frantic dashing from side to side behind the set), which is aggravated by his frustration with doors that keep jamming,

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windows that keep slamming on his head, and drapes that keep blocking his movement. By the time the sketch is over, with Armand in Marie's arms, a pardon is received from the governor, Bobby is so exhausted that he collapses on the floor.[81]

Similarly, in Mexican Hayride (1944), he played a numbers racketeer. In his efforts to evade the police, he underwent a variety of disguises, including a Mariachi flute player and a cigar-chomping Indian squaw selling tortillas and enchiladas. For the latter disguise, he carried a doll papoose on his back made to look like a miniature version of himself, complete with painted on eyeglasses, tiny cigar, and buck teeth. When Clark inhaled his cigar, the papoose, by means of a concealed atomizer, seemed to exhale the smoke.[82] Anarchical, in the mode of the Marx brothers, he sent up preconceived notions of masculinity, class, ethnicity, and race and worked in musicals through the 1950s.[83]

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[81] Stanley Green, The Great Clowns of Broadway (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 30-1.

[82] Ibid., 34.

[83] Ironically, Clark who performed "Jewishness" onstage with his Groucho Marx leer, frail physiognomy, and penchant for racial, ethnic, and gendered disguises, was, unlike all the other other comics mentioned in this chapter, Episcopalian, the son of a minister. Performing Jewishness is not always equated with being Jewish. For example, Ethel Merman performed stereotypically Jewish qualities throughout her career, although she was not of the Jewish faith. Similarly, Nathan Lane performs Jewishness today, particularly in his performance as Max Bialystock in The Producers, but he is actually Irish. The point is worth making as a challenge to theorists like Michael Rogin, who claimed that Jewish comics used blackface to essentialize the African-American while promoting their own assimilationist strategy as members of a marginalized group. As I've observed previously, blackface was a stage convention necessary to those who desired a career in showbusiness at a given cultural moment. In the same way, the performativity of Jewishness was also a stage convention that was not necessarily the result of a Jewish birthright. Racial and ethnic identity during the early years of the century was incredibly

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Willie Howard, a Jewish comic whose career thrived from the 1920s to 1948, played a defenseless littlechap. He characteristically spoke with a Yiddish accent, which emphasized his ethnic identification, in contrast to Fanny Brice and Eddie Cantor who used Yiddish as a comic contrast to the parts they played.[84] Like Cantor and Jolson, Howard was also a master of other dialects as well, including French, Spanish, and Scottish, which he fractured with Yiddishisms. In Scandals of 1928, he sang "We Americans," in a hybrid Yiddish/French dialect. In the George White Scandals of 1935, he created the character of Professor Pierre Ginsberg, a self-assured teacher with tousled hair and waxed moustache and goatee, who gives French lessons over the radio. During the lesson, he hopelessly muddles the French with Yiddish. In Girl Crazy (1930), he played Gieber Goldfarb, a New York cab driver who ends up in Arizona. Ironically, he becomes mayor of Custerville and spends the evening disguising himself to evade the clutches of the man he's defeated for sheriff.[85] At one point, he appeared as an Indian in a loin cloth and war paint with large headdress. Instead of a tomahawk, he uses a hammer as he dances with hunched shoulders to a ragtime Indian tune. When an ostensibly real Indian speaks

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complex and subject to appropriation. Why non-Jewish performers like Bobby Clark, Ethel Merman, and a contemporary performer like Nathan Lane chose to perform Jewishness is worthy of a study in itself.

[84] Brice would inject Yiddishisms into her balletic rendition of classical dance, while Cantor would inject Yiddishisms while dressed as an American Indian out west.

[85] Custerville is a signifier that the racialized "other," through his trickster personality and ethnic, racial, and gendered disguises, will emerge victorious over the Anglo-American cowboy. The racialized "other" in Girl Crazy was the Indian, who was impersonated by the ethnic Jewish comic.

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to him. Gieber answers in Yiddish, a language which the Indian speaks with equal ease.[86] Howard sends up race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

Bert Lahr, a Jewish comic who worked in musicals from the 1920s through the 1960s, was a master at ridiculing class, social pretensions, and traditional notions of masculinity. Many of his characterizations are reminiscent of his cowardly lion in The Wizard of Oz (1939), where the male is all bluster. In Hold Everything (1928), he played an incompetent prizefighter posing and preening after an unexpected victory. Lahr also endured the jiggling of an electric reducing machine, which finally exploded and from which he emerged in blackface, which served as an excuse to deflate his bluster.[87] In Life Begins at 8:40 (1934), Lahr and Ray Bolger played two Frenchman in love with the same woman, played by Louella Gear. Both men wear inverness capes over their formal evening attire and are about to jump into the Seine because they are hopelessly in love with the same woman. Gear rushes in, claims she has just seen Noel Coward's Design for Living, and announces that they can all live together happily. The two men kiss and hug each other, realize they no longer need Gear, and throw her into the Seine.[88] In Two on the Aisle (1951), he played an assortment of characters, including a German accented Queen Victoria ("I am a kveen"),[89] a frightened astronaut, as well as a dim-witted professional baseball player, while his final Broadway appearance in Foxy (1964), a

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[86] Green, The Great Clowns of Broadway, 94.

[87] Ibid., 108-09.

[88] Ibid., 114.

[89] Ibid., 123.

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musical version of Volpone, saw him masquerading as a British lord, complete with violet walking suit, deerstalker hat, and yellow leggings with black buttons. He sang "Bon Vivant," a satire on class, where he reminisces about "Manchester and Dorchester and Chichester and Perth / Sailing on the Firth of Forth or is it the Forth of Firth."[90] Lahr specialized in ridiculing essentialist notions of masculine superiority and class.

The tradition of star clowns improvising on their material and sending up essentialist notions of masculinity, class, and ethnicity continues through the 1960s and beyond. In 1962, for example, Sid Caesar played all of Belle Poitrine's seven lovers in Neil Simon's Little Me, including sixteen year old Noble Eggleston, the richest boy in Venezuela, Illinois (who is so smart he goes to both Harvard and Yale to become a legal doctor); crusty eighty-eight year old banker, Pinchley; Val du Val, a French entertainer and tap dancer; Fred Poitrine, a Word War One sad sack; and Prince Cherney, the expiring king of Rosenzweig, who engages in a Russian peasant dance as he bids farewell to his subjects and dies. All these comics subverted perceived notions of fixed identity, and all were influenced by the two most successful male performers in early musicals, Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson..

Cantor

As I've indicated, the negotiation between ethnicity and race for the Jew was particularly topical during the 1920s, due to the Johnson immigration act and prejudice

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[90] Quoted in Green, 125.

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against the hyphenated American. Resisting racial exclusionism while managing to cling to one's Jewish heritage is illustrated by Eddie Cantor's performance in his most famous vehicle, Whoopee! (1928), which survives in a Samuel Goldwyn film adaptation (1930) that was supervised by Ziegfeld and is relatively faithful to the original Broadway production.

Whoopee! finds Cantor playing Henry Williams, a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant hypochondriac who speaks with a marked Yiddish inflection and possesses an effeminate personality. Cantor's nurse, played by Ethel Shuttea, tells him of her love, but Cantor seems more interested in the half naked physique of Wanenis, an American Indian whose race precludes his marrying Sally Morgan, the white girl whom he loves. The plot is contrived and silly, an excuse for Cantor's clowning, singing, and ultimately his donning of blackface. Trying to save Sally from marriage to Sheriff Bob Wells, the Cantor character runs off with her. Shuttea's nurse misconstrues Cantor's relationship with Sally and finds opportunities to smack him around and manhandle him. The butch, aggressive Shuttea finally is united with Cantor at the conclusion of the film, while Wanenis is reunited with his beloved Sally when he discovers he is not really an Indian, but of white parentage.

Although the Cantor character is ostensibly a WASP, it is clear that Cantor is performing a Jewish man. Note the following dialogue between Wanenis and Cantor's Henry Williams:

Wanenis: I studied the ways of your race--I went to your schools!

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Henry: An Indian in a Hebrew school? Tell me, how did you get along?[91]

Like Fanny Brice, who had to learn Yiddish phrases from Jewish comics, Cantor was not versed in Yiddish when he went on the stage, but performed with a Jewish vocal inflection. At one point he impersonates an Indian chief; later he plays an Indian in a red union suit. While impersonating an Indian, he still speaks with a Jewish inflection.

At the end of act one, he bursts out of a gas oven that explodes, a convenient excuse for him to emerge in blackface. Ethan Mordden describes this remarkable sequence, which served as an excuse for Cantor to interpolate a variety of songs which he performed in blackface: "Evading a posse, Cantor slips into an oven. 'Look over the ranch,' the sheriff snarls to his men. 'Don't let a white man get by you.' The oven explodes and Cantor pops out in his minstrel make-up. He gets by. Claiming to be a 'singing waiter,' he proves his stuff in a spot left blank for interpolations." [92] The key here is the sheriff's demand that no white man escape. Cantor bests the authority figure by appearing in blackface, a comic reversal of the traditional perception, at the time, of white superiority. Borrowing from minstrelsy, Cantor's blackface persona is the trickster. During the nineteenth century, the blackface trickster was outwardly subservient, but always showed his master (and the audience) that he was more intelligent and clever than

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[91] See Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 446.

[92] Depending on his whim, Cantor interpolated a wide variety of songs in this spot on stage: "Hungry Women, "My Blackbirds are Bluebirds Now," Ever Since the Movies Learned to Talk," and the most famous, "My Baby Just Cares for Me," written for the film. See Ethan Mordden, Broadway Babies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 65.

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his white superiors. The dynamic is identical to the wily servant in Plautus' comedies, who always bests his master.

The other fascinating aspect of Cantor's blackface in Whoopee! is that he never plays black--he continues to incorporate his Jewish vocal inflections in his blackface scenes. Contrary to late twentieth-century show business mythology, the Jewish (or Irish) blackface comic did not necessarily sound black, despite the grotesque physical exaggerations and stereotypes of "blackness." According to Douglas Gilbert, there was a significant and long tradition of blackface performers who donned burnt cork but made no attempt at Negro impersonation:

> Many entertainers in the eighties [1880s], and long after, appeared in blackface with no attempt at dialect or impersonation. Some of these were Lew Dockstader, Leopold and Bunnell, Frazer and Allen, Carroll and Nealey, Keating and Sands, Smith and Byrne, and Bryant and Saville. They did monologues or other specialties, jig, clog, and so on, and used blackface make-up. But they were not Negro impersonators; they were blackface entertainers.[93]

In an interview with jazz critic Gary Giddins, Bob Hope, who performed a blackface act in vaudeville, confirms Gilbert's assertion : "In those days, you did blackface but you downplayed the minstrel aspect."[94] According to Hope, blackface was a stage convention

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[93] Douglas Gilbert, American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times (New York and London: Whittlesey House, 1940), 79-80.

[94] Quoted in Gary Giddins, Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams--The Early Years, 1903-1940 (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2001), 79.

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that did not necessitate black dialect or impersonation.

In an article entitled "The Vaudeville Theatre" written in 1899, Edwin Royle stresses that blackface did not necessarily mean the performer sounded black or played black in any but the most obvious physical sense: "This unique and original world has its conventions, too, quite as hard and fast as elsewhere . . . The comedian will black his face, though he never makes the slightest pretense to negro characterization."[95] Royle's quote, like most generalizations about blackface, invites questioning. Jolson occasionally used a Southern dialect, which, in blackface, implied playing black; he also used other identities and ethnicities, including Jewish. Cantor, at least on film, plays every identity but black while donning burnt cork, the most prominent being Yiddish. George M. Cohan, an Irishman, also played blackface not only early in his career but as late as 1933 in the film, The Phantom President. Rather than using black characterization, however, he clung to his own Irish ethnicity and Yankee Doodle Dandy performing style. Blackface was a convention that many Jewish and Irish performers were forced to adopt if they wanted to succeed in the show business of their day. As a stage convention in the early part of the century, it fit in with the appropriation of identity so common to ethnic performers of the period. At the same time, various Jewish and ethnic performers appropriated the use of blackface for their own purposes, including black characterization. Despite myriad literature on the subject and a plethora of theories by scholars like Michael Rogin, Eric Lott, and Noel Ignatiev, it is hard to make any hard and fast rules about a stage

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[95] Edwin Milton Royle, "The Vaudeville Theatre," Scribner's Magazine, October 1899, 485-95.

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convention that was so prevalent and that was used in so many different ways by such a wide variety of performers.

Again, it is hard to know how much of Cantor's blackface persona was convention and how much was Cantor. Goldman stresses the closeness of his relationship with the black star Bert Williams, who was Cantor's mentor when he first worked for Ziegfeld. Williams reportedly instructed Cantor on the correct use of blackface during the run of the Ziegfeld Follies of 1917 and encouraged him not to be too broad. Instead of being threatened by Cantor, who was the only other blackface comic in that edition of the Follies, Williams did his best to encourage Cantor to perform with dignity and still get laughs.[96] Clearly, he used blackface to deconstruct the all-American, virile, white hero of the Western in Whoopee!.

Cantor's "Henry Williams" in Whoopee! was characterized not only by his use of blackface and disguise, but by his performance of effeminacy. As the shy hypochondriac, Henry Williams, Cantor played with gender to the extent that his biographer argues the character borders on homosexuality.[97] At one point, Henry compares his "operation" scars with another male character. The scars, of course, center around the genitalia, an obvious reference to circumcision, so the two are forced to peer down each other's pants. Eventually they wind up entwined on the floor. At the same time, there is little doubt that Cantor is only playing a role. The gender dynamic here is complex. Cantor is like an

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[96] For more on the Cantor/Williams relationship, see Herbert G. Goldman, Banjo Eyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66.

[97] Ibid., 57-8.

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adolescent boy who has not committed himself sexually. He is homosexual in his admiration for strong, physically attractive men like Wanenis, whom he unabashedly ogles. At the same time, he is clearly smitten with women, as Goldman explains:

> Cantor, in his stage work, seemed to play both ends against the middle, suggesting a borderline homosexual at one moment and rolling his eyes in a genuine appreciation of the Ziegfeld beauties in the next. His character's effeminacy seemed part of a presexual youth's sexual awakening--a young man uncertain of his sexual orientation but with a definite susceptibility to the charms of beautiful women.[98]

The shy effeminate persona remained throughout Cantor's career, although the Yiddishisms and Jewish expressions disappeared when he abandoned Broadway and became an American institution through his films for Samuel Goldwyn.

If one watches the film Whoopee! today, it serves as a model for appropriation as well as the impossibility of separating gender, ethnicity, race, and class. Virtually all the characters, save one, play complex, topsy-turvy identities. The nurse, played by Ethel Shuttea, is man-hungry yet relentlessly butch; her pursuit of Cantor's sexually ambivalent Henry is in itself a turn on conventional gender relations. Wanenis is sexually attractive, virile, and Indian, but, to his surprise, he realizes by the film's end that his Indian identity has really been a performance since his parents were both white. Sheriff Bob is a brave authoritarian WASP figure, until Cantor's blackface persona exposes him as a thief and a coward. The showgirls, ostensibly Indian, transform themselves with headdresses and

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[98] Ibid., 58.

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ostrich plumes into glamorous Goldwyn Girls. Like Wanenis, race has been a performance. If they dress "white" and perform "white," they can be "white." Anything is possible in melting pot America.

The sole character without a topsy-turvy identity is Sally, the ingenue, who appropriates no racial, ethnic, or gendered characteristics except "whiteness," which is, of course, a racial construct by itself. Hilary Harris and Kate Davy argue that "whiteness" gives women access to respectability.[99] According to Richard Dyer, the construction of whiteness for women provokes anxiety about sexuality. It is the white woman's responsibility to reproduce her race; however, the sexual act of reproduction paradoxically is a disturbance to her "refinement" and "racial purity."[100] The plot of Whoopee!, such as it is, hinges on this anxiety. Transgressively, Sally is in love with the Indian Wanenis rather than with white Sheriff Bob. In fact, most of Cantor's antics are aimed at the plot's concern with whom Sally should wed. Since Wanenis is revealed to be of white parentage, the final scene oddly and comically reconfirms the hegemonic notion of whom nice, white American girls should marry. What is striking is the contrast between Sally and the comic insanity of the rest of the production, as well as Sally's identification with the glorified show girls. As Linda Mizejewski observes, "Situated among the more playful masquerades and ethnic/racial disguises of Whoopee! is the Glorified American Girl as a 'genuine' article, a real boundary of 'Americanization,' that could make possible a liminal

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[99] See Hilary Harris, "Failing 'White Woman': Interrogating the Performance of Respectability," Theatre Journal 52.2 (May 2000): 187; Kate Davy, "Outing Whiteness: A Femininst/Lesbian Project," Theatre Journal 47.3 (1995): 204.

[100] Richard Dyer, White (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 29.

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space for Cantor's clowning."[101] Cantor not only bests dim-witted straight white men, like Sheriff Bob, but also provides ironic commentary for the glorified showgirls, who serve as embodiments of the ideal Nordic American beauty. In fact, the Goldwyn Girls in the film (or the Ziegfeld Girls onstage) are really clones of Sally. While Cantor sings the title song, he is surrounded by forty show girls posing flirtatiously as bridesmaids. The lyrics of the song are comic; they chronicle the collapse of a marriage due to excessive extramarital "whoopee." The show girls seem blithely ignorant of the meaning of the words. Their refusal to respond to the racy lyrics confirm hegemonic notions of white female purity and refinement, which only contributes to Cantor's outrageousness. At the same time, their deadpan, obliviousness to Cantor's number confirm that their "whiteness" is also a performance, to be treated with a mixture of respect and humor. The glorified American girl was revered and stable; at the same time, her respectability and innocence are springboards for the antic humor that surrounds her.

Jolson

Like Cantor, Jolson played Jewishness, appropriated a variety of ethnicities and races (or ethnoracial identities), and performed ambiguous, if not ambivalent, gender. Both performers used blackface interspersed with Yiddishms, and both performed in the minstrel tradition. Although Jolson's "Mammy" songs are regarded by many as racist, he also used blackface to consolidate Jewish identification with the African-American.

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[101] Mizejewski, 153.

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Rather than just interspersing Yiddishms while in blackface as Cantor so frequently did, Jolson often played Jewish-American in blackface, occasionally singing in cantorial tones to emphasize the similarities between these marginalized groups. I don't mean to overstate my case. Certainly, he used the minstrel tradition of rolling eyes and tasteless minstrel grotesquerie as well. But the blackface dynamic in films like Big Boy (1930) and The Jazz Singer (1927) is complex and worthy of further study.

In Vera Violetta (1911), Jolson introduced the character of Gus, a blackface version of Pseudolus, which would be his persona in most of his Winter Garden musicals and which was as closely identified with the Jolson persona as "Lorelei Lee" was with Carol Channing or "Peter Pan" with Mary Martin. Like Cantor's "Henry Williams," Gus was the trickster from minstrelsy, the black underdog who lived by his wits and was always far more clever than his master. Eddie Anderson famously recreated the character years later on radio and television as Rochester, Jack Benny's man Friday. Gus was a constant in Jolson's book musicals, but the character was a melange of racial and ethnic appropriation. Jolson is best known today as a singer who worked in blackface; it is important to realize he was equally known as a great comic, who confided and joked with audiences in the guise of his Gus persona, and who, like Cantor, often played a variety of ethnicities within blackface. Jolson's blackface persona was always dynamic and changeable. In other shows he managed to combine Gus with a Venetian gondolier, Robinson Crusoe's Man Friday, Inbad the Porter to Sinbad in the 1918 show of that title, and Bombo, Christopher Columbus' Black navigator.

Like Cantor, Jolson also played with gender. If Cantor was sexually ambivalent,

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Jolson was sexually ambiguous. Cantor's persona was that of an adolescent who was sexually confused. Jolson was similarly boyish, but more knowing; his nickname was the black Peter Pan of the Winter Garden.[102] Like many comics of the day, Jolson curried favor with the straight men of the audience by ridiculing effeminacy: "Jolson often touched his listeners while speaking. He also pinched cheeks and occasionally kissed other men. Onstage, his work was filled with sly references to homosexuality: suggestive moistening of the lips, risque use of the behind and hips, and what was then known as a 'nance walk.'"[103] A typical Jolson reference to homosexuality occurs in Wonder Bar, a 1934 film version of his 1931 stage musical. Jolson plays Al Wonder, the owner of a Parisian nightclub. The role enables him to interject a variety of wisecracks and nightclub performance numbers as he unravels a rather complex, seedy assortment of romantic entanglements always concerning others, rather than himself. Indeed, the role is a kind of "whiteface" Gus. At one point, Jolson, as emcee, performs in front of the bandstand. He notices a handsome man asking a dancing couple if he can cut in. The couple agrees and the man proceeds to dance with the male partner, while the woman stomps off the dance floor. Jolson crows, "Boys will be boys."[104]

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[102] Herbert G. Goldman, Jolson: The Legend Comes to Life (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), 81.

[103] Ibid., 66.

[104] See Wonder Bar, starring Al Jolson, Warner Brother, 1934. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Jolson's ribbing of homosexuals onstage may have been influenced by his offstage sexuality. Jolson was a tortured character in real life, the victim of several unhappy marriages. According to Ann Douglas, his cruelty and sadism involved urinating on people. He thought this was funny (Douglas 363). Rumors abounded that Jolson was bisexual. Goldman recounts a story involving Jolson and Harry Richman,

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Jolson's portrayal of gender is markedly different from Cantor's. Whereas Cantor capitalized on his effeminacy and seeming inability to decide between men and women onstage, he made it clear throughout his career that he was a devoted family man and father of five daughters. Onstage, despite the sexual double entendres and jokes about homosexuality, Jolson adopted a persona that was basically asexual. He enabled his young "master" to marry the girl of his dreams or he exposed women with questionable financial/sexual motives, but as Gus, he was never in a position to be the romantic lead. It was in film where he was forced to become something of a romantic lead, and this skewers the Jolson performing legend.

Jolson's only film appearance as "Gus" is in Big Boy (1930), which is pretty much a duplicate of his 1925 Broadway vehicle of the same title. Because it contextualizes blackface through the "Gus" character, the film gives a close approximation of Jolson's stage style. The film is unique for Jolson in that he is not playing a role where he is romantically engaged, but rather a tangential character to the main love plot, who nevertheless dominates the enterprise through his clowning and singing. This was the dynamic in his most successful Broadway vehicles.

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another vaudeville/musical comedy star of the 1920s, who was also rumored to be bisexual. He and Jolson, once close friends, had a falling out and Richman remained bitter. After Jolson's death, Richman ran into Pearl Goldbert Sieben, who had always worshiped Jolson. According to Goldman, Richman's conversation was brief: "'I lived with your boyfriend,' he whispered in her ear. The remark startled Sieben, who had already heard rumors of Jolson's possible bisexuality'" (Goldman, Jolson 142-43). On the other hand, Jolson's comment in Wonder Bar may have exploited the "pansy" craze prevalent in mid-town Manhattan when Wonder Bar was first produced in 1931 (see chapter five). Whatever his offstage sexual preferences may have been, however, the nance jokes and ribbing of homosexuals persisted throughout Jolson's career.

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In Big Boy, Jolson plays Gus, the blackface stableboy on a Southern plantation, who rides Big Boy, a champion horse, in the Derby. A group of crooks try to discredit him and replace him with an English jockey, a foppish dandy. The plot borrows heavily from George M. Cohan's Little Johnny Jones (1904). The script, as such, is an excuse for Jolson's wisecracks and clowning. Leslie, the English jockey, snottily announces, "The more I read the less I know," to which Gus replies, "You must be well read."[105] Later, the jockey mutters condescendingly to Gus, "My word, what a lovely tan. Just been to Palm Beach?" Gus replies, "No, I was to a funeral and I had to wear all black."[106]

The film then reverts to a flashback of the plantation before the Civil War. We see white Southern aristocrats on the plantation porch and their white Southern women twirling parasols. Jolson, as Gus, is in the front yard with the other slaves. Jolson is in blackface; the rest of the slaves are African-Americans. The scene is typical of the minstrel plantation setting, supposedly nostalgic for the Old South and gentle lifestyle that nurtured the stereotypical loyal slave. What is startling here is Jolson's choice of song. Joining the other slaves, he sings "Let My People Go" in a Jewish cantorial tenor. The lyrical references to "smite Pharaoh" and "Go down, Moses" are obvious references to Jewish slavery and Jolson's own racial and ethnic heritage. There is no vestige of black dialect here. The song is sung seriously. In the context of the nostalgic plantation setting, the anti-slavery message is both clear and emotionally stirring. This is not minstrelsy, but

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[105] Big Boy, starring Al Jolson. Warner Brothers. 1930. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[106] Ibid.

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a deliberate yoking of African-American and Jewish culture.

After the gospel, Big John Bagby is introduced, obviously a takeoff on Simon Legree. The villainous Bagby, a racist bully, taunts Gus: "Remind me to horsewhip you at 6 P.M. tonight." Gus replies, "Remind me to be away from here at quarter past five."[107] The lecherous Bagby kidnaps Gus' master's fiancee. As he rides off with her, Gus chases him on horseback, eventually roping him and lassoing him--a kind of blackface Tom Mix/Gene Autry. In this scenario, it is the blackface slave who rescues the fair damsel, not her wealthy white fiancé.

The scene shifts back to the 1920s. Gus' young master, like his pre-Civil War incarnation, is weak and passive. He has been bribed by a bunch of crooks to throw the Derby. The master turns to Gus:

> "Am I your boss?"
>
> "You're my boss."
>
> "Have I common sense?"
>
> ""You're my boss."[108]

The message is clear: the black servant is morally, ethically, and physically superior to his white master. Through a series of plot convolutions, Gus punishes the crooks, exposes the wicked, licentious wife of one of the crooks, restores his young if unworthy master's honor, and rides Big Boy to glory in the Derby. Although he engages in several wisecracks about "pansies," Gus is not romantically involved. He enables his master to be

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[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

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reunited with his fiancee, but his great love in the film is Big Boy, the Derby winner. Sexually, he is pre-pubescent. Interspersed through all this, of course, are several Jolson showstoppers, all performed in blackface. During one, "Hooray For You," Jolson navigates the first two verses in English and sings the third in French. As in "Let My People Go," he is always traversing boundaries of fixed identity. The persona is endearing: boyish, sincere, funny, wisecracking, and entertaining. In this offshoot of the comic Plautus servant, Jolson's blackface "Gus," like Cantor's "Henry Williams," is always superior to his supposed "white" betters.

Jolson's most famous film role, Jakie Rabinowitz in The Jazz Singer, is far removed from his "Gus" persona on Broadway, although it closely mirrors events in Jolson's own life. Jakie is the son of a cantor, who leaves his lower East Side home to become a blackface ragtime and jazz singer. He explains to his father that the music of the synagogue is like jazz, only jazz can reach more people. Jakie's explanation is dismissed by his father, who wants him to be a cantor. At the climax of the film, Jakie is backstage in blackface waiting to go on for his big break when his mother appears to tell him that his father is dying. Should he return to the synagogue and sing "Kol Nidre" to please his father or sing ragtime and accomplish his dream of stardom? While his mother pleads with him to replace his father at the synagogue, Jakie's split loyalties and desires are maximized as his gentile girlfriend, a chorus girl, hovers sympathetically in the background.

Blackface works both in conjunction and opposition to Jakie's Jewish identity. Jakie has two identities: his blackface or American identity, which feeds into his ambition to be a jazz singer, and his obligations to maintain his Jewish heritage. The conflict was

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controversial in 1927. Subscribing to a melting pot aesthetic, whether Zangwill's or Henry Ford's, meant acculturation at the price of dejudaization. Miraculously, Jakie manages to appear at the synagogue and affirm his Jewish heritage, while later appearing on stage in blackface. His successful stage appearance makes him a star and guarantees his assimilation and inclusion into the Anglo hegemony. The film attempts to meld the melting pot aesthetic with cultural pluralism, which is admittedly a difficult union. Although Jolson is not playing the trickster persona, he is still performing a complicated and flexible version of American identity by negotiating the gap between ethnicity and its promise of acculturation with racial "otherness" and its inherent separation from the center of the Anglo hegemonic power structure. The chasm between possible acculturation and exclusionism defines Jolson's character in the film and reflects the unstable notion of Jewish identity during a cultural moment still stinging from the Johnson Immigration Act of 1924. Jews, like other ethnicities and races, were subject to pressures from their families and their past as well as societal pressures that set rules about assimilation and becoming American. Justifiably, these marginalized groups were confused about their unstable position both within their own cultural heritage and within the larger framework of American society.

Jolson's blackface persona in The Jazz Singer arguably plays with gender as well as race. According to Michael Rogin, whereas Jack Robin is self-confident and aggressive in whiteface, blackface renders him childlike: "In a decade when Jewish aggression was feared and blacks kept securely in their place, and when white collegians considered blacks less aggressive than Jews, the black mask of deference enforced on one pariah group

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covered the ambition attributed to the other."[109] Rather than playing Gus, the trickster, Jolson plays a blackface Peter Pan in The Jazz Singer. He yearns for his Jewish home and family, but also wants the "Never Never Land" of a career in mainstream show-business as a jazz singer. Singing "Mammy" in blackface onstage, he manages to win Mary, his gentile girlfriend, while avoiding alienating his adoring Jewish mother. As Peter Pan, Jolson negotiates the two attitudes that divided the American Jew between the two world wars: the yearning for ethnic assimilation in an Anglo world and power structure, and the fear of becoming essentialized as a racialized "other." This ambivalence is typical of Jolson's blackface persona, even in his Winter Garden shows, where he was dubbed the blackface Peter Pan. He constantly slips between both worlds, his identity self-consciously theatrical and blurred.

Unlike other Jewish entertainers, like Sophie Tucker and Eddie Cantor, who gladly shed burnt cork as soon as they were able, Jolson was lost without blackface. As radio and motion pictures replaced Broadway as mass entertainment, the ethnic/racial dichotomy posed by blackface wore thin in movie palaces outside major urban areas like New York City, which were filled with ethnic audiences. Jolson continued to make films, but was unable to find an onscreen persona that would justify his continued use of blackface for mainstream film audiences during the 1930s. While Cantor's blackface number in Whoopee! is appropriate to his trickster persona, we are left with snatches of Jolson performing various songs in blackface on celluloid without the context of his "Gus" persona or the ethnic/racial dichotomy of his role as Jakie Rabinowitz. As a result, Jolson

[109] Rogin, 105.

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has become the "Mammy" singer, and his celluloid songs are delivered devoid of his onstage gifts as a comic. Jolson was also cursed with a sentimental streak, which he exhibited in treacly songs like "Sonny Boy" and a string of sappy films that only demonstrated that Jolson's gifts embraced comedy and song, not those of a romantic lead. His film career after the blockbuster Jazz Singer is really a long, failed attempt to find a suitable celluloid formula for his talent. He tried to secure starring roles in both The Green Pastures and Porgy and Bess and performed some of the most tasteless blackface numbers in Hollywood history, including the notorious "Heaven On A Mule" sequence from Wonder Bar, in which he cavorts with Uncle Toms shooting craps, dancing watermelons, fried chickens, and pork chop and possum trees. Watching the film Rose of Washington Square, in which he recreates numbers like "California Here I Come," "Avalon," "Rockabye Your Baby With A Dixie Melody," and "April Showers," one admires his boundless energy, but the blackface persona is off putting, to say the least.

When we think of Jolson and Cantor today, we often think of their singing styles. Never much of a serious actor, Jolson's comedic genius was virtually lost on celluloid, and what remains is his song stylization. Similarly, Cantor's impersonators focused on his singing style, aping his rolling eyes, outstretched palms, high tenor voice, and busy, mincing dance steps; these were the most easily identifiable aspects of his film persona. The party line is that cooler film crooners like Bing Crosby and Ross Colombo replaced the hard-sell ethnic emotionalism of Jolson and Cantor once talking films were established. Ann Douglas, for instance, blames Jolson's decline on technology. Once talking pictures and radio became popular, she argues, Jolson's performance style became doomed, since

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he was by nature a stage performer:

> The crooner's subtle nuances of phrasing and casually natural pronunciation were made possible by the invention of the electric microphone in 1925 . . . and their fame was tied to the new sound media of radio and talking pictures; they marked the beginning of a shift from live to canned entertainment. The crooners personified an ultra-sophisticated, upper-crust cool, an intimate yet bland sexuality, very different from the tears-and-laughter-drenched raw craving of Jolson's belt-it- out style. Live performers of Jolson's generation had to project, even shout, their songs by putting the energy of their entire bodies into their performance; "all upper-cuts" is the way Ethel Waters described Jolson's delivery . . . The crooners gave listeners their voices in place of their bodies; they cleaned up black and Jewish sexuality from the WASP or would-be WASP middle-class mainstream audience.[110]

Douglas' theory about canned versus live entertainment sounds plausible.

At the same time, while Douglas is correct in asserting that Jolson and Cantor were replaced by more economic male singers--the models being Crosby and later Frank Sinatra--I suspect she is guilty of oversimplification. If she is accurate in arguing that male singing styles changed because of the technology of film and the microphone, how can she explain the phenomenon of Elvis Presley in the 1950s, who shot to fame on television because he performed with his body, not just with his voice? Presley, like Jolson, was

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[110] Douglas, 361.

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characterized by "stage" technique and was a consummate live performer. Also like Jolson, he performed race. Presley was a blackface performer who needed no burnt cork; he sang black.

One could make the case that rather than technology, male singing styles changed during the early 1930s as ethnicity, race, and gender threatened the concept and image of the American male. With the rise of the Latin lover, the Jewish musical star, the new icons of the Harlem Renaissance, the flapper with the bobbed hair, American identity during the 1920s was in a constant state of flux. In such a fluid mix, one group had to remain stable. Women and Negroes had always been perceived as inferior, as were the Jews. In fact, one of the truisms of minstrelsy was the persistent effort to ridicule women's desire to wear pants, both figuratively and literally. Throughout the nineteenth century, minstrelsy was anti-abolitionist and anti-women's rights.[111] Women, as long as they were not ingenues, could perform with an ethnic style; they were hopelessly marginalized anyway. It was the male who became more stabilized in the early 1930s to counter the threat to WASP masculinity.

Jolson's singing style was in fact inherited by women: from Judy Garland on screen to Ethel Merman on stage. Indeed, female stars of the 1920s like Fanny Brice and Sophie Tucker continued to practice this kind of singing style for decades. Rather than "coon shouting," the reliance on a mixture of Jewish and black growling chest tones became known as "belting." Not only did it not disappear from the stage, it remained intact on film. Garland was Jolson's spiritual progeny. Her vocal style was characterized by the

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[111] Garber, 277.

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same ethnic throbbing, the flailing hands, the slurred speech, the impossibly busy little dance steps between lyrics and between choruses, the often spastic hand gestures and movements, the emotional flamboyance. Trained in vaudeville, Garland consciously modeled her concert persona after Jolson. The publicity on the jacket cover of her Carnegie Hall concert (1961) calculatedly compares her performance style to Jolson's. Many of her famous songs were either introduced or popularized by Jolson, including "When You're Smiling," "After You've Gone," "For Me and My Gal," "Swanee," "Mammy," "April Showers," "Rock-a-Bye Your Baby With a Dixie Melody," "Among My Souvenirs," and "Chicago." Like Jolson, Garland used a runway during her concerts; the runway enabled both performers to establish an intimate rapport with their audiences, despite the vastness of their performing spaces. Both had enormous sincerity, a keen sense of comedy, and a kinetic performing style. Appropriation of gender resulted in a singing style, which became overly theatrical and overemotionalized for the man, but appropriate and revered for the woman. It is also incredibly ironic that Garland was imitated by a generation of drag queens, who, in reality, are modeling themselves after a Jewish blackface minstrel entertainer who frequently derided homosexuals with nance jokes.

It is important to stress that Douglas treats Jolson as a singer, which was only a part of his onstage persona. The tradition of the vaudeville comic transplanted to the musical comedy stage did not disappear in the 1930s. Great male clowns continued to star in Broadway musicals at least through the 1960s, although none sang as well as Jolson or Cantor. While the male comics increasingly spoofed essentialist notions of Anglo

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masculinity, female musical theatre stars from the 1920s through the 1960s, like Merman, Mary Martin, Carol Channing, Gwen Verdon, Beatrice Lillie, and Nancy Walker, ridiculed essentialist notions of femininity while playing with fixed, rigid notions of ethnicity and class as well. Their shows were vehicles in which they could manifest this performativity of identity, mainstreaming elements of their personae that, taken in isolation, might have been construed as queer or marginalized. I'd like to focus the rest of the chapter on a discussion of these women, including Marilyn Miller (1920s), Mary Martin (1930s-1960s), Ethel Merman (1930s-1960s), and Carol Channing (1940s-1960s) and their subversion of essentialist identity during the melting pot era.

The Women

In addition to performing a variety of complex identities, musical stars of this melting pot era are paradoxical in that their vehicles seem to celebrate heterosexuality and conservative community values while simultaneously exerting a magical appeal to ethnically marginalized and gay audiences.[112] Although it was far more important for male

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[112] For a discussion of show queens and opera queens, see Wayne Koestenbaum, The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire (New York: Vintage, 1993); for a discussion of the appeal of musicals and musical stars to a gay sensibility, see John M.Clum, Something for the Boys (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Richard Dyer, Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society (London: Macmillan, 1986; Richard Dyer, The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations (New York: Routledge, 1991); Richard Dyer, "A Star is Born and the Construction of Authenticity," Stardom: Industry of Desire, edited by Christine Gledhill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 132-40. For queer readings of film musicals and other popular culture, see Doty, Making Things Perfectly Queer; Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty, editors, Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays on Popular Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). For a personal reading of musicals and a focus on musicals as a feminine/gay genre, see Miller, Place For Us. For lesbian readings of Mary Martin, Ethel Merman, Julie

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star comics like Jolson, Cantor, and Willie Howard to don a variety of disguises and theatrical impersonations than to find a mate, female stars like Merman, Mary Martin, and Carol Channing always managed to end up with the man of their choice by the final curtain, confirming hegemonic heterosexual values that women, during this pre-women's liberation period, were defined by marriage and/or their relationship to men. The husbands, who inevitably turn up in the final scene, are often treated as afterthoughts. It is the game, rather than the prize, that glorifies these female performers. In this way, these stars both subscribe to hegemonic notions of matrimony, while simultaneously subverting perceptions of essentialist, passive female identity. There is never any doubt that Marilyn Miller, Merman, Martin, and Channing will get whatever they want; it is incidental that what the script tells them they want is a man.

Much of the appeal of these female musical theatre icons, both to straights and gays, involves playing with stable notions of gender and sexuality. Verdon's burlesquing of gender in "Whatever Lola Wants" from Damn Yankees (1955), Merman's raffish clowning and "butch" persona in her early Cole Porter musicals and in Annie Get Your Gun (1946), and Martin's comic striptease, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," in Leave It To Me (1938) as well as her rather asexual interpretation of Venus in One Touch of Venus (1943) were all comic commentaries that denounced the essentializing of female identity. If the male comics subverted perceived notions of ethnicity and race through performances

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Andrews, and Barbra Streisand, see Stacy Wolf, A Problem Called Maria; Stacy Wolf, "Mary Martin: Washin' That Man Right Outta Her Hair," in Passing Performances: Queer Readings of Leading Players in American Theatre History, edited by Robert A. Schanke and Kim Marra (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 283-302.

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of multiple identities and theatricalized disguises, the goal was acculturation. The aesthetic for the female stars was similar. The women who became musical comedy icons achieved whatever they desired and on their own terms. Those terms involved deconstructing stereotypical, one-dimensional notions of the passive Anglo female, while substituting complex, ambiguous star personae that triumphed through cunning, wit, humor, and desire.

Marilyn Miller

Marilyn Miller, the great blue eyed, blond haired musical star of the 1920s, was the forerunner of later stars like Mary Martin and Julie Andrews. As opposed to Jewish performers like Sophie Tucker, Nora Bayes, and Fannie Brice, whose ethnic, somewhat masculine personae tended to ridicule the "Gibson girl"/new woman of the 1920s, Miller was an offshoot of the Gibson Girl: adorably forthright, athletic, a marvelous dancer, petite and dainty, and definitely "white."[113] Never the vamp, she was typically the wholesome, all-American Cinderella, who worked her way from poverty to glory. Miller's history was well known to the American public during the 1920s. She began her career as a child performer in her family's vaudeville act, The Five Columbians. Eventually she was discovered and glorified by Ziegfeld in a series of Follies revues. She finally achieved immortality in Sally (1920), a role that was as firmly identified with her in the

[113] As far back as the 1910s, Brice, along with Mae Irwin satirized feminism and the suffragette movement. In The Ziegfeld Follies of 1913, Brice sang about the "Ragtime Suffragette," who keeps her husband waiting for dinner at home while she shouts for street votes. This kind of satirical ridicule is similar to minstrelsy's attitude toward abolition and the woman's movement through the nineteenth century.

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1920s as Hello, Dolly! was with Carol Channing or Funny Girl with Barbra Streisand in the 1960s. The heroine of Sally shares aspects of Miller's own story: a poor, orphaned waif, Sally rises from a soup kitchen to become the star of the Ziegfeld Follies. By the final curtain, she has also married a millionaire and will presumably leave the Follies to be a loving wife and preside over a considerably upscale kitchen of her own.

Like Mary Martin, Miller loved to dress in trousers onstage, which was considerably more daring during the 1920s than Martin's trouser roles during the late 1940s and 1950s. Two of her major appearances during the 1920s saw her, at least part of the time, dressed as a boy: once as a ship's stowaway in Sunny (1925) and once as Peter Pan (1924). Although attractive and glamorous, Miller's stage persona also involved being a tomboy; indeed, the lyrics of the title song of Sunny question gender: "Smiling all the while boy / Where'd you get your smile from, boy."[114] Although she dons no trousers in Sally, her identity constantly shifts. The fairly faithful 1929 film version of Sally reveals her performing style and bag of tricks. A poor waif in the opening scene, she wistfully sings "Look for the Silver Lining" as she washes dishes. Trying to get her friend Connie, played by Joe E. Brown, to cheer up, she performs an eccentric dance, that like Jolson and Cantor's footwork, was borrowed from black hoofers in minstrelsy and vaudeville. However, Miller is a superb dancer and ballerina; her eccentric dance is remarkable and exuberant. The choreography is incredibly eclectic, incorporating black and ethnic eccentric dancing with substantial flashes of European "white" ballet and classical technique. The combination of the two was typical of vaudeville dance acts of

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[114] See Bordman, The American Musical, 405.

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the period, but Miller's balletic training and technical expertise make it unique.[115] Miller plays the number like a sprite or tomboy. The closest thing to it I've seen is Ray Bolger's work as the Scarecrow in The Wizard of Oz. Miller is a conventionally "white," Anglo-looking woman performing ethnicity, race, and ambiguous gender, quite a transgressive performance for a woman who, physically, was a model of American nativism and eugenics of the period. Later in the film, she impersonates an heiress at a Long Island party. During the "Wild Rose" number, she plays a singing Russian ballerina, complete with ethnic accent. The dancing here, like the choreography for her earlier eccentric dance number, is dazzling because she masters so many different styles in one number. Combining complex ballet leaps and arabesques with steps that would be appropriate for a Rockette, she also manages a bit of jazz as well as high kicks that defy gravity. By the finale, Miller has reverted to her "Sally" identity, a unique combination of glamor girl and tomboy. Of course, she is reunited with her rather stiff Prince Charming during a marriage ceremony at the "Church Around the Corner."

This kind of flexible identity is typical of Miller's work. A terrific mimic, she impersonated a variety of well known figures of the day in her final musical, As Thousands Cheer (1933), including a chamber maid cleaning a room in the style of a Noel Coward play and Joan Crawford newly married to Douglas Fairbanks. Offstage, she was a glamorous figure, much married and constantly in the newspapers and society columns. She was briefly mistress to Jack Warner, who signed her to a three picture contract that

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[115] Sally, starring Marilyn Miller, First National Pictures, 1929. Personal collection.

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made her the highest paid female entertainer in America. A party girl, she loved to play with her chorus boys offstage.[116] Her onstage persona, however, was plastic and malleable; she was adorable and charming, but never sexually threatening or predatory. Clearly an ideal of "white" Anglo notions of eugenics at the time as well as a model of glamour and 1920s femininity, she loved to play tomboys and incorporate ethnicity and race into her eclectic dance style. Her performances constantly reiterated that class, gender, and race are all a performance and constantly in flux.

Mary Martin

Mary Martin embraced a multiplicity of identities, and her appeal, through video, kinescope, and film, still extends to a diverse spectatorship, both hegemonic and marginalized. Stacy Wolf writes of Martin's probable bisexuality and insightfully explicates how she has become an icon for lesbians.[117] Wolf also describes the dichotomy between Martin's lesbian "fem" persona and her tomboy image. In truth, Martin is a mass of contradictions: the All-American girl who played tomboy; the glamorous star who adored trouser roles; the quintessence of American "whiteness" who loved to sing hot jazz and swing; the vocalist with two voices, an ethnic belt and trick "head" (soprano) voice; the girl-next-door whose career was established with a striptease number. Although in

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[116] For more on Miller's private life, see Warren G. Harris, The Other Marilyn (New York: Arbor House, 1985).

[117] See Wolf, A Problem Called Maria. Also Stacy Wolf, "The Queer Pleasures of Mary Martin and Broadway, The Sound of Music as a Lesbian Musical," Modern Drama 39 (Spring 96): 51-63.

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real life, Martin often wore turbans, appeared regularly on the list of ten best dressed women in America, and loved to clothes shop, on the Ford Fiftieth Anniversary television show, she performed Jerome Robbins' "Fashion" segment, in which she wore a plain shift that she stretched, tied, and manipulated to ridicule women's fashions from the turn of the century until 1950.[118] Onstage, she often mocked feminine glamor. In South Pacific, she appeared in shorts and a halter top; as Peter Pan, she cross-dressed; as Maria von Trapp, she wore an unfashionable nun's habit.

Publicized as kind, loveable, and adorable, she had a good cop/bad cop relationship with manager/husband Richard Halliday, who saw to it that her every whim was carried out. She was responsible for tormenting her second female lead, Paula Lawrence, during One Touch of Venus (1943), for driving Noel Coward and his designer Gladys Carthrop to distraction during rehearsals for Pacific 1860, and for driving Alan Jay Lerner to psychotherapy. When Lerner played her his first songs for My Fair Lady to convince her to star as Eliza Doolittle, she had her husband inform Lerner and Loewe that she thought they had lost their talent. Onstage, as Wolf points out, she played wholesome, simple girls brimming with humanity like Maria Von Trapp and Nellie Forbush. Offstage, she was coddled and overprotected. In her autobiography she recounts having to take a cab to the theatre while she was playing in the Sound of Music.

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[118] Kirkwood describes Martin's shopping sprees for clothes while she rehearsed and performed in his play, Legends, which co-starred Carol Channing. At this point in her career, Martin had a terrible time learning lines, which apparently did not stop her from going off to shop during the day. According to Kirkwood, Channing was furious. See James Kirkwood, Diary of a Mad Playwright: Perilous Adventures on the Road With Mary Martin and Carol Channing (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), 176-77.

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Although she had been playing in the show for months, she claims she was unable to tell the cab driver the name of the theatre.[119] According to Martin, she failed in Hollywood because the studio refused to let her be herself. That "self," however, was fluid and enigmatic.

Her Broadway success was assured when she sang Cole Porter's racy "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" in Leave It To Me. The song was a mock striptease. Her character, Dolly Winslow, is the bubbleheaded, bimboesque mistress of a newspaper tycoon who finds it necessary to get her out of town. She ends up in a Siberian railway station dressed to the teeth in fur. As she dances a hot rumba with the chorus boys, she removes fur hat, fur coat, gloves, lynx coat, lynx cap, a blue velvet jacket with bugle beads, and a matching skirt. She ends the number in a pink "teddy," a lacy chemise. Presumably, the rumba was so hot that the clothes had to come off, even in Siberia. By all accounts including her own, it's questionable that Martin understood the double entendres inherent in the lyric:

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[119] Martin recounts the following story:

> In my whole two-year run of Sound of Music I missed only one performance. That is not counting the time I almost missed the whole theatre. Ernest was driving me one matinee day when our car broke down. I had to get out and run for a taxi. I got into the first one that came along. The driver said, "Where to you want to go?" And I didn't know. I never knew addresses, never could remember the names of theatres. I just trusted Ernest or Richard to get me there.
>
> So I said, "Well, uh, wherever Sound of Music is performing, do you know where that is?"
>
> He didn't. I couldn't confess that I'd been playing in it for two years and I didn't know where the theatre was, so I just said, "Let me out, please." I jumped out and luckily got another taxi. This time before I got in I asked the driver if he knew where the show was playing. He did, so in I got and he delivered me there on time.

It's hard to believe Martin would invent this story if it were not true. See Mary Martin, My Heart Belongs (New York: William Morrow, 1976), 249-50.

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Sophie Tucker used to watch me all the time in the wings. Once after I had sung "Daddy" in rehearsal, she came over and said, "Kid, do you know what you're singing? Do you know what the words mean?"

I said, "Of course," but she persisted.

"Do you know that 'Daddy' is not your father?"

"Of course I do." I insisted. "I know that he's a man who takes care of me."

Sophie--I adored this woman--shook her head and kept on at me. "But do you know what you're singing?"

I wasn't all that sure. I didn't have any idea what finnan haddie was, for example, until somebody told me it was fish. Finally Sophie explained, "It is a naughty song, a risque song. There's one thing I want you to do. Each time you sing a lyric you don't understand, don't know exactly what you're singing, tell it to your audience. I mean like, 'If I invite a boy some night to dine on my fine finnan haddie, I just adore his asking for more,' but, on the last line, *never* look at the audience. Look straight up to heaven, fold your hands, and sing '*but* my heart belongs to Daddy.'"[120]

This is the same performer who, according to Howard Dietz, refused to sing the original lyric to "Before I Kiss the World Goodbye" in Jennie (1963) because it contained a

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[120] Ibid., 74.

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reference to "putting salt back in the shaker," something Martin considered dirty.[121]

Stacy Wolf observes that Martin is a tomboy, a cross between a girl and a woman. In that sense, her portrayal of gender, humorous and transgressive, is very much like Eddie Cantor's performance of adolescent sexual ambivalence. Returning to Broadway after her lukewarm film career, she played the title role in One Touch of Venus. But Martin's "Venus" typically played with notions of gender and allure. Although the play was not filmed with Martin, there is television footage of her singing "That's Him," as well as production photos. Martin seems to have played the role not as a femme fatale or siren, but as a charmingly forthright innocent. She performed "That's Him," a song about Venus' love for the barber, Rodney Hatch, sitting sidesaddle in a chair. The lyrics are filled with double entendres, but Martin performs them simply. Rather than play a fluttery woman effusively speaking of love, there is something masculinely forthright about her delivery and about the lyrics themselves. Her love is like "bread baking," like "a tooth that stops aching," like "a plumber when you need a plumber."[122] Martin's tone is too matter-of-fact to be conventionally feminine; her Venus is of ambiguous gender, really almost asexual. There is little vulnerability here; she is a goddess and quite simply asks for what she wants and expects to get it.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Marjorie Garber cites Weininger and Jung as

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[121] See Howard Dietz, Dancing in the Dark (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Company, 1974), 273.

[122] One Touch of Venus, lyrics by Ogden Nash, music by Kurt Weill. In Great Musicals of the American Stage, Volume I, ed. Stanley Green (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Books, 1973).

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advocates of stereotyped perceptions of Jewish male identity. Both linked Jews with women because both groups are supposedly physically weak and that perceived weakness forces them to find chinks in the armor of their "real" male adversaries. Andrea Dworkin quotes H.L. Mencken's biographer to much the same effect. Being forthright is the province of the physically strong; women and Jews supposedly relied on cunning and deviousness to succeed. Their moral position, according to this train of thought, is calculated to protect the weak.[123] Like her "Venus," Martin's most successful roles never involved cunning, but masculine forthrightness: Venus, Nellie Forbush, Peter Pan, even Agnes in I Do, I Do, whose only devious moment is "Flaming Agnes," where she burlesques the stereotype of the cunning, sexual vamp. Martin's failures were her forays into non-forthrightness: her Billie Dawn in the televised Born Yesterday, which had none of Judy Holiday's innocence but which Martin surprisingly played as a bitch; her Lute Song, which pigeonholed her in terms of gender as a weak, dependent Chinese wife; her Kind Sir, in which she played a sophisticated woman having an illicit affair; her Sabina in The Skin of Our Teeth, in which she played the eternal other woman, a role ill-suited to Martin's child-like persona; and her temperamental opera diva in Pacific 1860. (There were a surprising number of misses in this legendary career.)

Martin's transgressive approach to gender is evident in both South Pacific and Peter Pan.[124] Her Nellie is typically open and forthright. Fluid and ambiguous in terms of

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[123] See Dworkin, 102; Garber, 224-233.

[124] One can see bits and pieces of Martin's performance in South Pacific on kinescope. A tape also exists of the London production of South Pacific, starring Martin and Wilbur Evans, which was filmed without an audience for research purposes by the

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gender. Martin plays Nellie almost as a white man coming to terms with racism. Indeed, Nellie and DeBecque can be read as a homosexual couple, with Martin in need of a dominating male, or Martin as the "fem" needing a "butch" partner. Once she decides to leave DeBecque she sticks pretty much by her decision. This assertiveness is in contrast to Lt. Cable, who makes a similar decision about Liat but neurotically tortures himself about his inability to shed his prejudice. Eventually, he lands in the naval hospital. Wolf notes that Nellie is authoritative and commanding with Billis, who plays a feminine role in that he washes her laundry and performs in drag during the "Honey Bun" sequence.[125] Of course, Nellie also cross-dresses in this number, appearing as a sailor. As Wolf points out, Martin's famous pose during "Honey Bun" has her dancing dressed in a male sailor suit with one leg raised high behind her, neither man nor woman. Wolf calls attention to another famous production shot which shows Martin in shorts and barefoot, with legs spread, leaning forward: an equally ambiguous representation of gender.[126] For Wolf, Martin's provocative interpretation of gender can be read as coded for a lesbian audience; at the same time, straight audiences read her as the girl next door.

One can make much the same argument about Martin's Maria Von Trapp in The Sound of Music. Again, one can read her relationship with the Captain as a homosexual relationship. Forthright, sincere, and honest, she tells the Captain exactly what she thinks of his child-rearing techniques. Like Nellie, she seems to yearn for a partner to dominate

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Rodgers and Hammerstein office. Personal collection.

[125] Wolf, A Problem Called Maria, 89.

[126] Ibid.

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her, whether that means she plays "fem" to a "butch" partner or bottom male to a top. Male/female sexuality is missing here. "An Ordinary Couple," the show's love duet, is arguably the most passionless love song ever written for a major musical. Like Nellie, Maria learns "womanhood" and a degree of sophistication from a European man. Is she a "white" woman playing ethnic "other" who transcends her lower/middle class ethnicity by being transformed by a worldly, sophisticated European, read white male? DeBecque in South Pacific is French and very much "white." Nellie's naive, Southern racial prejudice renders her as a version of the "other"; she must learn tolerance and acceptance through the European.[127] Similarly, the Captain is Austrian and an aristocrat. His fiancee, Elsa, treats Maria as a racial "other." She may be "white," but she is economically most definitely of a different class and of a different world. Maria eventually is able to transcend her class and marginalized status through marriage to the Captain, a variation on the Marilyn Miller Cinderella formula.

As far as Peter Pan is concerned, Wolf has written an excellent study of the gender dynamics involved.[128] For the purposes of this chapter, it is enough to say that the role again confirms the notion of doubling and double doubling of musical theatre star in terms of gender. Cyril Ritchard plays an effeminate Captain Hook to Martin's cross-dressed

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[127] Andrea Most foregrounds South Pacific as a metaphor for the role of the liberal Jew during the McCarthy era. For this alternative reading, see Andrea Most, "'You've Got To Be Carefully Taught': The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific," Theatre Journal 52.3 (October 2000): 307-38.

[128] See Stacy Wolf, "'Never Gonna Be A Man / Catch Me If You Can / I won't Grow Up': A Lesbian Account of Mary Martin as Peter Pan," Theatre Journal 49 (December 1997): 493-509.

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Peter. The most interesting number is "Mysterious Lady," written to display Martin's coloratura. Martin plays Peter Pan playing a "mysterious lady," the kind of double doubling intrinsic to minstrelsy.

It is often impossible to separate race and gender. With her Texas accent and fine features, it would be difficult for Martin not to play "whiteness." Throughout her career, however, she had a peculiar vocal duality. While she sang opera in her soprano voice (one of her audition songs in Hollywood was "Les filles de cadiz"), she made something of a reputation in the 1930s singing swing versions of operatic arias. The highpoint of her club act was a rendition of "Il Bacio," which she sang with a hot swing rhythm, and which Cole Porter liked so much, he promised he would incorporate it into Leave It To Me. Throughout her career, Martin sang both "black" and "white," enabled by her two voices, the chest/belt voice and the head/soprano voice. In Rhythm on the Range, she sang and swung black New Orleans jazz tunes, while "Daddy" was a typical Cole Porter beguine mixed with the flavor of a hot rumba. In South Pacific, she sang "whiteness" in songs like "Cock-eyed Optimist" and "Born on the Other Side of the Tracks," while performing more "black" or ethnic in songs like the jazzy "Honey Bun" or "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair." The mask was constantly flexible, the persona complex, which is in line with Jolson, Cantor, Miller, and other great musical theatre stars.

Ethel Merman

Like Jolson, Ethel Merman's onstage persona is hard to reconstruct. Her

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performance in her most famous vehicle, Gypsy, was not preserved on film.[129] One can study her performance in the film version of Call Me Madam, in films she made during the 1930s, and on television kinescopes of the 1950s, including versions of Anything Goes (1934) and Panama Hattie (1940). Most people today are familiar with her work from her recordings and her television variety show appearances which were made long after she had retired from the stage. The perception is that Merman was only a singer. Like the similar misconception about Jolson, this is not true. Merman was known as a brash clown, and, like Jolson, her vehicles, including Gypsy, all provided her with the opportunity to wisecrack. Her lines were fast and throwaway. A typical exchange can be seen in the film version of her Broadway triumph, Call Me Madam (1950). Merman's character, an unlikely American ambassador, is being wooed by a fat, venal mittel European diplomat, played by Walter Slezack. The diplomat puts his arm around Merman. "Call me August," he coos. Merman removes his unwelcome arm and shoots back, "That'll be soon enough."[130] If Merman did not ad-lib the wise-cracks herself, she made sure her book-writers, from Herbert Fields in the 1930s and 1940s to Russell and Crouse in Call Me Madam to Arthur Laurents in Gypsy, kept the one-liners coming at rapid-fire pace. She was equally adept as a singer and as a comic. During "It's All Yours," a duet she performed with Jimmy Durante in Stars In Your Eyes (1939), she and Durante ad libbed jokes night after night between encore choruses. Her deadpan delivery

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[129] The film version starred Rosalind Russell and was produced by Russell's husband, Frederick Brisson. Merman called Brisson the Lizard of Roz.

[130] Call Me Madam, starring Ethel Merman. Book by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse. Music by Irving Berlin. Twentieth-Century Fox, 1953.

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of "By The Mississisissinewah," which she performed with Paula Laurence as two Indian squaws regaling the sex life they both share with their one Indian Chief in Something for the Boys (1943), is one of the legendary show stoppers of the musical theatre (before she had the much maligned Laurence fired for stealing bits of comic business). She co-starred with Jimmy Durante and Bob Hope in Red, Hot, and Blue (1936) and matched each of those great comedians laugh for laugh. Her character was Nails DuQuesne, whose job was to help track down an heiress who, as a child, sat on a hot waffle iron.

Merman was fast, brash, and funny. Although she didn't spend a lot of time in vaudeville, her performance style was presentational, like that of Jolson and Cantor. There was little attempt at realistic characterization, if that meant delivering her lines any way but dead center out front. She could be vulnerable, but her boxoffice appeal and persona relied on both her trumpet-like singing, fast wisecracks, and throwaway comic shtick. When I saw her in Hello, Dolly!, she stopped the show when she filled Horace Vandergelder's plate with beets at the Harmonia Gardens restaurant. Her shtick during this "food" scene was in fact more impressive than anything she sang. I also saw her in Gypsy. What no one has ever matched in subsequent revivals, including Angela Lansbury, Tyne Daly, and even Bette Midler, is the comedy. Merman managed to make the monstrous Rose likeable because she was so sharp, dry, sarcastic, funny, and outrageous.

Unlike Marilyn Miller and Mary Martin, Ethel Merman did not play "whiteness." Instead, she came from the Sophie Tucker/Mae Irwin "coon shouter" tradition, which involved playing Jewish/blackface/and butch. Like Tucker, Merman performed Jewish, although in Merman's case, it was even more of a performance since she was gentile by

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birth. Merman radiated Jewish stereotypes. She was butch, aggressive, loud (both in song and in dialogue), and working-class.

Just as the Jewish man was perceived as feminine, the Jewish woman was perceived as masculine. According to Andrea Dworkin, their masculinity was rendered even more potent because of their potential for eroticism:

> Fagin is more cruel than Shylock, more exploitative, more criminal, more heartless, without love or redemption. (Shylock loves his daughter.) This is the Jew in skirts, an anatomically correct woman as opposed to a feminized male; and she strikes double terror because she is imprisoned by a double contempt. Unlike the male Jew, the Jewish woman cannot assimilate: because there is no sphere--public or private--in which she is free; she stays woman, caged by male perception and by male violence.[131]

Dworkin argues that this image of the Jewish woman is created by the Jewish male. The Jewish woman is forced to perform the man's view of her as destructive, traitorous, and transgressive. If this perception of the Jewish woman precludes transcendence, Merman's stage persona and those of other female musical comedy stars of the "coon shouter" tradition demonstrated the opposite. Though stereotypically demanding, avaricious, ambitious, and masculine, she was nonetheless able to transmute her usually working class status, masculinity, and ethnicity through desire.[132]

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[131] Dworkin, 103-4.

[132] According to Robert Allen, she is also the descendent of nineteenth century burlesque. Transgressive, rebellious, but sexually non-threatening, her more modern incarnations include stars like Nancy Walker, Fanny Brice, and Barbra Streisand. Allen

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Merman's persona, like those of Cantor, Jolson, Miller, and Martin, is incredibly complex. She plays the butch, Jewish whore with a heart of gold, cunning, knowing, but secretly yearning to be feminine.[133] Vocally, her belt is that of the Jewish blackface female

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links this type of female star to burlesque rather than to minstrelsy and vaudeville. He argues that the Lydia Thompson model of the nineteenth century, in which female performers were both sexually transgressive and visually alluring, has been modified in the twentieth century to an either/or proposition. According to Allen, performers like Mae West, Sophie Tucker, Ethel Waters, Bessie Smith, and Lizzie Miles have retained their transgressive voice, but the rebellious message has been made palatable to WASP audiences because they are not sexually attractive. This consequently makes their stage personae non-threatening:

> In each performer, expressive sexuality was yoked to another, "inappropriate" cultural category, producing what for WASP, bourgeois culture was a grotesque hybrid: sexuality and age; sexuality and (nonwhite) race; sexuality and nonexotic ethnicity; sexuality and the nonfetishized, excessive body. Channeled through these grotesque constructions and consigned to the margins of popular culture ([Sophie] Tucker in the cabaret demi-world; [Bessie] Smith, [Ethel] Waters, and [Lizzie] Miles in the ghettos of tent shows and race records), the sexually aggressive songs and jokes of these performers could challenge some aspects of white, patriarchal culture without provoking suppression. Limited as these performers were to the shadows of mainstream culture, they still kept alive something of the insubordinate, inversive spirit of Thompsonian burlesque long after that spirit had been all but drained from burlesque itself.

See Robert C. Allen, Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina, 1991), 273.

[133] Merman's onstage persona was brassy and butch, along the lines of Mae Irwin at the turn of the century and, later, Sophie Tucker. Her offstage orientation was probably bisexual. Rumor has it that she had an affair with Jacqueline Suzanne and was the model for Helen Lawson in Valley of the Dolls. According to Bob Hope's biographer, Lawrence J. Quirk, Merman and Hope vied for the attentions of chorus girls when they appeared together in Red, Hot, and Blue (1936):

> Merman's lesbianism was well-known in show business circles. She had a belting drive, a kinetic force in her acting, clowning, and song delivery that one Mermanophile characterized as seventy-five percent masculine, twenty-five percent feminine. In fiercely homophobic and benighted 1936, it was true that lesbians could get away with more than gay men--even so called "straight" women were huggy-kissy with each other and given to emotional displays for people of their own sex--but nonetheless, her sexual

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"coon shouter" with a Jewish yodel. Not surprisingly, Merman played a peculiar version of Cinderella. Stacy Wolf notes that "our pleasure in Merman comes from her efforts to feminize her butchness."[134] Our pleasure also comes from her comic efforts to transcend her "Jewishness" and achieve "whiteness."

In each of her musicals, Merman has a moment of gender transcendence, where she sheds her butchness and performs "feminine." In Panama Hattie (1940), she plays Hattie Malone, a bar girl and saloon singer in the Panama Canal Zone, who falls in love with a Nick Bullett, a widower with a Philadelphia Main Line pedigree who has a young daughter, Geraldine. Geraldine ridicules Hattie for her garish dress and unladylike manner. Eager to marry Nick, Hattie finally wins the child over and the two sing a duet, "Let's Be Buddies," during which the little girl takes a scissors and cuts all the garish bows and ribbons from Hattie's dress and hat. In Something For the Boys (1943), a wartime musical comedy, Merman plays Blossom Hart, a defense worker who receives radio messages through the filings in her teeth. She sets her sights for Rocky, an army officer engaged to a debutante. In the opening scene, Rocky tries to make a pass at the Merman character; he begs her to be nice to him, since she is the womanhood he is

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ambivalence (she could be fiercely man-mad at times too) troubled Merman. Hence her overreaction to Hope--he was in her way romantically, and it humiliated her into the bargain to know that he was on to her girly pursuits and in his mind downgraded her for it. His experience with Merman, others later felt, accounted for his ever more homophobic stance in future years.

See Lawrence J. Quirk, Bob Hope: The Road Well Traveled (New York and London: Applause, 1998), 78.

[134] Wolf, A Problem Called Maria, 137.

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fighting for. Merman counters by telling him she is the womanhood she is fighting for. Her moment of vulnerability where she sheds her tough, butch persona and "becomes a woman" is her ballad of unrequited love, "He's A Right Guy." Of course she eventually gets her man, but, oddly enough, like the stereotype of the sexually predatory male, she seems to enjoy the chase rather than her ultimate prize.

One can trace similar moments throughout Merman's career. Merman claimed that Irving Berlin made a lady out of her when she sang "They Say Falling In Love Is Wonderful" in Annie Get Your Gun (1946), where Annie shyly confesses her love for Frank Butler in an uncharacteristically quiet belt. In Call Me Madam (1950), Merman played Sally Adams, a character loosely based on Pearl Mesta, who becomes American ambassador to the mythical Lichtenburg. Sally falls in love with Cosmo Constantine, a mittel European politician, and despite his wishes to the contrary, forces a United States loan of millions of dollars on the tiny principality. Sally nonetheless loses her aggressive brashness when she becomes feminized during her ironically insecure plea to Cosmo, "The Best Thing For You Would Be Me." The moment of feminization comes in Gypsy (1959) when Herbie leaves Rose during the second act. Merman's reprise of "Small World," ends with her sobbing, unable to finish the lyric. Most telling perhaps is Merman's Broadway appearance as the final Dolly Levi in Hello, Dolly! Jerry Herman originally wrote the show with Merman in mind and included a ballad, "Love, Look In My Window," which Dolly sings near the end of the first act. The song is a typical epiphany of feminization for a character in a Merman vehicle. Widowed for years, Dolly yearningly asks her deceased husband for a sign to rejoin the human race; she begs to be alive again,

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to find someone to marry. When Merman rejected the show, Carol Channing was cast and the song was cut. Seven Dollys later, it was reinstated when Merman joined the show.

Not only does Merman transcend butchness; she transcends ethnicity. Although it is characteristic in a Merman vehicle for her to play Jewish, her vis-a-vis is inevitably written to be played "white." In Panama Hattie, she is in love with an heir to a Main Line Philadelphia family. In Annie Get Your Gun, her vis-a-vis is the dashing, virile Western star, Frank Butler. In Anything Goes, her first starring role on Broadway, she is in love with Billy Crocker, but eventually ends up with Sir Evelyn Oakley, an English aristocrat. Her romantic interest in Call Me Madam is the Continental Cosmo Constantine. There are constant references in the show to Merman's character being typically "American" in her preoccupation with money and belief that money can solve any problem. By 1950, aspects of Jewish identity had begun to be mainstreamed into American life through assimilation. What "American" implies, through stereotyping, is that Merman is not only typically American, but typically American Jewish. She brags, "Money, money, money, money, money, money / Can you use any money today? / Bright new bills we're giving away / We have photographs on every one / Lincoln, Grant, and Washington / We even have a few of General Clay / Can you use any money today?"[135] She is reunited with Cosmo at the end of the show when she is de-ethnicized: she realizes, in the words of one of the ballads, that "marrying for love" precludes bribery. Even the ill-written Happy Hunting (1956) provides her with a Hapsburg for a love interest, the Duke of Granada. Merman

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[135] Call Me Madam, starring Ethel Merman. Music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse. Decca Recording ED806.

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invariably transcends her performance of Jewishness and butchness, by being romantically united at the final curtain with a leading man who definitely plays "whiteness."[136] There is a mixed message here. The "white" leading man, like the plantation bosses of the Jolson vehicles and the virile Westerners of Whoopee!, is manipulated by the trickster. In this case, the trickster is the female star, who controls and manipulates her love interest through wit, cunning, desire, and will. At the same time, Merman invariably is "whitened" by being romantically united at the final curtain with a WASPish leading man. Again, the message is both subversive and conservative, with Merman, like Jolson and Cantor, playing both sides of the bargain. She is the antithesis of the respectable "white" woman, which is subversive. At the same time, she is ultimately "whitened" by winning her love interest, which is conservative and hegemonic.

In playing both sides of the bargain, Merman is a precursor to Barbra Streisand, who plays Jewish but never co-starred opposite a Jewish actor or an actor who played Jewishness as her love interest. In her most famous vehicle, Funny Girl, the Fanny Brice character is hopelessly in love with the Jewish Nicky Arnstein, but significantly that role was played by the WASPish Sydney Chaplin on Broadway and the Egyptian Omar Shariff on film. Streisand transcended her performance of ethnicity by co-starring with men like Robert Redford, Nick Nolte, and Ryan O'Neill on film; oddly, her onscreen triumph is that

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[136] Oddly, the one show where this isn't true is Gypsy, in which Herbie is arguably Jewish. Although Herbie is never explicitly identified as Jewish, he makes veiled ethnic references, including the fact he never married because he had three sisters and had to wait until the last snagged a husband. Merman's character, by the way, does not get this man at the final curtain. The implication, in a Merman vehicle, is that Herbie is a tool Rose uses for her daughters' act; if she truly wanted him, he would not abandon her. Desire and will are invincible in a Merman vehicle.

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her lovers are all gentile. Merman performed Jewish and butch, but her musicals were nonetheless Jewish Cinderella stories, in which she was able to transmute and transform her performance of gender and ethnicity through desire and will.

Carol Channing

Like the other stars I've discussed in this chapter, Carol Channing's persona is hard to pinpoint. Arguably, it's the most bizarre. Certainly, she plays as many levels of identity as Jolson or Cantor, but her performance aesthetic is even more complex. Like Mary Martin, Channing has two voices, one chest/belt and one sub/bass. Unlike Martin, there is no soprano. Coming from a woman, Channing's bass voice sounds as low as Chaliapin's, while her chest voice is squeaky and redolent of New Yorkese. The accent is peculiar to say the least, since she was born in Seattle and educated at Bennington. Arguably, a New York accent is associated with Jewishness, so, like Jolson, Cantor, and Merman, part of the persona involves a Jewish ethnicity. Channing is tall and gawky. Along with her Pinza-like tones, these qualities enable her to perform masculinity. Rather than butch, she is a woman performing a man performing a woman. Actually, she is a "white" woman (her Bennington/Seattle "pedigree") performing an ethnic New Yorkese woman performing a man performing a "white" caricature of the blond, blue-eyed image of the American girl in whiteface. Like minstrel performers, her makeup accentuates her eyes and lips; however, rather than blackface, she performs in a grotesque, comic clown white.

Channing collaborated with director Gower Champion to evolve her star persona.

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Fresh from Bennington, she was cast in Lend An Ear (1948), a revue that originated in Los Angeles. Champion, engaged as director of the revue, recognized Channing's potential and worked with her to develop the conniving, wide-eyed, open-mouthed, dizzy persona that Channing has invested in most of her roles throughout the remainder of her career.[137] The famous Channing "persona" was born in "The Gladiola Girl," a sequence from Lend An Ear that satirized 1920s musical comedies. The premise involved a fabulously successful 1920s musical comedy, "The Gladiola Girl," produced by Lou and Z.Z. Sherbert. The "Sherberts" sent out a multitude of road companies, including one in 1928 that got lost.[138] Finally rediscovered in 1948, after playing the midwest for twenty years, the musical is performed by Channing, the Gladiola Girl of the title, and includes snippets of the book and score, including numbers like "Doin' the Old Yahoo Step."

The "Gladiola Girl" characterization was the basis for Channing's "Lorelei Lee," the archetypal gold digger, in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1949), which Champion was originally supposed to direct but from which he withdrew. Anita Loos created the character in the 1920s, but Lorelei's roots go back to the Floradora girls, who performed the famous sextette on Broadway in 1900 and who, as legend has it, all married millionaire stage Johnnies. By the time Ziegfeld produced his Follies and glorified the American girl,

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[137] David Payne-Carter, Gower Champion: Dance and American Musical Theatre (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 35.

[138] "The Gladiola Girl" produced by the "Sherberts" is a satire of Blossom Time (1921), an operetta which the brothers Shubert sent on tour throughout the 1920s and which they constantly revived throughout the 1930s and 1940s. A standard Broadway joke during the 1940s and 1950s was that one of the myriad road companies got lost in the 1920s and was still performing the Shubert operetta somewhere in the hinterlands.

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the show girl had become part of the American lexicon. The term "gold digger" was coined by Avery Hopwood, in his famous 1919 play of the same title, and was probably inspired by the "career" of Peggy Hopkins Joyce, the quintessential show girl of the 1910s and 1920s. Like the legendary Floradora girls, Joyce joined the Ziegfeld Follies, where she marketed her petite blond, blue eyed beauty and soon ensnared a millionaire stage door Johnny. Unlike the Floradora girls, however, she was not satisfied with one millionaire. Much married, she was probably the first socially acceptable American courtesan. A legend in her own time as well as in her own mind, she was fodder for many Cole Porter lyrics from the 1920s through the 1940s, while her marital and extramarital hijinks were duly chronicled by the press.[139]

Channing's "Lorelei" owed a heavy debt to Peggy Joyce. Like the glorified Ziegfeld girl, Joyce embodied characteristics popular to nativist theories of American identity and to the "science" of eugenics of the day.[140] With so many marginalized European and Mediterranean ethnicities immigrating to the United States through 1930, eugenicists tried to stabilize and essentialize what a truly American girl should look like, which, of course, was perceived as Anglo-Saxon. It didn't much matter if the girl was truly Anglo-Saxon, as long as she performed that identity. Along with the physical characteristics of blond, Aryan beauty, girls like Peggy Joyce and the glorified Ziegfeld

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[139] For a recent biographical study of Peggy Joyce, see Constance Rosenblum, Gold Digger: The Outrageous Life and Times of Peggy Hopkins Joyce (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000).

[140] For more on nativism and eugenics in relation to the Ziegfeld chorus girl, see Linda Mizejewski, 65-88; 109-35.

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show girl had to assume an upperclass persona, both offstage and on. Ziegfeld not only dressed the show girls in exquisite gowns and headdresses, the clothes were created by Lady Duff-Gordon, a fashion couturier rather than a typical theatrical costumer. The women were taught the Ziegfeld walk, which was calculated to demonstrate poise and elegance. Mizejewski describes it in Ziegfeld Girl:

> Unlike the traditional fashion walk down a ramp or runway, the Ziegfeld walk was devised for a set of dramatically steep risers designed for Joseph Urban's Follies stages. Wayburn [Ziegfeld's dance director] created a processional step suited to this architecture which necessitated an unusually artificial thrust of hip and shoulder in order to keep one's balance.[141]

To add to their poise, Ziegfeld often spent costly sums on the undergarments of his show girls, his theory being that if they felt poised and glamorous, they would perform "poised and glamorous." Offstage, the glorified American girl had to conduct herself with a modicum of decorum and class. Each edition of the Follies opened in early summer. By 1925, when sun lamps and suntans had become the rage of New York, Ziegfeld gave each show girl a bonus of two hundred dollars at the end of the summer if she were not tanned. The tans, of course, were not in keeping with eugenicist notions of Anglo-Saxon beauty.

By the time Hopwood's The Gold Diggers was produced in 1919, it was clear to the American public that the show girl's identity was something of a performance. Americans were learning that their icons were not always what they appeared to be. By 1915, for instance, it was well known that Anna Held, whom Ziegfeld had promoted as

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[141] Ibid., 97.

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the essence of French chic and continental female sophistication, was in reality a Polish Jew. According to Eve Golden, her biographer, publicity about Anna's Polish heritage had been public knowledge for years: "As she booked passage for the United States [in 1915], Anna was also 'outed' as Polish, though no one made very much of this--her true heritage had been admitted by everyone but Anna herself for two decades."[142] Part of Held's appeal was the outrageous publicity Ziegfeld lavished on her, including her specious milk baths. The truth of her background mattered little and had no effect on Held's popularity; audiences loved Held's *performance* of French sophistication. Similarly, Peggy Joyce's performance of elegance and class similarly did little to hide her avarice and ambition, but American audiences were nonetheless attracted and intrigued.

Recycled ad nauseum throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Hopwood play is probably best known today as the inspiration behind the Warner Brothers film, Gold Diggers of 1933. Describing the chorus girls in that film, Linda Mizejewski cites their performance of "whiteness" and class:

> The dynamic is familiar from Ziegfeld advertising and hype; upscale setting and costume creates, for women, a direct visual relationship with an upper class and enables her class mobility. The access is possible because she has been choreographed into behavior that fits the visual package: the beaded evening gown and the elbow length gloves are the wearing of a discipline. At their most Ziegfeldian, the chorus girls in this film form a giant neon

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[142] Eve Golden, Anna Held and the Birth of Ziegfeld's Broadway (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 191.

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violin, a reference to classical music and its milieu, to which they have access literally through their bodies as plastic, malleable elements in a larger design.[143]

Women were permitted upward class mobility; they just had to perform the correct identity.

Lorelei Lee is very much an echo of Peggy Hopkins Joyce. She is not particularly intelligent, but certainly shrewd; her goal in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes is to snag millionaire Gus Esmond as a husband. Along the way, she flirts with another millionaire, a button manufacturer named Josephus Gage, and a married millionaire, Lord Beekman, who gives her his wife's diamond tiara. By 1949, when the musical version of Gentleman Prefer Blondes was produced, Peggy Joyce was no longer in the news and the image of the gold digger no longer a novelty; plays and films about venal chorus girls had proliferated for thirty years. Clearly, a novel approach was needed. Producers Herman Levin and Oliver Smith offered the role in the musical version of Blondes to Mary Martin, who turned it down. Eventually, they cast Channing, who looked nothing like the Peggy Hopkins Joyce model. Dark, thick featured, extremely tall, Channing was also broad shouldered and a bit stocky when she first played Lorelei. Rather than play her petite and demure, Channing's performance was broad and bizarre from the start. Assuming a New Yorkese accent, Channing's Lorelei was outrageously manipulative and avaricious, but she was also humorously honest about her greed. Marilyn Monroe, who recreated the part onscreen, looked like a beautiful show girl. Channing did her best to look like a man

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[143] Ibid., 185-86.

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playing a showgirl. Richard Watts in the New York Post commented on her hearty, towering presence. He observed that Channing "gave every indication of being able to out-box and out-wrestle any four males in the cast."[144] According to Brooks Atkinson in the New York Times, "she goes through the play like a dazed automaton--husky enough to kick in the teeth of any gentleman on the stage, but mincing coyly in high-heel shoes and looking out on a confused world through big, wide, starry eyes. There has never been anything like this before."[145]

Her singing aided her flexible performance of gender. The verse of "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend" is sung in Channing's basso-profundo. Without reading the song credits listed on the original cast album, it's possible, hearing the verse, to mistake Channing for Ezio Pinza on a busman's holiday from South Pacific, albeit a Pinza with a bad cold. As soon as the chorus begins, however, Channing reverts to her squeaky, Betty Boop chest voice. Channing's delivery deliberately sets up the song as a woman playing a man playing a woman. Along with huge, ruby red bee stung lips, a blond wig, and a jar full of mascara, Channing donned a kind of whiteface makeup that was intended to send up the stereotype of the ambitious show girl. What made the performance so memorable is that it was created by a performer so physically wrong for the role. As a result, the caricature became all the more hilarious. Channing's performance was just that, a self-reflexive, ironic commentary on a type. She transgressively overturned the construct of

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[144] David Suskin, Opening Night on Broadway: A Critical Quotebook of the Musical Theatre, Oklahoma! to Fiddler on the Roof (New York: Schirmer, 1990), 249.

[145] Ibid., 246.

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female "whiteness" and its link to purity, refinement, and respectability, revered in the musical since the days of Ziegfeld and the glorified American show girl. According to Brooks Atkinson, Channing's "Lorelei" was "the most fabulous comic creation of this dreary period in history."[146]

Since her appearance in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1949), Channing has developed a trademark stage appearance that is an even more exaggerated version of her "Lorelei Lee" persona: clown-white makeup, heavy rouge that seems to form a line across her nose, black-spider eye makeup, and an Eva Gabor blond fright wig. Channing's stage persona remained centered around the venal 1920s show girl. During the 1950s, she performed a nightclub act with George Burns in which she played a dithery Gracey Allenesque version of "Lorelei Lee." This persona culminated in the revue, Show Girl (1961), which incorporated some of the original Lend An Ear material, including the "Gladiola Girl" sequence. It was only natural that when Gower Champion was signed to direct and choreograph Hello, Dolly!, he gravitated to Channing as his star. Dolly Gallagher Levi is Irish by birth and Jewish by her first marriage to Ephraim Levi. Champion was able to nurture a kind of oddball, brash Irish/Jewish ethnicity in her performance. Channing incorporated a heavy New Yorkese accent for the role, which, peculiarly, was fused with her over-the-top, venal but daffy, "Lorelei Lee" white, show-girl persona. Growling "Hello, Dolly!" in a basso-profundo as she paraded down a long flight of steps in full fire-engine red regalia, Channing created a quintessential musical comedy moment. Her "Dolly Levi" was a bit like Lorelei Lee widowed and on the make

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[146] Ibid., 246.

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again. The New York accent grew thicker, the clothes necessarily grew less skimpy since Dolly is negotiating matrimony in turn-of-the-century New York, but the persona is very much a middle-aged Lorelei.

After Dolly, it became harder to find vehicles suitable for a woman in late middle age with a 1920s show girl stage persona. Channing's next vehicle was a rehash of Blondes called Lorelei (1974), which opened with Channing in widow's weeds, mourning the death of Mr. Esmond, her millionaire husband, as she reminisces about her past. Basically this was a revival, although the widow's weeds did capitalize on negative stereotypes of the Jewish woman: acquisitive, greedy, ambitious, and sexually predatory.[147]

Although Channing's performance of the Lorelei persona always foregrounded an ironic, self-reflexive commentary, the exaggeration grew to grotesque proportions. By 1986, playwright James Kirkwood thought her onstage appearance in his play, Legends, garish. Recounting a backstage conversation with Channing, Kirkwood suggests her trademark spoofing of gender is dated and over-the-top:

> "That clown makeup you wear in the play, all that rouge and the line across your nose, the dark shadowing here and there. It's grotesque. You look so lovely without it."
>
> Now was played out a scene that I have never fathomed.
>
> "You mean there's something wrong with my stage makeup?"

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[147] Andrea Dworkin cites literary examples of the perception of the Jewish woman as black widow: sexually predatory, money hungry, avaricious, a Fagin in skirts who uses men like Fagin used little boys. (Dworkin 103).

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"Yes, of course. Everyone's told you that, but you keep on wearing it."

"Everyone?" she asked, eyes wide in amazement. "No one's ever mentioned it to me. Ever!" she emphasized.

I was thrown for a moment. . . . Everyone had mentioned her makeup. I'd heard tons of people comment on it in front of her; our director, producers, friends of hers, agents of hers; critics had written about it. Almost everyone had complained that it was too much.[148]

By the time Channing appeared in the 1996 revival of Hello, Dolly!, the cartoon voice, slashes of rouge, outlandish wig and clown-white makeup were relics of a past era. The revival lasted only a few months; a once humorous performance of gender and nativist notions of "whiteness" had become a grotesque that was no longer palatable to mainstream audiences.

Here is a case of a star who had mainstreamed the queer for decades, but whose mainstream persona eventually dated itself and became requeered. Channing's star persona was a satiric commentary on the archetypal gold digger of popular culture in the 1920s and 1930s. The gold digger stereotype was perpetuated in the Busby Berkeley films of the 1930s and became part of the American vocabulary. Channing, cast dramatically against type in 1949 as Lorelei Lee, managed to put her own bizarre twist to this period characterization of the 1920s flapper. The outrageousness and outlandishness

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[148] James Kirkwood, Diary of A Mad Playwright: Perilous Adventures on the Road with Mary Martin and Carol Channing, 242.

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of the satire lasted for decades, until what was originally spoofed had begun to disappear from the American sensibility. By the 1980s, Channing had passed late middle age. The skimpy showgirl outfits were becoming grotesque rather than amusing. Moreover, a racially diverse society no longer felt the need to spoof essentialist 1920s notions of eugenics and Anglo-nativism. Channing's cultural moment had passed. Bizarre rather than pithy, old and odd rather than relevant, she seemed out of place in the America of the 1980s and 1990s, where women had fought for sexual emancipation and financial freedom, and were discovering that both were attainable. Her deconstruction of the performance of white female purity and refinement provided laughter for decades. In a more marginalized context, a generation of drag queens owes much to Channing's double doubling and spoofing of gender; however, Channing's witty and ironic take on the performance of "whiteness" are no longer mainstreamed. She is cherished, but belongs to another cultural moment.

In Something for the Boys, John Clum argues that the gay affinity for musicals resulted from closeted pre-Stonewall gay men reading their own desires and dreams into larger than life female stars like Channing. According to Clum, post-gay lib gym clones and muscle boys no longer find that identification desirable.[149] If the current generation of gay men have trouble appreciating Channing, so do today's heterosexual audiences. Clum's theory essentializes gay identity, which is ironic, since the women who became gay musical theatre icons commented through performance on precisely that kind of

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[149] See John M. Clum, Something For the Boys: Musical Theatre and Gay Culture (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 167-196.

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essentialism. Gays have been assimilated into mainstream culture. Why code the performances of musical theatre stars when the goal of American society is diversity and acceptance? Straight audiences likewise don't need Dolly Levi to tell them that feminine identity need not be essentialized. The feminist movement has forced at least a significant sector of society to acknowledge that many women potentially can exert autonomy over their lives and their bodies.

Ironically, Clum ignores today's gay female icons. Madonna, for example, combines shrewd business manipulation with an evangelical enjoyment of transgressive sexuality, both straight and gay. Her videos celebrate interracial as well as gay and bisexual sex. I suspect that Clum would be surprised by Madonna's appeals to gym clones and muscle boys. More to the point, she also appeals to straight audiences. The same was true of Channing fifty years ago. We live in a different cultural moment.

Beyond Multiculturalism: Back to Zangwill

American identity has always been volatile and continues to be. In "Beyond the Melting Pot," William A. Henry predicted that by 2056 the average United States resident "will trace his descent to Africa, Asia, the Hispanic world, Arabia, almost anywhere but white Europe."[150] The 2000 census has generated much discussion about a new generation of Americans with muti-racial parents who were unable to identify themselves

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[150] William A. Henry III, "Beyond the Melting Pot," Time Magazine, 9 April 1990), 28.

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as belonging to one race.[151] In a diverse society, isn't it logical that various groups will share their cultures, intermarry, and eventually forge a new and unpredictable race of Americans, dynamically reinventing themselves? How different is this from Zangwill's original notion of the melting pot, not to mention the observations of Crèvecoeur, Tocqueville, Emerson, and Melville? Ironically, Zangwill's melting pot--his notion of the American as a process of becoming--may well play itself out differently in a multi-racial society, where "whiteness" may not be hegemonic in the future.

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw a decline in musical comedy and a rise in the serious, integrated musical. This is not surprising, since the playfulness and performativity that were strategies of musical comedy performers during the melting pot years seemed racist to a diverse, multicultural society that frowned on racial and ethnic appropriation. At the 2001 Tonys, however, The Producers won an unprecedented number of awards and has become a blockbuster hit. If musicals are products of their cultural moments, does the success of The Producers herald a cultural change or a throwback to an older melting pot aesthetic?

Clearly, Brooks understands the older conventions of musical comedy that exploited ethnic, racial, and gender appropriation. Much of the humor from The Producers comes from the two Jewish "tricksters," Bialystock and Bloom, ridiculing the Nazis. The victim bests his tormentor. I wonder if a musical version of Blazing Saddles (1974) would be equally successful. The film follows the old conventions of Cantor's

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[151] Holland Cotter, "Beyond Multiculturalism, a Way to a New Freedom in Art," New York Times, 29 July 2001: Section 2, 28.

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Whoopee!, as well as those of Jolson's Winter Garden vehicles, where the blackface servant "Gus"outsmarts his white plantation bosses. Brooks realized there was no need to essentialize the African-American through blackface to pander to a white patriarchy. In Blazing Saddles, the blackface star is replaced by Cleavon Little, a real African-American, who, along with the Jew (Gene Wilder), the Indians (who appropriate heavy Yiddish accents), and the gays (Dom DeLuise and a screen full of gay chorus boys) constantly subvert, outsmart, and best the white men, typically the heroes of a Western. Brooks' script even has Little incorporating the self-consciously theatrical disguises of a Jolson or a Cantor. At one point, Little dresses like a Western Union messenger to deliver a bomb. Later on, he and the Jewish Wilder dress up as members of the Klu Klux Klan. When the bigoted white westerners ask a chain gang of African-Americans to sing a song, the last thing the white bigots expect is "I Get A Kick Out of You." Unsatisfied with the Cole Porter song, the white men end up singing an "authentic" black anthem themselves, "Camptown Races," to the amusement of the African-Americans. Just as Bialystock and Bloom, both Jews, turn the tables on the Nazis in The Producers, the African-American, the Jew, and the American Indian essentialize the white man, the typical hero of the Western, in Blazing Saddles.

It will be fascinating if we move from multiculturalism to a new version of Zangwill's notion of American identity: unpredictable, ever-changing, and dynamic--a process of becoming through diverse cultures bleeding over into each other and forming a new, multi-racial nation. I would love to see the kind of ethnoracial, gendered appropriation of identity of a hip-hop performance artist like Danny Hoch on the musical

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stage. His impersonations would be well suited to the playfulness and transgressiveness of the form. Hoch's roster of impersonations includes a white teenager whose goal is to become a black gangster rapper, a cop who antagonizes a light-skinned Bronx street vendor because the vendor's race defies categorization and is not obvious by his skin color, and a Puerto Rican on crutches, who enthusiastically brags about his dancing abilities. Hoch appropriates Brooklyn Polish, Jamaican patois, Bronx Dominican Spanish, and Queens Trinidadian English. His purpose is not to make fun of gender, race, or class, but to reflect a new, multi-racial society that puzzles the white hegemony. Add music to this playful aesthetic, and perhaps once again, musical theatre will reflect dynamic issues that are relevant to contemporary society through subversive performativity of identity.

In 2001, with a new generation of Americans of multi-racial descent and the dawning realization that America may not be ruled forever by a white patriarchy, America may well be grappling with another vision of identity. Holland Cotter suggests the seeds of change in an article in the New York Times on 29 July 2001 entitled "Beyond Multiculturalism, a Way to a New Freedom in Art."[152] If the center can't hold, it's time to redefine the center. That redefinition is heading toward an ever changing social dynamic among gendered, racial, and ethnic groups to redefine public culture. A crucial question has always been whether or not American identity can successfully negotiate the thin line between race and ethnicity. As William Henry observed in 1990, "For whites, American heritage is a source of pride; for people of color, it is more likely to evoke anger and

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[152] Cotter, 1, 28.

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sometimes shame."[153] The place where hope is shared is in the future.

[153] Henry, 42.

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Chapter Three

The Serious Musical: Cultural Collaborations

In chapters one and two, I've redefined musical comedy as a non-integrated musical where the performer serves as co-creator. In this chapter, I redefine the serious musical as striving towards integration, where the text becomes increasingly predominant, authoritative, and eventually sacrosanct. The party line, in terms of musical theatre histories, posits that the integrated musical is a linear outgrowth from the Hammerstein model, beginning with Show Boat and refined with the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon (1943-1959). Historians like Ethan Mordden, Gerald Bordman, and Gerald Mast assume an ever upward spiral based on the Hammerstein model. In this chapter, I will argue that the development of the serious musical, which aspired toward or achieved integration, was not linear, but the history of a mutual genealogy, borrowing from a multiplicity of collaborations, models and sources, many from the non-musical theatre. Musicals, like non-musicals, reflect their cultural zeitgeist.

Rather than inventing the wheel, Hammerstein himself combined influences of realism, Romanticism, and melodrama in the 1920s. In the 1930s, serious musicals reflected the satires of Kaufman and Hart as well as influences as diverse as epic theatre, theatricalism, and the experiments of Pirandello. Serious musicals of the 1940s, including those by Rodgers and Hammerstein, embraced the wartime mythologization of America reflected in the non-musical theatre by works as disparate as the plays of Thornton Wilder and commercial comedies like Life With Father (1939), while the Prince/Sondheim

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concept musicals of the 1970s borrowed from sources as diverse as Brecht, Meyerhold, Oscar Hammerstein, and the Gershwins. As popular culture, musicals are products of their cultural moment; it is simplistic to argue they are the linear outgrowth of one mind, even if that mind belonged to Oscar Hammerstein.

Historians like Gerald Mast credit Hammerstein as being the hero in the development of the serious, integrated musical and imply he operated in a vacuum. [1] According to Foster Hirsch, "The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical plays invited variation and further experiment, as the careers of the ambitious inheritors Hal Prince and Stephen Sondheim have happily demonstrated."[2] Stephen Sondheim, Hammerstein's protégé, credits his mentor with creating songs for character rather than performer: "Oscar taught me how to construct a song like a one-act play, which is what he always did, in essence, and how to use songs to strengthen character and theme rather than to provide easy breaks for the audience."[3] According to Harold Prince, Hammerstein's book for South Pacific was the inspiration for Prince's future collaboration with Sondheim: "It was right after South Pacific opened that we began meeting to talk about how we would

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[1] Gerald Mast, Can't Help Singing: The American Musical On Stage and Screen (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1987).

[2] Foster Hirsch, Harold Prince and the American Musical Theatre (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.

[3] Ibid., 20. Ironically, Sondheim's intricate rhymes often seem to reflect the work of Lorenz Hart rather than Oscar Hammerstein. On hearing a Sondheim lyric, it is often hard to focus on the character and dismiss the brilliance of the lyricist's voice. For example, the intricate lyrics to "I Feel Pretty" from West Side Story seem alien to a Puerto Rican teenager new to America.

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like to contribute to the musical theatre."[4] For Ethan Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein laid the foundation for the American musical to supercede popular culture and "confront its audience" as a work of art.[5]

Each of these historians and practitioners imply that the development of the serious musical is linear and an offshoot of Hammerstein's work. While Hammerstein's contribution to the form is unquestionable, musicals, as popular culture, are products of their time and characteristically borrow from everything. If Hammerstein's blend of romanticism and realism was influential in the 1920s, 1940s, and 1950s, these were also decades typified by the influence of American realism, and in the 1950s, by the importance of the Actor's Studio. Serious musicals of the 1930s reflect political satire, which according to Mark Fearnow, is reflected in the anarchy of the grotesque in non-musical theatre of the period.[6] The Kurt Weill musicals of the 1930s and 1940s borrow from Weill's previous work in Germany with Brecht, as well as from German expressionism, which Sondheim and Prince return to with their concept musicals of the 1970s, adding both Meyerholdian and Pirandellian theatricalism. If Sondheim is a protégé of Hammerstein, he is also a descendent of influences as diverse as Brecht, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Lorenz Hart. The development of the integrated musical, then, is not just a

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[4] Ibid., 20.

[5] Ethan Mordden, Make Believe: The Broadway Musical in the 1920s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46.

[6] For a cultural reading of non-musical theatre in the 1930s, see Mark Fearnow, The American Stage and the Great Depression: A Cultural History of the Grotesque (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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linear, textual progression from the Hammerstein model, but the result of a mélange of cultural and theatrical influences. Musicals not only involve collaboration between creators, but also eclectic, unpredictable collaborations with the non-musical theatrical community. Again, the development of the form is a genealogy of mutual influence--in effect, a sociology of theatre.

American Realism in the 1920s and the Musical

If Show Boat is generally regarded as the first serious musical, it is not accidental that it was produced in 1927. Although realism dates back to Ibsen and the last third of the nineteenth century, at least on the Continent, American realism, as a viable commercial force, begins to flower in the 1920s and was concurrent with realistic aspects of serious musicals during the same decade. Before framing Show Boat in the context of American realism of the 1920s, however, one must qualify Hammerstein's use of realism. American plays that were regarded as realistic in the 1920s tended to mix elements of European, continental realism with older, more familiar conventions of Romanticism and melodrama. Hammerstein also mixed genres with the musical. He tackled serious issues and social problems, psychologized his characters, focused on the bourgeoisie, and emphasized settings and musical leitmotifs that evoked determinism, all of which were characteristic of realism. At the same time, he borrowed freely from Romanticism, melodrama, and vaudeville to sugarcoat his serious content and social determinism. Before examining Hammerstein's eclectic technique in Show Boat, it is necessary to contextualize the musical in terms of the realistic, American non-musical of the period.

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The emergence of American realism was the result of several factors: the rise of the Independent Theatre movement in America, particularly in New York with the birth of the Provincetown Players and the Washington Square Players in 1915; the founding of the Theatre Guild in 1919, a commercial offshoot of the aforementioned Washington Square Players, and the Guild's successful Broadway productions of Ibsen, Shaw, and O'Neill, as well as other groundbreaking Continental playwrights; the emergence of Eugene O'Neill as America's most important and successful realistic playwright with the production of Beyond the Horizon in 1920;[7] and America's exposure to Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theatre through the MAT's American tours in 1923 and 1924. At the beginning of the decade, Theatre Arts, the avant-garde theatre magazine of its day, devoted the October 1920 issue to the production practices of the Moscow Art Theatre. In 1922, Richard Boleslavski and Maria Ouspenskaya, both disciples of Stanislavsky, founded the American Laboratory Theatre, where they taught Stanislavsky's system of acting. Attending the American Laboratory Theatre were Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman, and Stella Adler, who went on to revolutionize the training of the American actor.[8] That same year, producers F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest invited the Moscow Art Theatre to perform in America. The MAT arrived in 1923 and performed Tolstoy's Tsar Fyodor, Gorky's

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[7] It is perilous to classify O'Neill is a realistic playwright, since he spent much of his career, including plays he wrote in the 1920s and 1930s, experimenting with a variety of styles. Perhaps no other American playwright with the possible exception of Albee has experimented quite the same way stylistically; however, O'Neill's early reputation was established with his one acts and the Pulitzer Prize winning Beyond the Forest, which were examples of American realism.

[8] Wendy Smith, Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940 (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 19.

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Lower Depths, and Chekhov's Cherry Orchard and The Three Sisters. The tour was so successful that the company was invited to return in 1924. In all, the Moscow Art Theatre gave 380 performances in thirteen plays in twelve American cities including New York during 1923 and 1924.[9]

Stark Young, critic for the New Republic from 1921 to 1947, championed the performances of the Chekhov plays:

> He found the Chekhov "that rarest of events," a perfect combination of acting, production and playwriting. He invoked the phrase "spiritual realism," which for him implied "a selection among realistic details that can bring out the inmost spirit of the actual matter." "I saw Chekhov's art come true," he claimed, and said he experienced "the thrill that comes from a sense of truth." . . . Young's advocacy must be accounted a factor in the Russian's continuing appeal in America.[10]

Perhaps the first influential production in English that New Yorkers were exposed to was Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre production of The Three Sisters in 1926.[11]

Although Le Gallienne's Theatre, dedicated to preserving the works of Chekhov, Ibsen, and Shakespeare in repertory, was not ultimately financially successful, the impact of continental realism on American writers in the 1920s was unmistakable. While farces,

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[9] See J.L. Styan, Modern Drama in Theory and Practice I: Realism and Naturalism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 116.

[10] Ibid., 116.

[11] Ibid, 116.

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melodramas, operettas, and urban musical comedies were still commercially popular, clearly a revolution toward American realism was occurring, with productions like Beyond the Forest (1920), Anna Christie (1921), Desire Under the Elms (1924), Rain (1922), What Price Glory (1926), Broadway (1926), and Street Scene (1929).

True, many of these examples of American social realism from the 1920s also exhibited strong elements of melodrama, a combination that Oscar Hammerstein adapted to his musical libretti in the 1920s. It's important to remember that much of what we consider early American realism doesn't seem terribly realistic today. Critics William Dean Howells and Henry James had been pioneering the cause of realism since the end of the nineteenth century, long before the visits of the Moscow Art Theatre to America. In the 1879-1880 season, a play like Steele Mackaye's Hazel Kirk was considered a landmark of American realism, basically because Mackaye dispensed with the standard melodramatic villain. By the turn of the century, critic William Dean Howells had praised the earlier work of Edward Harrigan, author of the Mulligan Guard's Ball, as a pioneering attempt at realism. According to Brenda Murphy, "Howells praised Harrigan for creating ethnic types--Irish, German, Italian, and black--that rang true. But his plots were the hackneyed structures of comedy, and if his characters represented some particular ethnic type on the surface, they represented some conventional comic type at bottom."[12] Howells went as far as comparing Harrigan's reforms of melodrama with Carlo Goldoni's

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[12] Brenda Murphy, American Realism and American Drama, 1880-1940 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8..

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reforms of commedia dell'arte.[13] Early twentieth century playwrights like David Belasco, Clyde Fitch, and Edward (Ned) Sheldon managed to combine elements of realism with decidedly melodramatic plots. Sheldon is a particularly important figure, since he was a strong influence on librettist/lyricist Dorothy Donnelly, who later influenced Oscar Hammerstein.

Salvation Nell (1908) is a good example of Sheldon's mix of realism and melodrama. The plot concerned a young woman who dodges a life of sin by joining the Salvation Army. Sheldon was able to create the kind of milieu that Howells had said was necessary for a realistic play, a milieu that integrated the setting with character and action. Characters in a realistic play were the product of their environment. The settings were not just representational, but exemplified a way of life. The barroom set in Salvation Nell showed the way of life that prevents Nell from attaining respectability. In the specificity of his stage directions, Sheldon was a disciple of William Gillette, who had specified comparable detail in the famous telegraph room scene in Secret Service (1895). Here, however, the bar setting enables us to understand Nell's inability to attain respectability. We see two bartenders serving a variety of drunks, two streetwalkers trying to secure customers, a fat old Irish woman with a shawl over her head, a trio of ragged Italian immigrants trying to perform a popular song, and a constantly ringing cash register. As Brenda Murphy observes, "It is the bar itself, the milieu in which Nell exists, that is her antagonist."[14] Sheldon is psychologizing his characters by linking them to a deterministic

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[13] See "Editor's Study," Harper's Monthly 73 (July 1886): 318.

[14] Murphy, 89.

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setting. This is precisely what Oscar Hammerstein achieves in Show Boat with "Old Man River." It is this deterministic musical framework, in addition to the setting on the Mississippi, that helps us understand the helplessness of characters like Joe and Julie to struggle against their environment.

Sheldon's influence extended to the musical, most directly through his relationship with Dorothy Donnelly, whose libretti in turn influenced Hammerstein. As a playwright, Donnelly collaborated with Sheldon on The Proud Princess (1923), a romance about an oil heiress and an organ grinder, which closed out of town. Eventually, they reworked the script into a libretto for an operetta, My Princess (1927), which dealt with the same odd romantic coupling. This was the first libretto that Donnelly had written with a contemporary setting. Although the piece was not successful, the Boston Globe praised the libretto for its elements of realism: "To an extent rare in musical comedy, the situations and characters are drawn from typical American life. There is a well knit plot, sufficient to make a play without the music."[15] Lorraine Arnal McLean, Donnelly's biographer, argues that Donnelly paved the way for Hammerstein's work and set in motion the groundwork for the development of the serious musical.[16]

Donnelly's other libretti, namely those for The Student Prince (1926) and Blossom Time (1921), two of the most successful operettas of the 1920s, tended to reflect many of

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[15] Quoted in New York Times, 11 September 1927, sec. VIII, p.1,col.3.

[16] Lorraine Arnal McLean, Dorothy Donnelly: A Life in the Theatre (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1999), 83. For more on Sheldon and both his personal and professional relationship with Donnelly, see Eric Wollencroft Barnes, The Man Who Lived Twice (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 70-1.

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the romantic conventions one associates with a Sheldon play; these libretti also foreshadow the work of Hammerstein, not only in Show Boat, but in Rose Marie and The Desert Song, as well as his later libretti in collaboration with Richard Rodgers. Both Donnelly libretti are sentimentalized love stories: Blossom Time deals with Franz Schubert's unrequited love for the fictive "Mitzi," which ends with his death, while The Student Prince, based on the 1902 play, Old Heidelberg, revolves around the bittersweet love of a mittel European prince and a barmaid. Donnelly used many of the conventions that Hammerstein later developed and perfected. Like Hammerstein, her libretti always had comic relief, though critics of the time found comic characters like Lutz in The Student Prince less than hilarious and carped about her sense of humor. Like Hammerstein's libretti, the principal romance in a Donnelly libretto was usually supported by a subplot. Kathy and Prince Karl are mirrored in the relationship between Princess Marguerite and Count Tarnitz.

Despite clinging to these conventions, Donnelly added an element of realism in the unhappy endings of both operettas. She fought the Shuberts, producers of The Student Prince, who objected to the separation of the principal lovers at the end of the play. Similarly, in Blossom Time, Franz Schubert dies, his love for Mitzi unrequited. Gerald Bordman comments on the fatalism of The Student Prince ending: "The saddened but essentially rebellious lovers accept the social dictates of their world. The heroine is not discovered to have royal blood, nor is there any hint that future generations will resolve

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their woes. There is, instead, a touch of fatalism rare in pieces of the period."[17] True, Donnelly's characters tend to be one dimensional, and her plots sentimentalized and over romanticized. Her comic characters and novelty songs tend to stop the plot cold rather than develop the story or further character. It took Hammerstein to perfect the symbiosis of comedy and character, trimming unnecessary operetta and musical comedy conventions and making song, dance, and plot part of an organic whole.

According to McLean, Donnelly's influence on Hammerstein and the serious musical was considerable:

> The "touch of fatalism" that Dorothy injected into Blossom Time and The Student Prince--and almost guaranteed the latter would not graduate from script to production--paved the way for other operettas that would explore the darker side of human nature, Show Boat and Porgy and Bess, both of which demonstrate the cruel effects of slavery and racism, immediately come to mind. Once Dorothy established a precedent for confounding those who looked for comedy or "light" in light opera, the stage was set for Pal Joey, Oklahoma!, and Carousel. Even more modern works like Les Misérables, Into the Woods, Sweeney Todd, Assassins, and Miss Saigon, says William Everett, can trace their lineage to Blossom Time and The Student Prince.[18]

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[17] Gerald Bordman, American Operetta from H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 115.

[18] McLean, 171.

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If McLean's assertions are hyperbolic, they do imply a genealogy of mutual influence. One must realize that Hammerstein did not operate in a vacuum. He was thoroughly familiar with the conventions of operetta and musical comedy of his day, and certainly familiar with Donnelly's work, not to mention Sheldon's. If her great contribution to the serious musical was an element of fatalism borrowed from Sheldon's social realism mixed with romance, Hammerstein was able to combine musical theatre conventions of the day with daring subject matter, which he eventually refined by psychologizing characters, and venerating the middle class.

Three musicals from 1926-1928 embraced aspects of realism, but only one, Show Boat, was successful, and that success was at least in part due to its mixing pioneering subject matter with traditional operetta and musical comedy conventions of the time. Although episodic in structure, Show Boat borrows several elements from realism. Basically, the story revolves around Magnolia and her quest for independence. By the play's end, she has survived the desertion of Ravenal, her husband, has raised her daughter, Kim, and has simultaneously maneuvered a career as a Broadway star. Hammerstein's libretto spends much of its time exploring the emergence and growth of the independent woman, which is reinforced at the end of the play by Kim's emergence as a 1920s flapper and a star in her own right. Magnolia and Kim's successful fight for freedom and independence is contrasted with the luckless mulatta, Julie, who is left destitute and alcoholic. Women's fight for equality and independence can be dated back to Ibsen in terms of realism. At the same time, the issue is reflective of a decade in which women won the right to vote.

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In terms of realism, Hammerstein manages to psychologize several of the principals. Parthy and Andy act as foil to Ravenal and Magnolia. The irresponsible Ravenal is mirrored in the unreliably ebullient Captain Andy, while the prim, schoolmarmish Parthy, New England to the core, instills the drive and desire in Magnolia to succeed at her career. According to Ann Douglas, the conflict between the New England Victorian matriarch, who exhibited "that atavistic yearning for a bad time if a bad time is possible," and the New York modern, who championed the "lighthearted, streetwise, and more or less secular popular and mass arts as America's chosen means of self expression" was endemic to the decade.[19] Although no "New York moderns" exist in Show Boat, Ravenal and Andy bear more than passing resemblance to Douglas' description:

> [They] grasp the supremacy that mass culture would acquire, to realize that, in the late capitalist or consumer society America was becoming, there might not be distinct classes as Marx had explicated them in his studies of early capitalism a half century earlier; instead of a clear distinction or face-off between the oppressor and the oppressed, there might be only a handy-dandy exchange between what the metropolitans termed "suckers and racketeers."[20]

Neither Andy nor Parthy is a model of correct behavior. Both exhibit undesirable

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[19] Ann Douglas, Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s (New York: Noonday Press, 1995), 21.

[20] Ibid., 20.

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extremes. Andy is irresponsible; Parthy, shrewish. Ravenal's love for the high life, to which Andy is more than sympathetic, is blasphemy to Parthy's New England Victorianism; yet it is Magnolia who manages to negotiate a middle road between them.

The heart of Show Boat's plot, of course, centers around racism, most notably in the bloodletting scene, where Steve swallows a drop of Julie's blood to prevent their being banished from the show boat on charges of miscegenation. The unjust treatment of African Americans borrows from realistic folk plays of the era, including Paul Green's In Abraham's Bosom (1926) and Dubose and Dorothy Heyward's Porgy (1927), the latter of which opened just three months prior to the Kern/Hammerstein musical. Both plays seemed to have influenced Show Boat. Green and the Heywards advance the kind of work Sheldon tried to accomplish in terms of a deterministic milieu. Both plays, not unlike O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms (1924) and The Emperor Jones (1920), help define character through setting.

In Abraham's Bosom, Green not only psychologizes his protagonist, Abe, but represents, through the setting, the deterministic environment that has produced Abe. Abe is torn between fighting to improve the conditions of his fellow African Americans and his own tendency to self destruct because he cannot curb his sense of injustice at the indignities his people have suffered at the hands of white men. According to Brenda Murphy, the indoor scenes "represent the condition of his people within the white man's society he is fighting so hard to change," while the outdoor, forest scenes represent the more primitive, mythic forces inside Abe.[21]

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[21] Murphy, 140.

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The non-musical Porgy, to an even greater extent, combines a regionalist setting with the sense of determinism demanded by advocates of American realism. As the curtain rises, the audience sees Catfish Row in all its squalor, but the Heywards' stage directions specify that at first, the cast is speaking only in Gullah. Gradually, the African words are omitted, and the audience is drawn into this strange culture being presented onstage. This is an advance over the realistic play's use of local color; here, the authors, by distancing the audience at the beginning, manage to finally make them feel like "privileged initiates," rather than a privileged group slumming as they watch an alien culture.[22] As Murphy argues, "removing the mediating presence of the dominant culture from between the audience and the stage, the playwrights took a step toward a fuller illusion of reality in representing regional culture."[23]

Both Abraham's Bosom and Porgy offered deterministic settings against which the protagonists were forced to struggle. Oddly, Kern and Hammerstein were able to achieve a similar fatalism through the score to Show Boat, which, like the settings for the non-musical plays, established Show Boat's deterministic milieu. Songs like "Misery's Comin' Round" and particularly the thematic "Old Man River" were reprised throughout Show Boat. Both are anthems to the inexorable determinism of life on the Mississippi.[24]

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[22] Ibid., 142.

[23] Ibid., 142-43.

[24] On the other hand, Kern also appropriated the leitmotif from opera. Each character had his own theme. When Vallon, the sheriff arrives in the opening scene to threaten Julie's place on the show boat, his motif is reminiscent of the kind of silent movie music written for the villain. This is characteristic of melodrama, not realism.

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Perhaps most surprising is the contribution of designer Joseph Urban, who was able to inject a deterministic milieu through his realistic sets that collaborated with deterministic aspects of the Kern/Hammerstein score, such as the use of leitmotifs, "Misery's Comin' Around," and "Old Man River." Ironically, Urban's designs before Show Boat were part of the New Stagecraft that was revolutionizing the New York theatre. His distinguished sets for the Ziegfeld Follies of 1915 were concurrent with Robert Edmund Jones' groundbreaking design for The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife (1915), directed by Harley Granville Barker. Both Jones and Urban were among the first to apply elements of the New Stagecraft to the commercial Broadway theatre. During the 1920s, Robert Edmund Jones designed landmark sets for Richard III (1920), Macbeth (1921), and Hamlet (1922), all for producer Arthur Hopkins; these designs incorporated the theories of Craig and Appia and altered ideas about the necessity for pictorial illusion. Urban's work from 1915 to 1927 was in keeping with this design revolution, but rather than the imaginative stylizations and pointillist work he had created for the Follies, Urban turned to a heightened *verismo* style with Show Boat,[25] which provided Hammerstein and Kern with a deterministic milieu in which to frame story and songs.

The designs, uncharacteristically following pictorial illusionism, emanated from the realistic/melodramatic plays of David Belasco, Clyde Fitch, and Ned Sheldon, where a set in effect became the environmental antagonist, a force against which the characters were destined to struggle. Act one featured a bustling onstage levee, which eventually served

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[25] Even in Sally (1920), a book musical, Urban was able to subvert traditional *verismo* musical theatre design; the show highlighted a "Butterfly Ballet," which allowed Urban to go as far as his imagination would take him.

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as dock for the *Cotton Blossom*. In a later scene, the auditorium for the show boat revealed spectators on its main floor and balconies as they were engrossed by an onstage performance. During the second act, Urban recreated the magic of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.[26] These are settings that frame the presentational numbers performed on the show boat and at the world's fair. Other settings, like the boarding house in Chicago, stress deterministic environment. One sees the poverty and desperation Magnolia must overcome when we find her in a cheap rooming house as she learns of Ravenal's desertion. And throughout the play, the dock on the levee returns, as Joe and the stevedores sing their anthem to determinism, "Old Man River."

Show Boat's theme of miscegenation was timely during this decade of the Harlem Renaissance. For Ann Douglas, the 1920s saw the collaboration of whites and African Americans in an ethnically mixed society in New York that brought African American art and culture into the mainstream. The same was not true elsewhere in America. Indeed, based on the public outcry against O'Neill's All God's Chillun' Got Wings (1924) and its sensationalistic reception, one wonders how prevalent an ethnically mixed society was in New York. The controversial O'Neill drama generated much publicity over an interracial kiss. Actually, a white actress, Mary Blair, kissed an African-American actor, Paul Robeson, on the hand; nonetheless, the kiss provoked intense news coverage and heavy box office traffic. The miscegenation scene in Show Boat was somewhat more tame, however, since Julie, the mulatta, was played by white actress, Helen Morgan.

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[26] Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, 434. Urban's heart must have rested with the New Stagecraft. He abandoned the heightened *verismo* of Show Boat in his designs for the later Ziegfeld's book musicals.

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Although serious in content, Show Boat trimmed some of the realism from Edna Ferber's source novel. Julie is no longer a prostitute; she becomes an alcoholic saloon singer deserted by her husband. Many of the characters who had died or disappeared throughout Ferber's epic tale were illogically reunited and appeared at the musical's happy ending. As Oscar Wilde's Miss Prism pontificates, "The good end happily, the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means."[27] Prism could well be writing about an Oscar Hammerstein libretto. In Show Boat, Hammerstein had attempted a serious work with realistic content, despite clinging to tried and true Romantic conventions to tell his story. The relationship of Magnolia and Ravenal is mirrored in two subplots. One revolves around the squabbling, comic dancers Frank and Ellie, while the other focuses on the antagonism between Captain Andy and Parthy. This episodic structure was typical of Hammerstein's libretti for the next thirty years. Through mirroring subplots, Hammerstein is able to mix genres, supplying comic relief to serious, at times tragic, situations. In addition to no unity of action, Hammerstein dispenses with unity of time and place, providing his designer with opportunities for exotic settings and colorful costumes, including a Mississippi showboat at the turn of the century and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Despite Show Boat's serious subject matter, Hammerstein softened the harshness of the story with tried and true theatrical conventions. He cast Tess Gardella, an Italian actress and the original Aunt Jemima, to play Queenie in blackface, a popular theatrical convention of the period that few would have questioned. Period songs, included to

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[27] Oscar Wilde, The Importance Of Being Earnest (New York: Avon, 1965), 58.

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establish an authentic nostalgia, were blended with Kern's magnificent score to frame the story in what is, in effect, a backstager, a popular musical comedy convention of the 1920s.[28] By definition, a backstager must be theatricalist. Presentational numbers are not realistic. A surprising number of songs in the score exist as part of this show-within-a-show convention, performed, at least in part, to entertain and divert audiences: "*Cotton Blossom*," "Life Upon the Wicked Stage," the reprise of "Can't Help Loving That Man," "I Might Fall Back On You," "Bill," as well as the previously mentioned "Goodby My Lady Love" and "After the Ball." The finales of each act adhere strictly to both operetta and musical comedy convention of the day by reprising several songs and linking the reprises with a recitative that includes new musical and lyrical material related to the plot.[29]

Curiously, Show Boat was one of several musicals between 1927 and 1928 that

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[28] The 1920s was the decade of the backstage musical, beginning with Irene (1919) and ending with Sweet Adeline (1929). Often musicals were fashioned around the title character, a woman who journeys from rags to riches and becomes a musical theatre star. Marilyn Miller made something of a specialty of the convention, with starring vehicles like Sally (1920), Sunny (1925), and Rosalie (1927).

[29] If I seem hazy about the differences in convention between operetta and musical comedy, it is deliberate. Audiences of the day made little distinction between the two. Even Sigmund Romberg referred to his operettas as musical comedies: "You will notice today that there are types of musical comedies which flop, in the parlance of the theatre. On the other hand, you will find one here and there that plays for a seemingly endless time to capacity houses. The latter, if you will observe, is usually the musical comedy which leans toward the operatic rather than the jazz type." See Bordman, American Operetta, 116.

True, musical comedy did employ more of a jazz based score than the more European operetta, but those distinctions blur as well. Romberg himself included jazzy numbers in his operetta scores and wrote for Al Jolson. Also the musical structure of the finalettos in both musical comedy and operetta were almost identical. See my introduction for more on the problems of differentiating musical comedy and operetta..

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dealt with race relations. A year earlier, Arthur Hopkins produced an uncompromising work that examined relations between blacks and whites and tackled the theme of miscegenation. Deep River (1926) was written by Laurence Stallings, co-author with Maxwell Anderson of What Price Glory, a notable example of American realism in the 1920s. Set in New Orleans in 1835, Deep River involves Muguette, a quadroon who becomes mistress to Brusard, a Creole who has murdered three men and thrown over his former mistress. Muguette falls in love with Hazard, a visiting Kentuckian, whose brother is in turn murdered by Brusard. Muguette runs off to engage in a voodoo seance in the Place Congo to pray for Hazard's love. Finally, Hazard kills Brusard in a duel, but returns to Kentucky, leaving Muguette in New Orleans, where she is prey to another unscrupulous Creole suitor.

Whereas Show Boat told a serious story within the conventions of epic Romantic theatre, operetta, and even conventional musical comedy, Stallings' libretto was strewn with complex character relationships and devoid of comic relief or subplot. The voodoo scene at the Place Congo was performed with virtually no dialogue and probably was difficult for audiences of the time to assimilate, whereas a comparable scene from Show Boat, the "In Dahomey" number, was performed at the Chicago World's Fair amid colorful sets and Zulu costumes which, at best, patronized the African-American performers who sang and danced the song. Franke Harling, who had previously written a rather highbrow version of Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes" commissioned by the Chicago Opera, wrote the music for Deep River. Like the libretto, the score was uncompromising in its integrity and apparently quite beautiful. But without a degree of pandering to

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musical comedy conventions of the day, producer Hopkins was unable to find an audience for Deep River. Despite excellent reviews from Burns Mantle, among others, the musical play closed within four weeks. Daring in its break from musical theatre conventions, Deep River was neither fish nor fowl to audiences of the period.[30]

Before one jumps to the conclusion that the development of the serious musical involved an ever upward linear progression, however, it is important to study Golden Dawn (1927), a commercial success that was later turned into a Hollywood musical, which opened less than a month before Show Boat. Like Show Boat, Golden Dawn had book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, although Otto Harbach co-authored the libretto. Unlike Show Boat, it reads as if it predated Uncle Tom's Cabin. Produced by Arthur Hammerstein and co-directed by Reginald Hammerstein, Golden Dawn featured a score by Emmerich Kalman, Herbert Stothart, and Robert Stolz, and sets by Joseph Urban. This Viennese-flavored operetta, incongruously set in Dutch East Africa, seems, incredibly enough, to be the musical stepsister to O'Neill's The Emperor Jones (1920), although, in this case, Brutus Jones has been turned into a voluptuous blonde girl in a sari. Dawn, a blonde beauty, has been raised in her African village to believe she is a native Princess; her whiteness, a gift from the Gods. She falls in love with Steve Allen, a British prisoner of war, but their romance runs into grave difficulty when the evil black overseer, Shep Keyes, does everything in his power to keep Dawn for himself. When Dawn rejects Keyes, he turns the village against her, blaming her for a drought that has destroyed the crops. Keyes menaces Dawn in "The Whip Song," which electrified audiences in 1927 as the evil

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[30] See Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, 417.

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black brute cracked his whip and threatened her with unspeakable sexual sadism. He is finally silenced when the village chieftain admits that Dawn is of European parentage and not black after all. Fearing his comeuppance, Keyes shrieks "I's afraid! I's afraid!" as he's led off for punishment.[31]

If this were not preposterous enough, Keyes was played by Robert Chisholm, a white actor in blackface. The African villagers also performed in blackface, while the score by Kalman and Stothart was basically in the style of a Viennese operetta. Writing of the film version, Richard Barrios marvels at its racism and bad taste:

> Warners' cast for *Golden Dawn* was as bizarre an assemblage as any in history. Poor Vivienne Segal, forced to wear a blonde wig, skimpy sarong, and leopard skin while trilling a gay waltz called "My Bwana"; . . .Alice Gentle as Dawn's vindictive mother Mooda [actually her African stepmother]. . .with her fervent rendition of "Africa Smiles No More"; . . .and above all, Noah Beery. Perhaps Otto Harbach saw *The Emperor Jones*, ate heavily, fell asleep, and had unthinkably bad dreams. Little else can account for Beery's role and performance as Shep Keyes, the self-crowned tyrant who terrorizes the Africans, antagonizes the British, and pants for Dawn. Wearing badly applied dark makeup, sporting a Kingfish-like accent, stomping about and cracking his whip as he growls the sadomasochistic "Whip Song"--he is utterly spectacular, in a way as to make orthodox notions of bad acting, even in operetta, wilt in

[31] Ibid., 433.

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comparison.[32]

Barrios seems to blame Harbach for the eccentric inanity of the libretto, but Oscar Hammerstein is billed as co-librettist. Golden Dawn certainly complies with musical conventions of Viennese operetta, but it is pure melodrama and determinedly racist. It is difficult to fathom how Hammerstein's libretti and lyrics, not to mention his take on racism, could vary so widely in two shows produced within a month of each other. Perhaps the difference in approach is the result of his collaboration with Harbach on the libretto for Golden Dawn, although Hammerstein alone is responsible for the racist lyrics to the "Whip Song." Perhaps, a good deal of the disparity is the result of the contribution to Show Boat of its producer, Florenz Ziegfeld, a man of impeccable taste. In any case, the two musicals, following on each other's heels, should help dispel the myth that one text spawns another, even from the same author.

Of the musicals of the 1930s, perhaps Porgy and Bess comes closest to Show Boat in negotiating the conventions of realistic theatre and melodrama and making some sort of linear progression. Of the serious musicals of the 1930s, it is definitely in the Hammerstein mold but also atypical. If Porgy smacks even more heavily of realism than Show Boat, the musical conventions it follows are not those of operetta, but of even more melodramatic grand opera. Originally, Dubose Heyward had wanted to musicalize his play, Porgy. Al Jolson had approached him about playing the title character in blackface and wanted Jerome Kern to write the score. Heyward, badly in need of money,

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[32] Richard Barrios, A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Film Musical (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 302-303.

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nevertheless clung to his artistic integrity and managed to interest George Gershwin in musicalizing the story without Jolson's participation. Porgy and Bess has often been called an American folk opera. Certainly, it derives from non-musical black folk plays of the time, including the previously mentioned In Abraham's Bosom by Paul Green, a realistic look at the troubled life of the black son of a mixed marriage; The Field God (1927), also by Green; and Dubose and Dorothy Heyward's non-musical, Porgy, which follows much the same storyline as the musical. The genre would later include DuBose Heyward's gritty Mamba's Daughters (1939), an Ethel Waters vehicle, which told the grim tale of Hagar, a generous hearted black woman, who endures imprisonment, abuse, and betrayal to finally sacrifice herself to protect her daughter.

The Gershwins, in Porgy and Bess, use music to create local color and atmosphere, much as Hammerstein and Kern did with "Old Man River" in Show Boat. The opening jazz montage introduces the audience to varied eccentric denizens of Catfish Row, until a familiar figure appears: a mother holding an infant while she sings the quietly empathetic lullabye, "Summertime." Later in the play, afraid that Porgy will not be released from jail, Bess succumbs to Sportin' Life's promises of "happy dust" and a new life in "There's A Boat That's Leavin' Soon For New York," while the show ends with the crippled Porgy ready to ride his goat cart from South Carolina to New York to find Bess as he sings the gallantly foolish "I'm On My Way." Still, as glorious as the score is, there is no aria as deterministic as "Old Man River."

Director Rouben Mamoulian, who had staged the non-musical Porgy eight years earlier, used the gritty, poverty stricken Catfish Row setting to establish the impossible

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social and economic adversary with which the characters were forced to grapple. The setting of the grimy courtyard of Catfish Row, the naturalistic characters caught in a shanty during a South Carolina hurricane, the onstage rape of Bess as she's stranded at the picnic, and the murder of Crown were far more realistic than anything the musical had yet attempted. Rather than clinging to the conventions of music hall, vaudeville, or operetta, however, the creative team consciously clothed the story in grand opera conventions. The authors substituted recitative for spoken dialogue, although in subsequent productions the recitative has become spoken dialogue, thus making Porgy closer to a musical play than a grand opera. The Gershwins wrestled with conventions from grand opera and those from the musical theatre; the score combined Gershwin songs that could be extrapolated with popular success with more obscure, extended passages suitable to opera. As a result, the original production pleased neither opera lovers or theatregoers, although the theatre critics were much kinder than the music critics on opening night. The original production ran 124 performances, lost its $50,000 investment, and proved to be the last musical play George Gershwin would compose for Broadway.

The Serious Musical in the 1930s:

Deviating from the Hammerstein Model

Certainly, realism blossomed in the non-musical theatre during the 1930s. This was the period of the Group Theatre, the flowering of Clifford Odets and American

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realism, and the decade of the WPA. But the serious musical is not a linear progression from the Hammerstein model. If Hammerstein was the dominant force behind the book musical in the 1920s, he spent the 1930s in virtual hibernation, licking his wounds from a long string of failures.[33] Rather than moving forward in a linear fashion, the "serious musicals" of the 1930s were characterized by experiments with the form, possibly because many of the dominant musical theatre writers of the decade were successful satirists and farceurs in the non-musical theatre. It was Strike Up the Band, an unsuccessful musical that closed out of town in 1927 but was remounted to great acclaim in 1930, that ushered in a decade of political musicals, whose experimental form not only borrowed but extended many of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta conventions, but whose content was inspired by the theatrical satirists of the day as well as the anxieties inherent in a decade that began with the Great Depression, continued with the rise of European fascism, and ended with a world at war.

The changing horizon of expectations for musical theatre audiences from realism mixed with romanticism and melodrama in the 1920s to political satire in the 1930s is a reflection of trends in both the non-musical theatre and the cultural zeitgeist. In The American Stage and the Great Depression, Mark Fearnow argues that farce and satire in the non-musical afforded depression audiences the opportunity to rebel against authority: "The physical and verbal attacks upon authority figures that the protagonists are allowed to enjoy in these plays certainly offered depression audiences considerable Freudian

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[33] In fairness, Hammerstein had a degree of success early in the decade with operettas like The Cat and the Fiddle and Music in the Air; but after those musicals, virtually everything he touched, until Oklahoma!, was a failure.

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pleasure and contributed to making farce the leading form in the commercial theatre."[34] The anarchy provoked by comics like the Marx Brothers was a strong statement of freedom in a decade that increasingly had to deal with the growth of fascism in Europe. If Hammerstein encouraged audiences to mythologize America and to bond in a community, the zeitgeist of the 1930s was to laugh at the chaos and danger constantly lurking around the corner. The subject matter was certainly serious, but farce and satire usually deal with serious issues. The treatment, however, was more satiric than realistic and often involved fantasy rather than realism. As Albert Bermel notes, "Farce deals with the unreal, with the worst one can dream or dread. Farce is cruel, often brutal, even murderous."[35] Many of the musicals of the period were political satires with farcical elements.

Fearnow's argument about the dangerous elements of farce can well be applied to the musical:

> Eric Bentley has pointed out the vast possibilities of farce to enact aggression against convention. . . . With its rapid pace and surprising turnabouts, farce has the greatest potential of any form to "capture" chaos in an aesthetic object. Farce opens the door to the grotesque when it places characters in perilous situations (threatened with discovery, injury, or even death) that exist in the context of a ridiculous world. Thus, farce leads the audience to laugh at the character's persistent misfortunes and suffering, the comic life preserved by the peculiar dreamlike quality of the

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[34] Fearnow, 130.

[35] Albert Bermel, Farce (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 21.

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> action. This "dream contract" allows the audience to laugh at events that, were they to occur in a melodrama, would provoke empathy and commiseration.[36]

For Fearnow, Hellzappopin (1938), a non-integrated musical revue, has a serious undertone; it furnishes an evening of attacks on authority that validates Eric Bentley's notion that farce is "hostility enjoying itself."[37] The opening sequence highlights a filmed newsreel with Hitler speaking in Yiddish dialect, Mussolini in heavy Negro dialect, and Roosevelt talking gibberish. Sirens, cannons, and guns constantly erupt, while workmen, supposedly making repairs, climb over the seats of audience members, simultaneously terrorizing them and eliciting their laughter. Here, as Fearnow stresses, "every violence was possible without risk. Beatings, murder, suicide, attacks on every kind of authority were carried out in a context of fun."[38] The context of the fun was often metatheatrical and Pirandellian, but the subversion of authority was constant. Musicals like I'd Rather Be Right (1937), Let 'Em Eat Cake (1933), and Leave It To Me (1938), politically satirical and topical in subject matter, similarly rely on elements of fantasy rather than realism to express a nightmare vision of greed, governmental corruption, bureaucracy, and war.

The dominant playwrights of the decade were George S. Kaufman, Moss Hart, and Morrie Ryskind, each successful as a writer of non-musical satire. The decade featured

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[36] Fearnow, 129.

[37] Eric Bentley, Life of the Drama, (New York: Atheneum, 1964), 245.

[38] Fearnow, 145.

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several major musical satires that commented on politics and that were motivated by plot, rather than the revue format: Strike Up The Band (1928; second version in 1930), Of Thee I Sing (1931), Face the Music (1932), Let 'Em Eat Cake (1933), I'd Rather Be Right (1937), and Leave It To Me (1938). With the exception of Let 'Em Eat Cake, a sequel to Of Thee I Sing, all were successful. And, with the exception of Leave It To Me, which featured a libretto by Sam and Bella Spewack, all were written by Kaufman, Hart, and/or Ryskind. Indeed, the common denominator seems to be George S. Kaufman, who either directed or co-wrote each of the shows with either Moss Hart or Ryskind.

It is indisputable that Kaufman, Ryskind, Moss Hart, the Gershwins, and Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart experimented radically with the musical theatre conventions of the day. Whereas Hammerstein's serious musicals of the 1920s had evolved from established Viennese operetta conventions, the musical satires of the 1930s derived from the French operetta of Offenbach and more clearly from the work of Gilbert and Sullivan. Ira Gershwin, Lorenz Hart, and Kaufman were all enormous fans of William Gilbert and their admiration was clear in the lyrics and libretti they fashioned for these pieces. Just as Hammerstein had presented realistic subject matter through accepted musical theatre conventions, the authors of these political satires filtered their attacks on fascism, big business, unemployment, and bungling governmental bureaucracy through farce. Gilbert and Sullivan operetta conventions including a more elongated musical structure than the thirty-two bar form, as well as the insertion of standard AABA songs capable of making the hit parade. Kaufman, Ryskind, and Moss Hart, like Hammerstein, also diluted their serious social messages, but whereas Hammerstein made his brand of liberal, social realism

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palatable to commercial audiences by mixing it with romantic and melodramatic conventions, Kaufman, Ryskind, and Hart diluted their social realism through conventions of vaudeville and burlesque.

Kaufman established his reputation in non-musical theatre during the 1920s. As a satirist, he was in good theatrical company: Maurine Watkins' Chicago (1926), Hecht and MacArthur's Front Page (which Kaufman directed), and Preston Sturges' adult fairy tale, Strictly Dishonorable (1929) were three of the biggest successes of the decade. Both Chicago and The Front Page not only satirized the cult of celebrity and the newspaper business, respectively, but also included scenes of great pathos. Mark Fearnow writes of the peculiar flowering of satire and of American tragicomedy during the period:

> For many people of that moment, the tragicomic feeling experienced in a theatre served as a satisfying metaphor for the position of their culture: torn between an agricultural past and a technological future, suffering from a sense of dislocation and confusion, threatened by wars that they feared could wipe out civilization as they knew it--all of this encased within and mixed together with an incongruous, hardy optimism. The doubleness and self-contradiction of these comedies gave a form to vague feelings, and the pleasure that people felt in recognizing this "reality" onstage led to their popularity; the plays symbolized in their uneasy form the culture's sense of hanging between possibilities of a glorious technological future and a dehumanizing chaos of social collapse and world war.[39]

[39] Fearnow, 54.

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These works of increasingly mixed genre criticized the status quo, but in no sense constituted a plea for revolution:

> Although American "Broadway" playwrights of the thirties often presented criticism of American social life and culture, they did not set out to overthrow it. These were commercial artists, interested in commercial success, who--in most cases--hoped to present "significant" ideas to a mass audience within the form they knew best. In this mixture of "theme" and entertainment, an unintentional, commercial grotesque emerged on Broadway.[40]

It was this climate that fostered the success of Kaufman, who drew his satire from current events, politics, big business, fascism, and the world of show business. Though ironic and topical, Kaufman was usually careful to temper his acerbity so as not to offend the commercial audiences on which his success relied. At the same time, he had a strong distaste for melodrama, romance, and sentimentality; indeed, he could not have been more different from Oscar Hammerstein.

Kaufman and Hart dominated the commercial musical theatre of the 1930s, just as they dominated the non-musical theatre. Prior to working with Hart, Kaufman collaborated with Morrie Ryskind on the libretto for Strike Up The Band. The plot dealt with politics, American capitalism, and war mongering. During its second incarnation, Kaufman softened the social weight of his message. Rather than encouraging a World War over Swiss cheese, Fletcher, the American businessman/fascist urges war over Swiss

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[40] Ibid., 54.

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chocolate. To make the social commentary more palatable, the whole story is revealed as a dream by the final curtain. The great comic team of Clark and McCullough were brought in as stars for the 1930 production, which further added to the piece's commercial appeal.

The score for Strike Up the Band was the work of the brothers Gershwin. Ira Gershwin, along with Lorenz Hart and Kaufman, was a great admirer of Gilbert and Sullivan, and the musical conventions of the Savoyards were very much characteristic of the political musicals of the 1930s. Whereas Oscar Hammerstein had been reared on Viennese operetta and contributed the libretti and/or lyrics for some of the most successful American operettas based on the Viennese model (The Desert Song, Rose Marie, The New Moon, to name but three), the Gershwins and Hart modeled their satirical musicals after the work of Gilbert and Sullivan, which, in turn, borrowed from Offenbach's French operettas of the 1860s.

Both French and English operetta models featured music that was melodic, representative of the popular music of the day, filled with variety, and satirical. Librettists Meilhac and Halévy, in France, as well as Gilbert, in England, foregrounded topsy-turvy plots, ingenious rhymes, witty lyrics, and peculiar, even bizarre characters. The difference between Offenbach's librettos and those of Gilbert was mostly due to the somewhat nationalistic prejudices of audiences: the French were eager for bawdy, sometimes vulgar situations and jokes, whereas the English were considerably more subdued. The Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were fashioned to attract a considerably more prim, Victorian audience. Richard Traubner quotes a 1906 speech that Gilbert made explaining the

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difference between the Offenbach model and his own:

> When Sullivan and I began to collaborate, English comic opera had practically ceased to exist. Such musical entertainments as held the stage were adaptations of the crapulous plots of the operas of Offenbach, Audran and Lecocq. The plots had generally been bowdlerized out of intelligibility, and when they had not been subjected to this treatment they were frankly improper; whereas the ladies' dresses suggested that the management had gone on the principle of doing a little and doing it well. We set out with the determination to prove that these elements were not essential to the success of humorous opera. We resolved that our plots, however ridiculous, should be coherent, that our dialogue should be void of offence; on artistic principles, no man should play a woman's part and no woman a man's. Finally, we agreed that no lady of the company should be required to wear a dress that she could not wear with absolute propriety at a private fancy ball; and I believe I may say that we proved our case.[41]

Whereas Viennese operettas tended to have illogical plots, Gilbert's plots (like those of the Offenbach libretti) were coherent in their own topsy-turvydom. The settings for Viennese operetta tended to be exotic and glamorous; those for Gilbert's libretti often echoed the England of his day. Even when the team grew more exotic in The Mikado, an effort was ostensibly made to capture Japanese culture accurately and truly, although

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[41] Richard Traubner, Operetta (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 155.

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ironically, over a hundred years later, contemporary critics and scholars tend to regard these efforts at cultural accuracy as not only erroneous, but also patronizing and insulting.

The George and Ira Gershwin scores for Strike Up The Band, Of Thee I Sing, and Let 'Em Eat Cake and the Rodgers and Hart score for I'd Rather Be Right were each heavily influenced by Gilbert and Sullivan. If the Savoyard scores inevitably included catchy Victorian music hall numbers in their scores, Strike Up The Band included several conventional songs in the thirty-two bar format that went on to hit parade status, including the title song, "The Man I Love," and "I've Got A Crush On You." Musically, however, Gershwin's score was more sophisticated than the musicals and operettas to which New York theatregoers had grown accustomed. Along with brassy, musical comedy tunes, Gershwin experimented with the standard AABA format, extending the musical line to include choral numbers which commented on the action. Although extended finalettos were well within the operetta convention and had been used by Kern in Show Boat, the Gershwins developed and extended the musical structure, so the songs became ironic choral commentary, probably influenced by Brecht's use of the chorus in his collaborations with Kurt Weill.

While the Gershwins experimented with musical conventions of the time and used the chorus as ironic commentary, Kaufman and his collaborators fashioned libretti inspired by topsy-turvydom that dealt with serious political and social issues like fascism, capitalism, unemployment, and political corruption, until that time the province of non-musical theatre in America. The musical satires of Kaufman, Ryskind, and the Gershwins would be echoed by E.Y. Harburg's satirical musicals, including Hooray for What (1938).

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a political spoof on the armaments race, Finian's Rainbow (1947), a satire on racism, and Flahooley (1951), a satire on McCarthyism, as well as musicals like Irving Berlin's Call Me, Madam (1950), Li'l Abner (1956), and the Abe Burrows/Frank Loesser How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying (1961). The altering of standard musical theatre conventions by the innovative use of the chorus commenting on the action and characters, however, was not replicated until the Brechtian irony of the Sondheim/Prince concept musicals of the 1970s.[42]

Of Thee I Sing was even more successful than Strike Up the Band. Here Kaufman and Ryskind limited their social commentary to politics and good naturedly spoofed American political institutions. Again, the seriousness of the message was lightened by not stooping to personal political attacks; Wintergreen, the presidential candidate, runs on a campaign celebrating love and kissing babies, while Alexander Throttlebottom, the vice president, is all but invisible to his colleagues. The social commentary earned the librettists the first Pulitzer Prize accorded to a musical; nevertheless, the score followed many of the conventions of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, again with longer, complex extended ensembles and finalettos. According to Richard Traubner, Diana Devereaux, the jilted winner of the beauty contest, "functions as a modern Broadway equivalent of the Katisha-type spinsters in Gilbert and Sullivan."[43] To guarantee hit parade status, the Gershwins included more conventional thirty-two bar tunes like the title song, "Who

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[42] An exception is the innovative Allegro (1947), which uses a Greek chorus to comment on the action and characters, though without the same humor and irony that Kaufman, Ryskind, and the Gershwins were able to muster.

[43] Traubner, 415.

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Cares," and "Love Is Sweeping the Country." The satire was also softened by the antics of the veteran milquetoast comic Victor Moore as Throttlebottom.

The format continued. Kaufman directed Moss Hart's book for Face The Music, with an Irving Berlin score. The libretto details the story of Mrs. Martin Van Buren Meshbesher, who finances a musical show through the political graft and double dealing of her policeman husband. The problems of the nouveau riche Meshbeshers sardonically commented on the scandal-ridden Tammany Hall administration of Mayor Jimmy Walker. Let 'Em Eat Cake, produced the next year, was the last political musical Kaufman worked on with the Gershwins. In this sequel to Of Thee I Sing, Wintergreen becomes a blue shirted Fascist in the Kaufman/Ryskind libretto. Losing his reelection, Wintergreen decides to overthrow the American government. His wife, Mary, makes blue shirts for his followers and saves Throttlebottom from the guillotine. Finally, the coup d'état is settled by a baseball game between the Supreme Court and the League of Nations. Here, the standard conventions of the musical are pushed too far. The subject matter is acrid and bitter; the targets more numerous and specific than the good natured Of Thee I Sing. Audiences confronted by the cost of unemployment, economic peril, and encroaching fascism were not assuaged by an unconventional score and a dearth of unfamiliar musical theatre conventions. The show was a failure.

Despite his celebrated observation that satire is what closes on Saturday night, Kaufman nevertheless persisted with the genre he had done so much to develop, this time with Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart. I'd Rather Be Right was a political satire with a specific target, FDR, who became the first incumbent American President to be the subject

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of a book musical. The plot hinges around a young man who must await a pay raise to marry his sweetheart. His only hope is if Roosevelt balances the budget. FDR appears to the hero in a dream, spends the remainder of the evening giving fireside chats and trying to balance the budget, and eventually fails. The authors relied heavily on the conventions of vaudeville and burlesque, and again, managed to leaven the satirical content by casting the beloved song and dance star George M. Cohan as FDR. Hart's lyrics were, like Ira Gershwin's, heavily reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan patter songs and choral numbers.[44]

The final musical satire of the decade, not surprisingly, was produced in 1938. By 1940, when it embarked on a national tour, it had become out of date. Leave It To Me was the work of Sam and Bella Spewack and Cole Porter. Based on their non-musical play, Clear All Wires, the libretto chronicled the misadventures of Alonzo "Stinky" Goodhue, a mild-mannered American businessman whose wife's generous contributions to Roosevelt's reelection campaign is rewarded by his appointment as ambassador to Russia. American through and through, Goodhue longs to return to the United States and does his best to be recalled. He shoots a revolutionary in Red Square and kicks the Nazi ambassador to the Kremlin. Eventually, Goodhue enthusiastically supports a plea for world peace, whereupon the Allied Powers do everything they can to relieve him of his ambassadorial post.

Porter's score relied on conventional thirty-two bar show tunes, including hits like

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[44] Cohan, who would have preferred to write his own songs, had previously sang Rodgers and Hart tunes in The Phantom President, a celluloid political satire, in 1933. He was aware of Gilbert's influence on Hart and sarcastically referred to the songwriting team as Gilbert and Sullivan. See Traubner, 400.

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"My Heart Belongs To Daddy," "Get Out of Town," and "Most Gentlemen Don't Like Love." Musically, the piece was more Tin Pan Alley than Gilbert and Sullivan. Unlike the Kaufman and Hart, Gershwin, and Rodgers and Hart satires, Leave It To Me was more vaudeville than political satire; certainly, it bore little resemblance to Gilbert and Sullivan. The show starred Sophie Tucker and the beloved Victor Moore, and introduced Mary Martin to Broadway in a splashy strip tease debut. Its content, however, dated rapidly. When Leave It To Me opened, America was on friendly terms with the USSR; indeed, during the first act finale an actor playing Joseph Stalin performed a dance in Red Square. By the time the show went on tour a year later, Hitler and Stalin were allies, the Stalin character was written out of the play, and "a warning was added to the program insisting the evening bore no relation to current events."[45]

Again, it's no surprise that the spate of musical political satires waned after Leave It To Me in 1938.[46] By the time America entered World War II, audiences were not keen to see their country denigrated or ridiculed. Patriotism along with nostalgia for the past were more reasonable positions, particularly as America became more entrenched in battle. By the time American soldiers returned home in 1945, the American economy was booming and a mood of optimism had replaced the grim fears that fascism, the depression,

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[45] Bordman, 513.

[46] Occasionally, an offshoot appeared, such as Louisiana Purchase in 1940. Ostensibly a satire on Huey Long's influence on Louisiana politics, the musical was less topical than its predecessors. Most of the humor came from a stellar cast, including Bob Hope, Irene Bordoni, Victor Moore, and Carol Bruce. The Berlin score also provided several tunes that became popular on the radio, including "It's a Lovely Day Tomorrow," an apropos theme for a nation fighting the holocaust.

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and a threatening war had brought to the previous decade.

Weill and Blitzstein: Realism, Expressionism, and Epic Theatre

While the Gershwins and Rodgers and Hart were experimenting with political satire, Kurt Weill, newly transplanted to America, was exerting an equally powerful if different influence on the serious musical during the 1930s with pieces like Threepenny Opera (1933 in New York), The Eternal Road (1935), Johnny Johnson (1936), and Knickerbocker Holiday (1937). The inspiration for the Weill musicals was the work of Piscator, Brecht, German expressionism and epic theatre, rather than the satirical American farce of Kaufman, Hart, and Ryskind. Indeed, the first Weill musical to reach New York was The Threepenny Opera, which Weill wrote with Bertolt Brecht after the composer had successfully collaborated with the German expressionist playwright George Kaiser on three operas: Der Protagonist (1925), a successful one-act piece; The Czar Has Himself Photographed (1927), a short comic opera; and The Silver Lake (1933), written after Weill had finished his collaboration with Brecht.[47] The Marxism of the Brecht-Weill Threepenny Opera seemed incongruous on the New York stage when a translation by Gifford Cochran and Jerrold Krimsky opened at the Empire Theatre in 1933. Indeed, the New York Post's Richard Lockridge derided it as "sugar coated communism."[48]

Brecht set his libretto in Victorian London, which was actually a metaphor for a

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[47] The Silver Lake is particularly significant because it included two pantomimes which were forerunners of the dream sequences, mini operettas within a play, of Lady in the Dark (1941).

[48] Boardman, The American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, 483.

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decaying Germany:

> Telling stories of thieves, beggars, whores, capitalist sharks, criminals who act like businessmen and businessmen who act like criminals, and unholy alliances between religious and criminal "gangs" and between the law and the underworld, Brecht and Weill used music and lyrics to support their satiric themes. . . . Their abrasive pop operas inform us that love doesn't last, that not being able to pay a bar bill is a capital offense in a capitalist society, that it's better to rob a bank than to own one, that the way of the capitalist world is betrayal provoked by greed.[49]

Brecht even borrows a Euripidean ending, in which the Queen spares Mack the Knife's life and grants him a castle; here, Brecht is ridiculing the happy endings endemic to commercial musicals. In accordance with his theory of alienation, Brecht wanted the songs to comment on the action, rather than further plot or define character. Instead of identifying with his character, the actor distanced himself from his character as he interrupted the plot and provided ironic musical commentary in songs like "The Solomon Song" and "The Barbara Song."

There are great similarities here to the American political satires of the Gershwins, but the philosophy is more didactic and the tone considerably more acerbic. If Kaufman wrote to amuse a commercial audience, Brecht was out to destroy the "culinary" commercial theatre of the cultural hegemony. Like Gershwin, Weill's musical style was eclectic. He mixed modern jazz idioms with Victorian patter songs, extended phrases and

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[49] Hirsch, 14.

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deviated from the standard AABA song form, and spoofed nineteenth century operetta conventions. The finales of act one and act two are unique in that they contain only one song and are not sung by the chorus. As per Brecht's instructions, the title of each finale,"The Uncertainty of Human Conditions" and "Ballad About the Question: What Keeps A Man Alive," was projected on a banner in the 1933 production, as the actor/singers approached the audience, not in character but as ironic commentators on the action. The finale of the third act was a parody of operetta conventions, as the chorus heralded the appearance of the King's riding messenger.[50] Ironically, twenty years later, an off-Broadway production, mounted in New York at the Theatre de Lys during a different cultural moment, the decline of McCarthyism, would run more than 2500 performances, considerably more than the twelve performances registered by The Threepenny Opera's first Broadway appearance.

The Eternal Road, with a libretto by Franz Werfel and direction by Max Reinhardt, was an epic saga of the history of the Jewish people, which was meant to allegorize the persecution of the Jews in Germany with the rise of Hitler. Clearly Reinhardt was influenced by both expressionism and Piscator's and Brecht's notion of epic theatre, but the piece is also curiously reminiscent of Marc Connelly's The Green Pastures (1930), a retelling of Bible stories from the creation of the world to the birth of Jesus as they might have been imagined by Black schoolchildren. Spirituals sung by the Hall Johnson choir were interspersed throughout the tales, and the play was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Brechtian epic theatre did not have the charm of Connolly's simple folk play; The Eternal

[50] See Traubner, 320-21.

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Road did not duplicate The Green Pastures' phenomenal success.

Weill's Americanization of epic theatre continued in 1936 with the Group Theatre production of Paul Green's Johnny Johnson, an Americanization of The Good Soldier Schweik (1928), which Harold Clurman had suggested to Weill and Green. The Group's other entry that season was a dramatization of Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy, retitled The Case of Clyde Griffiths, by Erwin Piscator and Lina Goldschmidt. Unfortunately, Piscator, who directed the original German production of Schweik, did not mount the Green/Weill musical. The musical was eventually directed by Lee Strasberg. In The Fervent Years, Harold Clurman remembers the first two audience previews as "the most distressing experiences I have ever gone through in the theatre."[51]

According to Wendy Smith, Cheryl Crawford, Weill, and Green read German plays other than Schweik for inspiration, as well as newspaper articles for period flavor. They decided on their title because 30,000 American "Johnsons" had served in World War II. 3000 of them were named "Johnny."[52] The aim was to adapt the Brecht/Weill musical form for America: "They envisioned a work that would draw on diverse native American idioms--vaudeville, folklore, homespun satire--and unify them in a form of musical theatre like that Brecht and Weill had pioneered in Germany, with songs and speech flowing naturally together."[53] The musical probably needed to be guided by an expert in epic theatre, like Piscator. Instead, Strasberg directed, and the results, according to Smith and

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[51] Harold Clurman, The Fervent Years (New York: Hill and Wang, 1945), 177.

[52] Smith, 261.

[53] Ibid., 261.

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Clurman himself, were disastrous.

> Strasberg built a production from the ground up, creating a mosaic of sharply detailed moments, each one filled with a sense of personal truth and reality through the use of affective memory; the theme emerged from the cumulative impact of these moments. He got to the larger picture through his keen use of detail, and when in Johnny Johnson he tried to speak more generally in terms of mood and tone, the actors felt lost. . . . In scenes with many characters, each actor was left to work out independently his or her character's motivations and actions, and the result was chaos and hard feelings: Actor A, having decided what the scene meant to him, thought Actor B had missed the point and was working in the wrong way. There had always been a certain amount of collective criticism during Group rehearsals but the level of bitterness rose, a result of their terror over the lack of direction inside and outside the rehearsal hall.[54]

Indeed, Johnny Johnson caused such dissension among Clurman and Strasberg, as well as the cast, that the Group almost disbanded.[55]

Piscator's adaptation of the Jaroslav Hacek comic novel concerned a Czech soldier drafted into the Austrian army in 1914. Schweik only wants to please; consequently, he unwittingly demonstrates the brutality and stupidity of his military superiors. According to Mordecai Gorelik in New Theatres for Old, Piscator's original intention was to have

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[54] Ibid., 281.

[55] Ibid., 283.

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Schweik alone played by a live actor; all his military tormentors would be represented as caricatures, but Piscator modified this concept as it was too limiting. In Piscator's production, Schweik wandered on a noisy conveyor belt as the comic world around him changed. Over 300 satirical line drawings by George Grosz were projected onto a back screen. At the conclusion of the play, Schweik finally enters the battlefield, only to be captured by his own side, whereupon, ironically, he is hit by shellfire.

The Weill/Green musicalization severely altered the heavily ironic tone of the German original: "There was a lot to discuss, for Johnny Johnson had a special tone, elusive and tricky to capture. 'The first act is a comedy, the second a tragedy and the third a satire,' Paul Green told a reporter."[56] Green's "special tone" was mostly sweet rather than ironic; it was the Weill score which injected variety and bite; nevertheless, the anti-war message was appropriate in 1936, when another World War seemed inevitable. The Green libretto involved a pacifist stonecutter who enlists to fight in World War I despite his principles; he wants to be worthy to marry his sweetheart, Minny Belle. While overseas, he tries to institute a ceasefire and sprays the Allied High Command with laughing gas. Eventually, he returns, his sweetheart has married a man who has managed to avoid enlistment, and the stonecutter spends ten years in a mental hospital. During the final scene, he sells toys on the street as his fellow townspeople gather to celebrate the beginning of the next war. The Americanized Schweik was not as heavily ironic as the German original; Johnny gains a tragic stature by the final curtain, whereas in Piscator's Schweik, the protagonist was a victim of circumstance. Weill's score was incredibly

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[56] Ibid., 278.

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eclectic, employing Singspiel, operatic ballads, French music hall songs, cowboy music, and a tune set first to an anti-war lyric then later reset to a military anthem.

The heavy, contemporary subject matter of the piece borrows from realism but, again, the influence is more clearly epic theatre, with doses of German expressionism. Not only does the play take place during World War I, the musical traces the Christ-like Johnny Johnson through metaphoric stations of the cross. It is one man's failed journey of self education, an outer manifestation of the hero's inner neuroses and anguish. Perhaps German expressionism and epic theatre were not compatible elements for a theatrical organization which did so much to advance American realism. In addition to Strasberg's contribution as director and Cheryl Crawford's and Clurman's contributions as advisors, the cast for Johnny Johnson included Robert Lewis, Elia Kazan, Sanford Meisner, Ruth Nelson, John Garfield, Phoebe Brand, and Morris Carnovsky.

The final Weill musical of the 1930s, Knickerbocker Holiday, was a period piece set in New Amsterdam. Peter Stuyvesant, originally played by Walter Huston, is the tyrannical governor of old New York who condemns a freethinking upstart to death and steals his girlfriend. Like The Threepenny Opera, a Euripidean deus ex machina concludes the piece: narrator Washington Irving, writing the history of New York, goes back in time and convinces Stuyvesant that he needs to be merciful if history is to regard him kindly. The lovers are thus reunited for the final curtain. The Maxwell Anderson script portrayed Stuyvesant as a despot who abolishes most of the freedoms of the town; this was a lightly veiled allegory about growing government interference from Washington. Anderson's libretto was anti-totalitarian, while the musical conventions were markedly Gilbert and

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Sullivan, particularly Stuyvesant's material and the choral ensembles "The Scar" and "All Hail the Political Honeymoon," which becomes an anti-fascist act one finale.

Anderson was known for his realistic plays about social injustice, which included Gods of the Lightening (1928) and Winterset (1935), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize, and, in collaboration with Laurence Stallings, What Price Glory (1924). The latter was a gritty World War I barracks story; the first two dealt with variations on the Sacco-Vanzetti case. A poet, Anderson also specialized in historical verse dramas, including Elizabeth the Queen (1930), Mary of Scotland (1933), Joan of Lorraine (1947), and Anne of the Thousand Days (1948). In combining social protest with historicization, he was a perfect collaborator for Weill. By setting Knickerbocker Holiday in old New York and making Peter Stuyvesant an autocratic despot, Anderson's use of historicization underscored the threat of fascism and autocracy in 1930s America. Clearly, he was warning Americans that the fascism enfolding Europe was also a threat to the United States.

Each of these musicals finds Weill collaborating with less didactic theatre men than Brecht; yet, none managed to achieve the success that The Threepenny Opera, Happy End (1929), and Mahagonny (1930) earned internationally. Each is political, similar in theme to the Gershwin satires, but unlike the commercialism of the Kaufman, Hart, and Ryskind libretti, which were not aimed at overturning the status quo, each of the Weill musicals was out of place in terms of the commercial Broadway hegemony of the day. Marc Blitzstein emulated the work of Brecht and Weill in his The Cradle Will Rock, which, like Mahagonny, takes place in a mythic American city, Steeltown, run by an autocratic Mr.

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Mister. But Blitzstein's Americanization of Brecht also failed to achieve commercial success. It was not until 1941 that Weill managed to find a commercially successful subject to match his eclectic musical style. Moss Hart's libretto for Lady in the Dark contained a realistic play about psychoanalysis framed by four expressionistic dream sequences, which, in effect, were mini operettas mounted on a series of revolving stages as different facets of the dream are revealed. The musical was incredibly successful, in part because of the fascination at the time with psychoanalysis and in part because of the performances by Gertrude Lawrence and Danny Kaye.

The musical opens, uniquely, without music. Liza Elliott, the editor of a fashion magazine, decides to undergo psychoanalysis to reconcile her feelings of failure as a woman with her career aspirations. Weill's music appears only in the four dream sequences and the childhood song, "My Ship" the words of which Liza struggles to remember throughout the play. Each dream is a fantasy which includes characters from her life whom we have encountered during the play's realistic scenes. Weill's music is as eclectic as it was in Johnny Johnson; fortunately, his collaborator here is Ira Gershwin, whose veneration for Gilbert and Sullivan turns each dream sequence into an extended operetta finale, complete with Offenbachian/Gilbert and Sullivan musical constructions. Interspersed in these miniature operettas were also individual songs ranging from jazzy show tunes like "The Saga of Jenny" to patter songs like "Tschaikowsky."

Searching for a collaborator after his brother George's death, Ira Gershwin finally found a composer appreciative of his sense of humor and daring, as well as his love for nineteenth-century English and French operetta conventions. Moss Hart's libretto

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foregrounds realism to a degree that surpasses anything in Show Boat or Porgy and Bess: there *are* no songs except for the dream sequences and the final "My Ship." The musical play is just that: non-musical scenes that occur when Liza is at work at the magazine and when she is talking with her psychoanalyst. The musical sequences, however, are extended expressionistic fantasies; they literally manifest musically Liza's inner neuroses and anxieties. Although there is no narrator as such for the play, the dream sequences inspire a master of ceremonies, someone to narrate Liza's inner journey. In "The Circus Dream," the Ring Master is in control as he condemns Liza for not being able to make up her mind. This kind of bold experimentation was a forerunner to the Sondheim/ Prince Follies, thirty years later, where the inner angst of the four principal characters culminates in a dream sequence, "Loveland," which symbolically manifests the characters' neuroses.

While the Gershwins and Rodgers and Hart embroidered musical satires and Kurt Weill transplanted elements of epic theatre and expressionism to the Broadway musical, another thread in the development of the serious, integrated musical appeared at the tail end of the decade. Pal Joey (1940), with a libretto by John O'Hara and a score by Rodgers and Hart, is the musical theatre's version of naturalism. Introducing the anti-hero to the commercial American musical, Pal Joey's libretto applies Emile Zola's elimination of the "sympathetic character." Joey Evans, a down on his luck hoofer and nightclub emcee, is simultaneously sleeping with Linda, a dim witted secretary, and Vera, a wealthy, married society matron who eventually keeps Joey and sets him up in a chic nightclub. Mixed into the plot are Gladys Bumps, a blackmailing chorus girl who is the whore minus the heart of gold, and Ludlow Lowell, an agent. When the latter two attempt to blackmail

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Vera, she dumps Joey. None of these characters is sympathetic; their dialogue is jagged, edgy, and full of underworld slang. Writing for the New York Times, Brooks Atkinson wondered, "Can you draw sweet water from a foul well?"[57]

Despite the grittiness of the dialogue, most of the songs are presentational performance numbers; they are sung and danced either as part of the floorshow at the seedy south side of Chicago nightclub which is the setting for much of act one, or at Chez Joey, the ultra-elite nightclub that Vera bankrolls for Joey in act two. Abandoning operetta conventions, the nightclub numbers are brassy, contemporary, lively, tuneful, and filled with double entendres. Joey extolls his sexual prowess in his metaphoric "Happy Hunting Horn." "The Flower Garden of My Heart," a satiric recycling of a typical Follies production number, features a Ziegfeldian tenor extolling the beauty of the chorus girls, who are tackily dressed as a variety of flowers; they are the antithesis of the lilies, daisies, roses, and lilacs that they impersonate. Late in the second act, Vera and Joey, cavorting on a huge bed, sing one of the more motivated numbers in the score as they celebrate their "Little Den of Iniquity."

A Zola-like musical, one with no sympathetic character, experimented with the horizon of expectations of 1940 musical theatre audiences. Here is another case of the musical being both transgressive and conservative. Audiences and critics were shocked by the amorality (and immorality) of Pal Joey's characters and relationships. The integrity of Rodgers, Hart, and librettist John O'Hara was uncompromising in terms of the text; their casting, however, was geared to make the musical palatable to audiences used to the

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[57] See Bordman, The American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, 523.

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convention of the sympathetic character and was responsible for the musical's commercial success. Aware that an older married woman cheating on her husband with a conniving heel would be distasteful to musical theatre patrons used to more conventional love plots, Rodgers and Hart cast Vivienne Segal against type: a lilting soprano, rather than an alto or belt voice. Listening to the 1951 studio recording which inspired the successful Broadway revival, also with Segal, one can hear the grace, class, and wit with which Segal imbued lyrics like "Bewitched" and "What Is A Man?" In subsequent revivals, Vera has been played as a brassier alto, and the toughness of the vocal delivery by performers like Carol Bruce and Patti Lupone enervates the role. Kelly, according to Lorenz Hart, achieved the impossible by making Joey sexually attractive, charming, and irresistible, and was all but irreplaceable in the role during the original run.[58] The show folded soon after Kelly let to pursue a Hollywood contract. Both Harold Lang in the Broadway revival (1952) and Bob Fose undertook the role with some degree of success, although no one has achieved Kelly's personal acclaim as the heel/hero.

In choosing to cast charismatic performers as unpleasant characters, Rodgers and Hart anticipated John Raitt's sexy, virile Billy Bigelow as the wife beating husband in Carousel (1945), Robert Goulet's eight by ten glossy interpretation of the priggish, arrogant Lancelot in Camelot (1960), Ethel Merman's hilariously raffish and outrageous portrayal of the monstrous Mama Rose in Gypsy (1959), Elaine Stritch's droll, antic approach to the acerbic Joanne in Company (1970), and Angela Lansbury's loveably

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[58] Apparently, after Kelly left the cast, Lorenz Hart discouraged his friends from seeing the musical. See Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle, 523.

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comic accomplice to cannibalism in Sweeney Todd (1979). True to the notion of a mutual genealogy of influence, these performances would not have been possible without Pal Joey and the star turns by Kelly and Segal in the original production.

Although the above mentioned musicals foreground unsympathetic characters, audiences accept them as long as they are performed by charismatic, popular star performers playing against type. When this is not the case, musicals with unsympathetic characters tend to fail. Stephen Sondheim's Passion (1994), for example, featured a virtuoso performance by Donna Murphy as Fosca, as unsympathetic a heroine for a musical as one is likely to find. At the time, Murphy, an attractive actress, was an unknown quantity to her audiences. Playing an ugly, sickly, sexually obsessed shrew, Murphy was greeted with jeers and laughter during previews. Despite winning the Tony for best musical of the season, Passion closed after a brief, financially unsuccessful run. Had Sondheim and his producers cast an actress the audience *knew* was attractive underneath all the warts and make-up--perhaps someone like Bernadette Peters--the unsympathetic nature of the character might have been palatable and the show might have been a financial success. Although the audience's horizons of expectations changed when Pal Joey was first produced in that an anti-hero became acceptable in the musical, audiences nevertheless demanded a charismatic, likeable star superimposing his or her personality on a distasteful role. The convention still holds true for musicals.

The Reemergence of Hammerstein and a Wartime Zeitgeist

During World War II, particularly with an end to the depression and a booming

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wartime economy, the horizon of expectations for musical theatre audiences were changing once again. It was no longer appealing for Americans to satirize authority. The cultural zeitgeist during the early 1940s was to foster community and social responsibility. Even before the United States entered the war in 1937, How To Win Friends and Influence People urged Americans to cooperate rather than to compete for success. Americans in 1939 were fascinated by Dorothy Gale, who managed to fulfill her wishes through self sacrifice and unselfishly helping her friends. By 1939, Hollywood had also mythologized the old South in Gone With The Wind, a film that preached much the same message about the need for community and healing. If Americans were struggling to maintain and eventually rebuild a nation that had been threatened by the great depression and the onslaught of World War II, Gone With the Wind, according to Mark Fearnow, reconciled nostalgia for the past with anxiety about the future.[59] The Old South of Gone With the Wind is mythologized nostalgia; Scarlett O'Hara journeys from barbecues and flirtations to a new and difficult world of Reconstruction in which she must mature to survive economically. At the end of the novel, unable to face her own anxieties, she romanticizes about the past and dreams of returning to Tara, at least temporarily, to find strength. Fearnow argues that "like Scarlett, America could return to its Tara, the body of myth and tradition symbolized by such projects as Rockefeller's Williamsburg, and from this haven plan its campaign."[60] This nostalgia for the past, coupled with anxiety about rebuilding an uncertain future, is very much the aesthetic Hammerstein applied to the

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[59] See Fearnow, 20-21.

[60] Ibid., 21.

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libretto of Oklahoma! which reunited Hammerstein's social realism mixed with romanticism of the 1920s in a new, receptive wartime zeitgeist.

The culture clash in Oklahoma! involves the farmer and the cowboy, both of whom are necessary to form a sense of community in the new state of Oklahoma. Like the Old South of Gone With the Wind, the West in Oklahoma is overly mythologized. The characters are hearty, boisterous, fun loving, and belong to a simpler time. The crushing question that motivates the plot is who will take Laurey to the box social. Hammerstein adds a strong dose of realism, however, to this nostalgic look at America's past. Violence is constantly threatening the bucolic Oklahoma territory. Jud, the farmhand, is a psychopathic arsonist. He spends his time in a smokehouse gazing at dirty pictures and, presumably, masturbating. The cowboys, Curly and Will Parker, may seem sunny in comparison; however, it is likely that they spend their leisure time in equally anti-social pursuits: traveling to Kansas City to patronize whorehouses, drinking, carousing, and living a nomadic existence. By the end of the play, both Curly and Will have been socialized; they realize that marriage is a far better alternative to nomadic life, while the audience is instructed to believe what they in fact know: that community is all important and requires hard work and self sacrifice. By 1943, Rodgers and Hammerstein were preaching to the choir.[61]

The phenomenal success of Oklahoma! can be traced to audience reception of wartime non-musical plays that basked in a nostalgic, romanticized glorification of

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[61] For an alternative reading of Oklahoma!, see Andrea Most, "'We Know We Belong to the Land': The Theatricality of Assimilation in Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!," PMLA 113.1 (January 1998): 77-89. See chapter four.

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American values. If one can see echoes of Gone With the Wind in the overly mythologized West of Oklahoma!, one can also see traces of a mythologized America in Life With Father (1939), a wartime play that ran for a phenomenal 3224 performances. The Howard Lindsay/Russell Crouse script affectionately mythologizes family life in nineteenth-century New York. If Oklahoma!'s plot rather simplistically hinges on who will take Laurey to the box social, Life With Father revolves around mother's attempts to get father baptized. The play is a valentine to the past and a tribute to simpler values.

Even more interesting are echoes of Thornton Wilder's mythologizing of American life in Our Town (1937) and The Skin of Our Teeth (1942), the latter produced a year before Oklahoma! and the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize. True, Wilder, unlike the Hammerstein of Oklahoma!, was heavily influenced by the theatricalism of Pirandello and experimented with metatheatrical form. These experiments with form, however, were in stark contrast to the rather simple parables of his plays, particularly that of The Skin of Our Teeth, which was an optimistic, if somewhat didactic, wartime message about the potential of American endurance in the face of all obstacles.

For Wilder, the present and the future borrow from past accomplishments. Building on the past ensures the upward spiral of Western civilization. In the final act of Skin, Mr. Antrobus, functioning as a kind of raisonneur, clings to the speeches of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, and Moses to inspire him to survive the destruction of war. The speeches of these philosophers are not necessarily the most well-known or obvious choices, but presumably they reinforce Western values with which the audience is already familiar. The work of the philosophers is already ensconced in the subconscious of what

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Gertrude Stein refers to in The Geographical History of America as "the human mind." Wilder is suggesting that wrapped up in the everyday life of Americans are the weaknesses that have threatened humankind, as well as the moral and religious values that have ensured its survival. The war between Antrobus and Henry in act three is seen as a struggle between the ego and the id, a somewhat pat explanation for Adolph Hitler and the extermination of six million Jews; nevertheless, patriotic audiences during World War II warmed to Wilder's mythologizing of the American spirit. In "Some Thoughts on Playwriting," Wilder claims the dramatist must deal with material that is "understandable by the larger number."[62] The author writes for the "popular mind."[63] In effect, Wilder, like Hammerstein, was preaching to the choir, and his play was an enormous commercial success.

Skin is a densely constructed morality play. In this parable of religious humanism, Wilder can't resist providing neatly packaged solutions for his audience, perhaps as partial compensation for the often esoteric abstraction of form. Elia Kazan, the original director of Skin, notes the incongruity between the play's rather simplistic content and its Pirandellian form:

> There was a curious contrast here: the form of the play was novel and constantly surprising, but the author's values, on which it was built, were conventional and finally stuffy. Other plays I've liked were conceived out

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[62] Thornton Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwriting," in Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), 890.

[63] Ibid., 890.

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> of the life experience of the dramatist; this play seemed to have been hatched in the library of a financially secure college campus. Wilder had a "clean" soul and a lively mind, but our country was in a nightmare of violence, a worldwide war. Thornton was telling us we'd survive this trial as we had others in our history. Nice to hear, but words of hope as simple as those in the play tend to sound hollow. Which is why, I suppose, the play is not revived as often as we, following its triumphant first reception, anticipated. Looking back, the plays and films that have shaken me most were those where no final reassurance was offered.[94]

Kazan may be right when he argues that plays with pat answers are less likely to last the test of time; however, musicals do tend to reassure, and Oklahoma's! rather pat solution to America at war--the glorification of the community--was not ensconced in the kinds of abstractions and intertextuality that permeated Wilder's work. In terms of content, Wilder and Hammerstein were soulmates. Wilder's humanism preaches that mankind will survive by the skin of its teeth if it clings to the values endemic to American life. Hammerstein's pious liberalism preaches similar homilies cloaked in the lyrics of his songs. To cement a sense of community in Oklahoma! "the farmer and the cowman should be friends." Racism in South Pacific is not hereditary but "carefully taught." Faith enables Julie Jordan in Carousel to "never walk alone," while Maria von Trapp in The Sound of Music must "climb every mountain" to follow her dream.

Hammerstein's pat resolutions and liberal platitudinizing should zap him from any

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[94] Elia Kazan, A Life (New York: Knopf, 1988), 206.

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list of realistic writers (it goes without saying that Wilder is not a realist). In mythologizing the American past in Oklahoma!, Hammerstein is definitely following a lyrical bent; however, even William Dean Howells was incredibly generous about plays that merged romanticism and realism:

> The fact is, the two kinds [realism and romanticism] do not mingle well, but for a while yet we must have the romantic and the realistic mixed in the theatre. That is quite inevitable, and it is strictly in accordance with the law of evolution. The stage, in working free of romanticism, must carry some rags and tags of it forward in the true way; that has been the case always in the rise from a higher to a lower [sic] form; the man on a trapeze recalls the ancestral monkey who swung by his tail from the forest tree, and the realist cannot all at once forget the romanticist. Perhaps not till the next generation shall we have the very realist; which puzzles the groundlings, romantically expectant of miracles that shall clear away all trace of romanticism in an instant.[65]

1943 is part of the next generation that Howells foresees, but one must remember that Hammerstein was trained in a theatre that mixed romantic conventions with a dollop of realism, the theatre of Ned Sheldon and Dorothy Donnelly. If the Hammerstein model of the serious musical play is not linear, its resurgence in Oklahoma!, was a product of American culture in 1943, just as serious musicals with satiric bents, whether hegemonic

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[65] William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's Monthly 83 (August 1891): 478.

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(the Kaufman libretti) or transgressive (Weill's librettists) were products of a depression economy. Obviously, reception is not just a function of text, but of how that text reflects the social concerns of its times.

Hammerstein interjects elements of realism in Oklahoma! through Jud, Laurey, and to a lesser extent, Curly, who become more psychologized than is normal in musicals of the period. Each sings lyrics appropriate to character, rather than to performer, just as the voice expressed in the lyric reflects the voice of the character rather than that of the lyricist. Instead of the comic specialty numbers of Captain Andy, Frank, Ellie, and even Magnolia of Show Boat, Hammerstein's songs, particularly "The Surrey With the Fringe On Top," are really musical scenes. If Jud's death reeks of melodrama, his darkness as a villain--his unhealthy preoccupation with sex--adds an element of realism to the musical. His soliloquy, "Lonely Room" is a brooding statement of his sexual psychopathology. The duet "Poor Jud Is Dead" is a new kind of comic number in which the hero tries to convince his nemesis to commit suicide. The subplot triangle of Ado Annie, Will Parker, and Ali Hakim harkens back to 1920s musical theatre conventions, but here the comic antics of the secondary trio help psychologize the more serious conflict between Laurey, Curly, and Jud.

It is Laurey's inner neuroses, however, on which the show hangs, making the woman by far the most interesting character in the piece. Much of what motivates Laurey is ambiguous. We know she lacks a father, which leaves her vulnerable to Jud. But as wistful and needy as she seems at times, she is also fiercely independent and concerned with her role as a new woman, which she demonstrates during the "Many A New Day"

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song and dance. Hammerstein's fascination with strong women is an outgrowth of his work during the 1920s; Rose-Marie, The Desert Song, The New Moon, and Show Boat all have strong, independent female leads. Indeed, as we've discovered earlier, the 1920s, the decade in which women were given the vote, was characterized by musical vehicles celebrating strong female characters: Irene, Sally, Sunny, and Rosalie are but four examples. Oklahoma! is the first of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals to celebrate complex female characters; Laurey eventually is joined by Julie Jordan, Nellie Forbush, Anna Leonowens, and Maria Von Trapp as women who fight societal conventions to win their desires.

Most interesting perhaps is Agnes De Mille's dream ballet, in which Laurey's sexual fears and neuroses are exposed somewhat expressionistically. Ethan Mordden correctly argues that DeMille's ballets are miniature plays because "they articulate wishes and fears that the characters themselves cannot express."[66] Originally, Hammerstein had envisioned a circus ballet, in which Laurey would dream about who would take her to the box social. De Mille objected: "People don't have dreams like that. They dream about their anxieties, their fears. Laurey should dream about what she's most afraid of. Nice girls dream rather dirty dreams, you know."[67] What motivates Laurey's indecision? Does she resent Curly's arrogance? Is she sexually attracted to Jud? Is she afraid for Curly if she rejects Jud? Is she struggling to maintain her independence from any man? All these

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[66] Ethan Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 33.

[67] Quoted in Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 33.

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are possibilities; the script is ultimately ambiguous and Laurey emerges as a psychologically complex character, more "realistic" than the run of the mill musical comedy heroine of the time.

It would be interesting to know the extent of Theresa Helburn's contribution to Oklahoma! and Carousel. With these two shows, Hammerstein embarks on a collaboration with Rodgers that focuses on culture clashes and revolves around class, basically venerating the American middle class and its values, which certainly reflects post-war American realism of the 1940s. Helburn, producer of both Oklahoma! and Carousel, had a long history with the Theatre Guild of championing plays that centered around culture clashes, including Shaw's Heartbreak House (1920), Sidney Howard's They Knew What They Wanted (1924), Robert E. Sherwood's Reunion in Vienna (1931) and Idiot's Delight (1936), Phillip Barry's Hotel Universe (1930) and Philadephia Story (1939), and S.N. Behrman's Biography (1932), End of Summer (1936), not to mention Tretyakov's Roar China (1930). It was she who had brought Richard Rodgers to see a revival of Green Grow the Lilacs, which the Guild had originally produced in 1931.

In Oklahoma!, the clash is between the farmer and the cowman. Cowhand Curly becomes domesticated by landowner Laurey and becomes a valuable member of the community by the act two finale. Carousel's Billy Bigelow manages to exonerate his sins by instilling faith in his daughter that she will no longer be a social outcast but can be accepted into her New England community. Joe Taylor, in Allegro, leaves his wealthy medical practice in a large city and his adulterous socialite wife to return to a simpler life as a dedicated country doctor. In South Pacific, Nellie Forbush simultaneously sheds her

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Southern bigotry while managing to Americanize her wealthy French planter, who wears GI fatigues by the final curtain. The King and I finds Anna Leonowens instilling middle class, schoolmarmish Western values in the King of Siam. When he resists, she somehow shames him into dying. Hammerstein's libretto for the first televised Cinderella (1956) finds the king praising the wine of his country: beer. Even he just wants to be middle class.

After Allegro, Hammerstein focused on racism in both South Pacific and The King and I. The former, of course, is a wartime tale. One wonders how much Hammerstein was influenced by the spate of liberal plays about social injustice popular after World War II, including Deep Are the Roots (1945), Strange Fruit (1945), Home of the Brave (1945), and All My Sons (1947). Both The King and I and South Pacific (and later Flower Drum Song) condemn insularity and racial tyranny; the message was a popular one for realistic plays at the end of the second world war. Writing of Deep Are the Roots, a play about a black soldier returning home from the war who is falsely accused of stealing from an old Southern planter, its director, Elia Kazan questions its political liberalism:

> The effect of treating a social problem in this way is that there is never any doubt in the audience's mind as to what they're expected to feel. They have the assurance from the beginning that they are on the side of the angels--the falsely accused. They have never been challenged to doubt. This, of course, does not prepare them for life as it's lived. They are also often masochists--so it has seemed to me--enjoying the middle-class white man's guilt about the black man. They've been told where to stand and

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> what to think, and guaranteed safe passage to the final curtain. We are in a kind of conformity tide. That is a word liberals say they hate, and they do--except when it's their own conformity. Such a play is not drama that informs life; it is liberal corn.[68]

Much the same criticism has been leveled at Hammerstein. True, Nellie sheds her bigotry in South Pacific, but she also manages to Americanize DeBecque and acquire an oceanside villa, whereas Lt. Cable, who only stands to inherit a shack in Bali Hai, dies for his intolerance. Bruce McConachie has attacked Hammerstein's Western imperialism in his Oriental musicals; according to McConachie, Hammerstein's well meaning liberalism planted the seeds of Oriental racism that led to America's involvement in the war in Vietnam, an interesting if hyperbolic thesis.[69] For Andrea Most, South Pacific is Rodgers and Hammerstein's attempt to reconcile their liberal politics with McCarthyism. By championing equal rights, Americans were attacking communism, which thrived on racial disaffection. According to Most, "American Jews--and in particular, assimilated New York Jewish artists like Rodgers and Hammerstein--had a personal stake in asserting this connection between anticommunism and civil rights."[70]

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[68] Kazan, 295.

[69] See Bruce McConachie, "The 'Oriental' Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia." Theatre Journal 46 (1994): 385-98.

[70] See Andrea Most, "'You've Got To Be Carefully Taught'" The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific," Theatre Journal 52.3 (October 2000): 307-338.

Most's point about the Jewish liberal reaction to McCarthyism is compelling; other aspects of her reading of South Pacific seem more specious. She maintains that the European DeBecque dominates the American Nellie Forbush: "Rodgers and Hammerstein

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Despite these alternative readings of South Pacific, Hammerstein interjects elements of realism to the serious musical by psychologizing his characters, championing

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exploit Emile's European high-culture style to co-opt its legitimacy, but in making Emile's musical presence in the play so powerful, they end up overwhelming Nellie's popular American style" (337). Her argument about DeBecque's overwhelming musical presence is questionable, since he sings only two solos in the play, while Nellie has several. Most's argument that the European DeBecque dominates the American Nellie ignores a photograph from the original production, which, puzzlingly, she includes in her article, in which Emile appears in the final scene reunited with Nellie in G.I. army fatigues, after returning from a mission fighting for the Americans. Since he has appeared in a white plantation suit up to this final scene and has also declared himself a man without a country, he certainly seems Americanized to me, particularly since Nellie now stands to be mistress of his oceanside villa.

Most disturbingly, Most maintains that the Nellie/DeBecque romance is passionless because the *stage directions* suggest that DeBecque not kiss Nellie after he sings "Some Enchanted Evening" in the opening scene. "Some Enchanted Evening" follows "Twin Soliloquies," in which DeBecque and Nellie both express their attraction for each other and their fear of rejection. The song ends as Emile crosses to Nellie with a cocktail and they toast each other to tumultuous, crashing chords. The sexual tension of the scene is enormous and depends on their *not* kissing. The same is true after "Some Enchanted Evening," which is DeBecque's initial proposal of marriage, not a sexual come-on. The sexual attraction between the two is heightened once again by their not kissing after this incredibly romantic ballad. It is much like the sexual tension between Anna and the King during "Shall We Dance?" in The King and I. Ironically, after this opening scene, Ezio Pinza, the original DeBecque, found many on stage opportunities to kiss Mary Martin, the original Nellie Forbush. The kisses were so passionate that gossip had it that Pinza and Martin were having a torrid offstage affair, this despite Pinza's own marriage and Martin's alleged relationship with Janet Gaynor: "Pinza's long and enthusiastic onstage kisses had convinced their public that he and Mary Martin were madly in love . . . Don Fellows said, 'Pinza knew her entrances and he'd go to her dressing room door and take her by the hand and lead her on stage. I'd hear her in the wings saying, 'Ezio, when you kiss, kiss me nicely,' and he'd be saying, 'When I kees, I kees!' She'd be singing on stage and he'd be whispering, 'Mary, I love you!' into her ear. . . . He used to get love letters and he'd put them on the call board. Some of them were crazy, women offering to leave their husbands for him.'" See Meryle Secrest, Somewhere For Me: A Biography of Richard Rodgers (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 291-92. Whatever did or did not happen between the two, kinescopes exists of Pinza and Martin singing "Some Enchanted Evening" both on the Ed Sullivan show and on a General Foods tribute to Rodgers and Hammerstein. The look on Martin's face as Pinza sings in her ear is pure adoration. Here is a case where a critic ignores evidence of performance and relies on text alone--a stage direction.

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the new woman, attacking social injustice, and venerating the middle class. He also manages to trim some of the older musical comedy conventions of the 1920s. The subplots still exist, but the secondary romantic leads, the soubrette and ingenue, no longer have to be comic after Carousel. In South Pacific, Liat and Lt. Cable are a tragic pair; they reflect the racial conflict that haunts Emile and Nellie, but the comic relief is provided by Billis and Bloody Mary. In The King and I, it is Anna and the King who provide the comedy; the secondary lovers, Lun Tha and Tuptim, are tragic. In addition to the secondary lovers, Hammerstein develops the figure of the older woman, a motherly sort who provides a degree of wisdom and comfort in virtually all his libretti: Aunt Eller in Oklahoma!, Nettie in Carousel, the grandmother in Allegro, Bloody Mary in South Pacific, Lady Thiang in The King and I, the fairy godmother in Cinderella, Fauna in Pipe Dream (1955), Wang Ta's aunt in Flower Drum Song (1958), and the mother abbess in The Sound of Music. Hammerstein also regularly fashions a comic villain whose comedy or villainy varies from show to show: Jud, Jigger in Carousel, Billis in South Pacific, the Kralahome in The King and I, Hazel in Pipe Dream, and Max in The Sound of Music.

Hammerstein also adapted an interesting element from non-musical realism in the persona of the male star as object of the sexual gaze. In The King and I, the king becomes sex symbol, much as Stanley Kowalski became the object of the gaze in Streetcar Named Desire (1947). Brando's performance in the Williams play galvanized audiences not used to seeing the male on a sexual pedestal. Brynner's bare chested king was kin to Brando's torn tee-shirted Stanley. Brando's sensitivity coupled with his intense sexuality threatened to overturn the balance of the original production, as Elia Kazan writes in his memoirs:

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> But what had been intimated in our final rehearsals in New York was happening. The audiences adored Brando. When he derided Blanche, they responded with approving laughter. Was the play becoming the Marlon Brando Show? I didn't bring up the problem, because I didn't know the solution. I especially didn't want the actors to know that I was concerned. What would I say to Brando? Be less good? Or to Jessie [Jessica Tandy]? Get better?[71]

If audiences rooted for Brando's magnetic Stanley rather than Jessica Tandy's fragile Blanche in the original production of Streetcar, the legendary Gertrude Lawrence had her hands full trying to wrest audience empathy from the charismatic, shirtless Brynner. Lawrence was magnetic and held her own. After her death, however, and throughout the many revivals of the show in which Brynner performed, it was he rather than Mrs. Anna for whom audiences cheered.

The Concept Musical

If musical comedy was typified by the star as co-creator, and the serious musical through the 1950s repositioned the text as autonomous and sacrosanct, the concept musical, usually traced back to the 1960s, turned the serious musical into a vehicle for the auteur director/choreographer. True, one could argue that Harold Prince, the director of Company (1970) and Follies (1971), two of the most widely hailed concept musicals, was

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[71] Kazan, 345.

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not a choreographer; however, he collaborated with choreographer Michael Bennett who was co-director of Follies. In Bob Fosse's Pippin (1972) and Chicago (1975), the director/choreographer's vision is at least equal to and arguably supercedes the text. In fact, Fosse had composer/lyricist Stephen Schwartz banned from rehearsals during Pippin (1972), while Michael Bennett, according to drummer Peter Hammer, had such intense disdain for the score of Ballroom (1979), he refused to choreograph when the dance arranger improvised melodies from the show. Instead, Bennet insisted on working only to dance counts of eight. [72] In both these examples, the text and/or score were incidental to the director's vision. In concept musicals, the look of the show and the way it is staged are just as important, if not more so, than the text.[73]

According to Harold Prince, the collaboration with his designer, who for many years happened to be Boris Aronson, is also crucial to the success of the concept musical: "'I get rhythm out of the way a show looks, and my failures have usually been when I haven't known what a show should look like."[74] For Cabaret, the look was a George

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[72] Peter Hammer, Personal Interview, 12 December 1981.

[73] The development of the concept musical in the 1960s coincides with a decade that boasted some of the most dynamic director/choreographers in the history of the musical: Jerome Robbins, Gower Champion, Michael Kidd, Bob Fosse, Joe Layton, Ron Field, and Michael Bennett. Robbins, Champion, Kidd, Fosse, and Layton had long paid their dues. By the 1960s, their shows exhibited a look and style that was immediately identifiable: Robbins' ruthless insistence on telling a clear story through music and ballet; Champion's incredible ability to make a production number not just grow but explode; Kidd's unmistakable athleticism; Fosse's isolated body movements (borrowed from Jack Cole), and the use of nightclub and jazz idioms to explicate his cynical world view; and Layton's reliance on craft and speed to cover holes in the plot make them stars by the 1960s, often more bankable than most star performers.

[74] Quoted, in Hirsch, 51.

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Grosz painting; for Fiddler, the look was Marc Chagall. Company was staged amid a jumble of platforms and chromium symbolizing the coldness of modern urban life, whereas Sweeney Todd's unit set conveyed the Holocaust-like smoke and stench of industrialization. Merrily We Roll Along (1981) was one of the few concept musicals that Prince found difficult to envision. He changed the look of the show during previews and never found a satisfactory resolution:

> "Even when I stripped the sets and let the kids wear their rehearsal clothes--it became very Brechtian--nothing worked visually. Merrily was one of the rare experiences in my life when I didn't know what a show should look like. I still don't know what it should look like." Indeed, played on an abstract set in rehearsal clothes which labeled the characters (Best Friend, Rich Kid, etc.) and with dated legends on either side of the stage, the production's quasi-Brechtian bleakness undercut the impact of what Prince calls Sondheim's "warmest" score.[75]

At one point, Prince tried applying constructivist sets, but the look was confusing to Broadway musical theatre audiences of the time.

Concept musicals also tend to have a circular structure. An opening number tells the audience what the show's "idea" will be, and this is usually reiterated, with some variation, in the conclusion. The emcee welcomes the audience to a nightclub in Cabaret's (1966) "Wilkommen"; by the show's conclusion, the opening number is reprised with ugly, discordant chords to underscore the effect the moral deterioration of Nazi Germany

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[75] Hirsch, 133.

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has had on the characters at the Kit Kat Klub. Fiddler begins with a song, "Tradition," that tells the audience what the show is about. Without tradition, sings Tevye, life is as fragile as a fiddler on the roof. The show closes with the image of the fiddler tucking the violin under his arm and following Tevye to America. Sweeney Todd begins and ends with a Brechtian chorus emotionally distancing the audience as they narrate "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd."

Jerome Robbins perhaps did the most to introduce this thematic opening number convention. Historically, musical comedies and operettas began with a merry peasant number, establishing setting and mood. Hammerstein alters the tradition with Oklahoma!, but "Oh What A Beautiful Mornin'" still establishes mood and setting, although it is sung by a lone cowboy rather than a colorful chorus. It was Robbins who insisted that an opening song tell the audience precisely what the show is about, most famously when he doctored the floundering out-of-town tryout of A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum (1962). Robbins insisted the original opening number, "Love Is In The Air," misled audience expectations. He demanded the evening's farcical intent be reinforced with a new opening number, "Comedy Tonight," telling the audience exactly what the show purported to accomplish. If this is Robbins' most famous example of clarifying the evening's intent to audiences, he had used already perfected the technique in West Side Story (1957), in which "The Jet Song" establishes the show's theme of gang warfare. Eventually he would inspire Boch and Harnick to write "Tradition," to explicate Fiddler's theme. Again, a mutual genealogy is in effect, since Robbins' apprentice work as choreographer in On the Town (1944) was with director George Abbott, a collaboration

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that lasted into the 1950s, while Prince, producer of West Side Story and Forum long before he became a respected director, worked almost exclusively with Abbott early in his career. Abbott was famous for fixing an audience's horizon of expectations as soon as the curtain rose. Interviewed by William Goldman, Abbott maintained "You show an audience how to take a show in the opening scenes."[76]

The concept musical, then, tends to be the work of an auteur/director, has a definite physical look or design, and is often circular in structure. But what exactly is it? Perhaps the best definition is an intellectualized musical that confronts the audience with material or ideas it has historically gone to musicals to escape. The tired businessman of the 1940s and 1950s could accept Hammerstein's liberal platitudes about bigotry in South Pacific and The King and I; after all, Hammerstein was basically preaching to the choir. The tired businessman of the 1960s and 1970s, however, was bombarded with social and political contextualization: middle age deterioration framed by crumbling American values in Follies; Western colonialism and its devastating effect on Japanese culture in Pacific

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[76] William Goldman, The Season (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1969), 366. Goldman relates an anecdote about an Abbott failure, The Education of Hyman Kaplan (1968):

> A scene has just ended in a black-out, and as one set rolls off and another rolls on, there is almost a moment in which the audience doesn't know where it is. Almost, but not quite. Because an instant after the black-out, a spotlight picks up a pretty young girl crossing toward where the new set is going to be but isn't yet, and as she makes her cross, she says to another girl, who is standing on the far side of the stage, "And how are things in the teacher's room tonight?" This is a line that could happen only in a George Abbott musical. Because once the words are spoken, the audience relaxes; it knows that eventually all the rolling on of sets and flying in of drops are going to create a teachers' room. All confusion vanishes; no one has ever been confused when Mr. Abbott is around" (359).

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Overtures (1976); the perils of emotional commitment in a cold, urban culture in Company; a corrupt media's veneration of celebrities in Chicago; the dangers in creating poisonous popular culture heroes in Evita (1979); the tendency to prostitute oneself in a capitalistic society in Merrily We Roll Along (1981); and the plight of women in a patriarchal, materialist culture in A Doll's Life (1982), the musical sequel to Ibsen's A Doll's House. This was heady stuff for musical theatre audiences of the time. Not surprisingly, several of the musicals failed to make a profit. But Hammerstein's appropriation of serious subject matter from realistic non-musical theatre was now intellectualized and presented in a more politicized context, not unlike Weill's experiments with theatricalism and epic theatre in the 1930s and with elements of expressionism in Lady in the Dark. Indeed, with Follies, Prince and Sondheim exploded Hammerstein's romanticism and mythologization of the American dream.

If the emergence of the concept musical follows several different threads, it is important to acknowledge two early precursors of the form: Rodgers and Hammerstein's Allegro, which bears a remarkable similarity to Thornton Wilder's Our Town, and Kurt Weill and Alan Jay Lerner's Love Life (1948), a history of a marriage told through the conventions of American vaudeville.

Like Show Boat, Allegro is epic in scope; it covers the first thirty five years in the life of Joe Taylor, Jr., Hammerstein's vision of Everyman. Joe is an idealistic doctor who loses his way in a materialistic society. Allegro traces Joe's birth, his upbringing as the son of a country doctor, his years at college, his marriage to his childhood sweetheart, his migration to a big city, and his career as a successful physician in an urban hospital. By

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act two. Joe has sold out: instead of healing needy patients, he becomes a kind of rich quack, comforting wealthy neurotics and squandering his knowledge and talent. Jenny, his wife, is a materialist for whom medicine promises a lifestyle, not an ethic. Ultimately, she sleeps with the president of the board of directors of a major city medical center to help secure a position as chief of staff for her husband. Disgusted, Joe walks off into the sunset at the second act curtain, accompanied by Charlie, his alcoholic best friend and colleague, and by Emily, the plain, sensible nurse who has loved him all along.

Hammerstein conceived Allegro as a kind of musical Our Town. Rather than a set signifying pictorial illusion, a bare stage was used. Projections were shown on a huge cyclorama; sometimes these were representational (a huge spoon when infant Joe is learning to eat) and sometimes abstract (geometrical patterns and shapes were projected to signify the hectic pace of modern urban life in act two).[77] Hammerstein employed a third chorus in addition to the traditional (at the time) singing and dancing choruses: a Greek chorus, who sometimes spoke and sometimes sang, but who frequently commented on the action and on the characters.[78]

Hammerstein's Greek chorus deliberately interrupted the book scenes, isolating and underscoring the show's theme of compromise. The chorus first appears in the opening scene, when Joe's mother is giving birth. Unlike the conventional chorus of a

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[77] Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 97.

[78] Until the late 1950s, musicals typically had a separate singing and dancing chorus. With spiralling production costs and the rise of the director/choreographer, men like Gower Champion, Bob Fosse, and Joe Layton, chorus members could no longer do one or the other. They had to sing *and* dance.

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musical, they carry scripts, introducing a theatricalism reminiscent of Wilder and Pirandello. At the beginning of the play, the chorus narrates Joe's birth. He is not visible onstage, but is addressed by the chorus as if he and the audience are one, which is partially true since Joe is Hammerstein's Everyman. Throughout the play, the Greek chorus comments on the action and serves as a counterpoint to the traditional dancing and singing chouses. In act two, the chorus expresses its antipathy to the frenzy of modern city life in a cocktail party chant, which simultaneously serves to entertain the audience and create emotional detachment or alienation. Not only is the technique reminiscent of Brechtian epic theatre (particularly with the use of slides projected on the rear cyclorama), it is remarkably similar to the theatricalism of Wilder in The Skin of Our Teeth, where Sabina's interjections about how much she hates the play in which she is forced to perform, the stage manager's explaining that various cast members have succumbed to ptomaine poisoning, and the dinosaur and the mammoth's antics all serve as comic theatricalism, producing laughter in the audience while at the same time underscoring Wilder's rather didactic message. Also borrowing a bit from expressionism, Hammerstein laces the tale of his Christlike central figure with archetypes: the Grandmother, the Mother, the Father, the Best Friend, the Wife, and the Loyal Secretary.

Agnes De Mille, who had found new and interesting ways to narrate plot and demonstrate character in Oklahoma! and Carousel, contributed even more daring ballets in Allegro. De Mille staged the final ballet to depict the brutality of modern urban society, with chorus members being crucified onstage, as close to an expressionistic statement of

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stations of the cross the musical is likely to get.[79] Perhaps De Mille's greatest contribution to the future of musical theatre, however, was the fluidity of her staging, since she directed as well as choreographed the musical, a harbinger of the superstar concept musical director/choreographers of the 1960s and 1970s. Allegro was close to ballet theatre, with virtually no stage wait between set changes. Since the stage was bare, characters would appear in spots or specials in a series of scenic dissolves. As one scene ended, the characters would exit offstage as new characters reappeared on another, often in full view of the audience. Designer Jo Mielziner's ramps and platforms helped differentiate space, and treadmills added to the constant sense of motion. Props and bits of furniture were used, but the play depended on lighting and scenic projections, which commented, as did the chorus, on plot and character.[80]

Allegro was Hammerstein's first and last venture away from realism and was amazingly similar to the kind of experiments Wilder had negotiated in Our Town and The Skin of Our Teeth. De Mille's fluid staging of the show was as integral to the central

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[79] Rodgers and Hammerstein, fearing negative audience reception, begged DeMille to soften the ballet, and it began more satirically, focusing on the speed and noise of city life. See Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 97-98.

[80] It was this cinematic fluidity which influenced Joshua Logan's staging of Rodgers and Hammerstein's next musical, South Pacific, and which influenced the way musicals moved for the next fifty years. The series of dissolves in Allegro happened on a bare stage, conceived in terms similar to the ancient Greek *orchestra*; two years later, South Pacific boasted more representational scenery by Mielziner and the effect of these quick dissolves on a stage filled with scenery was perhaps even more startling in 1949 than it had been in 1947 with Allegro.

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theme of compromise as the libretto and lyrics.[81] Stephen Sondheim was Hammerstein's gopher on the musical, and he has suggested that his career has consisted of attempts to rewrite Allegro: "In Allegro, Oscar used theatre convention frankly as theatre convention: the chorus that oversees the action, the abstract scenic design. These techniques have had a large influence on Hal's [Prince's] work and on mine."[82] Indeed, Allegro is pivotal to Sondheim's work with Harold Prince in the 1970s. The chorus of married couples who comment on the action in Company is a direct outgrowth of Rodgers and Hammerstein's Greek chorus. Hammerstein's libretto for Allegro literally bridges the world of the living and the dead, which anticipates the use of ghosts in Follies to underscore the deterioration of the characters and of a decaying America. Both Merrily We Roll Along (1981) and Sunday in the Park With George (1984) involve choices and roads either taken or abandoned. Both these latter Sondheim musicals also deal, in a somewhat postmodern fashion, with the plight of the artist in a commercial society, a predicament Hammerstein wrote about in relation to Allegro: "It is a law of our civilization that as soon as a man proves he can contribute to the well being of the world, there be created an immediate conspiracy to destroy his usefulness, a conspiracy in which he is usually a willing collaborator. Sometimes he awakens to his danger and does something about it. This is

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[81] Perhaps De Mille's staging experiments were more than Hammerstein had bargained for. Hammerstein stepped in during rehearsals and directed some of the scenes himself, whether because De Mille had too much on her plate, or because her innovative, ballet theatre staging became of concern.

[82] Quoted, in Hirsch, 21.

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the story of Allegro."[83] Although credited as a revolutionary, Sondheim is firmly descended from the Hammerstein of Allegro, the most atypical of the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaborations.

Similar in its theatricalism to Allegro, Love Life (1948), with music by Kurt Weill and book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, is another precursor to the Sondheim/Prince concept musicals of the 1970s. Producer Cheryl Crawford describes Love Life as an attempt to illustrate the effects of economics, particularly the growth of the industrial age, on one married couple from 1791 to the present, a somewhat intellectual enterprise for audiences of the day. Billed as a vaudeville, "the songs served as commentaries on character and situations, like Weill's earlier work in Germany."[84] There was no linear plot, but separate and connecting scenes spanning a period of one hundred and fifty years.

Whereas in Allegro Hammerstein had used comic theatricalism to entertain but distance his audiences while underscoring his didactic message, Weill used the conventions of American vaudeville to comment ironically on his fantasy about marriage mired in American economics. In The Musical Theatre: A Celebration, Alan Jay Lerner details the presentational aspects of the show:

> It began with a magician who sawed a lady, the leading lady, in half, raised the leading man three feet off the stage in the time honored, elevated trick and then disappeared, leaving the couple to figure out how they had arrived

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[83] Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, Allegro, in Six Plays by Rodgers and Hammerstein (New York: Random House, 1953), 116.

[84] Cheryl Crawford, One Naked Individual (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), 171.

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> in this awkward position, where the woman was half homemaker, half breadwinner, and part-time mother, and the man up in the air. The music was in the vaudeville genre. . . . Michael Kidd provided an imaginative Punch and Judy ballet, which took place in a divorce court . . . there were vaudeville quartets, songs, and dance acts, and even a trapeze artiste swung out over the theatre.[85]

Unlike the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows before and after Allegro, characters here don't just express their feelings; they comment on them. Weill used standard musical comedy conventions to distance his audience, not just to entertain them. Each scene ended with a vaudeville routine, an ironic distillation of the progression toward the economic disintegration of the central marriage. The techniques, like Allegro, are remarkably similar to the techniques Sondheim would use with Prince in shows like Company and Follies over twenty years later; indeed, both Company and Love Life share marriage and the difficulty of sustaining relationships as their central topic. According to Cheryl Crawford, there was "no heart and no passion [in the original production of Love Life]. The audience couldn't get emotionally involved in the marital problems of the couple."[86] This, of course, was precisely the point, but emotional alienation is difficult to popularize in the American musical theatre. Ironically, the most frequent criticism of the Sondheim/Prince shows, both by critics and by audiences, has also been that they are "cold."

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[85] Lerner, 170-171.

[86] Crawford, 168.

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Like Allegro, Love Life had in incredibly strong director, Elia Kazan, although Kazan was not a choreographer, and this was his only attempt at a musical.[87] Also involved in the production was designer Boris Aronson, who later became part of Harold Prince's creative team, designing Fiddler on the Roof (1964), Cabaret (1966), and Zorba (1968), three pioneering attempts at the concept musical, as well as the Prince/Sondheim Company, Follies, A Little Night Music (1972), and Pacific Overtures (1976). Once again, both Aronson's contribution to Love Life and Sondheim's involvement with Allegro underscore the musical as a collaborative form which constantly recreates itself, a genealogy of mutual influence.

Although precursors to the concept musicals that would emerge over twenty years later, Allegro and Love Life were by no means solitary threads in a direct lineage. The conventions Sondheim and Prince employed in the 1970s to underscore their intellectualized social and political messages hearken back to the 1930s, most particularly to the eclectic experiments of Kurt Weill with Brechtian alienation, expressionism, and theatricalism. One can trace echoes of The Eternal Road, Johnny Johnson, Knickerbocker Holiday, and The Cradle Will Rock, in addition to the expressionistic dream sequences of Lady in the Dark in the Sondheim/Prince collaborations. Sweeney Todd's Mrs. Lovett,

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[87] Love Life is perhaps best remembered as the show that created a schism between Elia Kazan and Robert Lewis, causing the latter to abandon the newly formed Actors Studio. Originally, Cheryl Crawford had approached Lewis about directing Love Life, but Kazan had discouraged him from embarking on what he argued was a weak project. At Kazan's urging, Lewis declined the project. Months later, Lewis learned that Kazan had accepted the directing assignment himself. Irritated by Kazan's betrayal, he resigned from the Actors Studio. The rift with Lewis over Love Life is, not surprisingly, absent from Kazan's autobiography. See David Garfield, A Player's Place: The Story of the Actors Studio (New York: MacMillan, 1980), 69-70.

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for example, could well be the heroine of a Brechtian musical. A comic Mother Courage, she chooses to develop her entrepreneurial spirit by embarking on a life of crime in this satire of capitalistic enterprise. Company's Bobby can be compared to Johnny Johnson's pacifist protagonist; virtually ciphers, both embark on a search for self education and enlightenment through a kind of "stations of the cross" journey. Both musicals involve eclectic scores and ironic choral commentary which distance the audience from emotional involvement and force it to question social platitudes.

The Sondheim/Prince Evita (not to mention the Prince/Kander and Ebb Cabaret) is reminiscent of Weill's Knickerbocker Holiday in its use of historicization and makes much the same point in a far more intellectualized, sophisticated way: who are our popular culture heroes and why have we allowed them to manipulate us? According to Prince, Evita is about Péronism, but also about America and its tendency to create false Gods:

> I find Evita herself to be absolutely relevant to contemporary politics, where glamor can mask bad deeds. I wanted the audience to *examine* what they worship. Fifteen years ago I told editors at *Time* that they put villains and felons on their covers, powerful figures who weren't caught. What that show is about is as poisonous now as in Evita's lifetime: how dishonest the news is every night.[88]

Like Anderson, Prince is using Brechtian historicization in relating Péronism to the dishonesty of the American news media. Ironically, audience reception to the character of Evita was the antithesis of Prince's intention. Rather than distance themselves from Evita,

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[88] Quoted. in Hirsch. 162.

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audiences tended to treat her as a political version of Dolly or Mame, tough but loveable to the core. Patrons cheered her despite her negative deeds and motives. Perhaps they read her as a victim of the system; perhaps she was a symbol of the independent woman in an era of the burgeoning feminist movement; perhaps none of this seemed to matter since the unwashed masses she alternately reviles and reveres are Argentinian rather than American.

Unquestionably, Evita borrows from an older musical theatre convention, the Cinderella story, even if, in this particular inversion, Evita is the Cinderella from Hell. Ironically, audiences distanced themselves from Prince's message of the media glorifying negative role models, while clinging to an older horizon of expectations: reverence for the Cinderella myth, which has been a part of musicals since at least the 1920s. Here is a case where reception for a popular musical manages to ignore the negative message intended by its creators. Evita's cynicism about the media was much like that of Chicago four years earlier (1975). Although both shows were successful in their original Broadway incarnations, their success probably had more to do with the razzle dazzle of performance and staging than with authorial intent. Chicago didn't really come into its own until its revival (1996) in a cynical cultural moment that found Americans reeling from the O.J. Simpson murder trial, the attack on Michael Jackson for child molestation, and President Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky. During its original Broadway run, Chicago's cynicism was deliberately overlooked; the focus was on its two divas, Gwen Verdon and Chita Rivera, both of whom played unsympathetic murderesses. Again, we can trace a genealogy of influence back to the original production of Pal Joey, where the show's

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unpleasant subject matter and characters were overlooked because of two charismatic, memorable performances by Gene Kelly and Vivienne Segal. Similarly, Evita skyrocketed Patti Lupone to fame, evoking the great diva musicals of the 1960s, while its political message about false worship of celebrities was largely overlooked. Perhaps audiences in 2001, cynical about their political leaders and government as well as their celebrities, would respond to the title character differently if the show were to be revived.

One can make a similar claim about reception to Sweeney Todd (1979), another Sondheim/Prince concept musical that revolves around the evils of industrialization. According to Prince, "I felt that by placing the action in its late nineteenth-century context, we could say that from the day the Industrial Revolution entered our lives, the conveyor belt pulled us further and further from harmony, from humanity, from nature."[89] The suffocating smoke emanating from the onstage factory in the original production designed by Eugene Lee suggested that the effect of industrialization on humanity was akin to the Holocaust; individuals were being sacrificed to a system that amounted to a large gas chamber: dehumanizing and murderous. Certainly, the title character, in his quest for vengeance, turns mad. Like Evita, however, the character of Sweeney Todd seems to invite cheers from the audience. Rather than Brechtian distancing, spectators seem to root for Sweeney the underdog, which undermined Prince's intellectual concept. Despite Prince's avowed intent, Sweeney Todd, the musical, remains a Victorian melodrama rather than a Brechtian parable of the horrors of industrialization. Arguably, Sweeney Todd, like Evita, is an example of a serious musical that succeeds in spite of,

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[89] Ibid., 120.

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rather than because of, its serious message.[90]

Historicization is not the only Brechtian distancing technique characteristic of concept musicals. Just as Brecht used songs as ironic commentary, and, before him, Meyerhold used vaudeville and circus techniques to express a character's hidden emotions, concept musicals tend to express their intellectualizations through musical comedy conventions that are reshaped to comment ironically on character and situation. Again the roots are in the Weill musicals of the 1930s and 1940s, most notably the dream sequences from Lady in the Dark. Decades later, the Sondheim/Prince Anyone Can Whistle (1964), unites older musical comedy conventions with those of the theatre of the absurd. The musical questions who is crazy and who is sane. Should society cherish the conventional or prize the nonconformist? The plot concerns a group of escapees from the "cookie jar," a mental institution. At one point, members of the cast who we have been told are insane, sit in theatre seats onstage and applaud the audience. This kind of theatricalist convention is reminiscent of Wilder's act one conclusion in The Skin of Our Teeth, in which Antrobus demands that the audience chop up its theatre seats for firewood to fight the oncoming glacier. Sondheim uses non-musical stage conventions which he borrows from Wilder and Pirandello to distance the audience and force it to question its clinging to conformity. "Me and My Town" involves a corrupt lady mayor and her bureaucratic stooges, who perform an extended nightclub routine to comment on the hypocrisy of government and indeed, of society. The "Cookie Chase Ballet," which

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[90] See chapter four for John Fiske's theory about the audience excorporating the text for its own purposes in terms of Evita and Sweeney Todd.

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involves song, dialogue, and dance, is an extended inversion of the rather hackneyed dream ballet, a further chipping away of the barriers between the spoken word and song.

Cabaret is even more obvious in its Meyerholdian use of vaudeville and musical comedy conventions as commentary. The play is divided into both realistic dialogue scenes that occur in the rooming house and performance numbers that occur onstage at the Kit Kat Club. Virtually all the nightclub numbers are commentaries on the action, ironic darts thrown at a Germany decaying through the rise of Nazism. We are at first taken in and entranced by the show business razzle dazzle of the Kit Kat Klub. As the evening progresses, we become horrified as we see the performance numbers reflect the moral corruption of a Germany under the sway of the Third Reich. The emcee, like a character in a Brecht/Weill musical play, steps downstage into a colored spotlight to comment on the play, simultaneously entertaining and distancing the audience in routines like "Wilkommen," "The Money Song," and "Two Ladies." Like the Brecht/Weill Threepenny Opera, these song and dance numbers are metaphors for a decaying Germany.

In the original production, Prince tried to create the impression that the moral corruption of the Kit Kat Klub was seeping into the everyday lives of Cliff and the others in the rooming house. Kit Kat Club girls lingered onstage and watched as the set changed to the rooming house. In the 1998 Broadway revival, director Sam Mendes takes the limbo world one step further. The denizens of the Kit Kat Klub no longer just linger; they act as an otherworldly presence, not unlike the ghosts in Follies. The emcee and chorus girls infiltrate the rooming house as they eavesdrop and spy on the characters in the more realistic dialogue scenes. The moral corruption, Mendes assures us, is everywhere.

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Employing a theatricalist technique worthy of Meyerhold, Prince used a distortion mirror in the original production of Cabaret through which the audience, at times, was permitted to see its own reflection, not unlike the moment in Anyone Can Whistle when the "crazies" sit onstage in theatre seats and applaud the audience. After "If You Could See Her Through My Eyes," the number in which the emcee dances with a gorilla, the mirror stopped distorting and became reflective just as the emcee sang the punch line, "If you could see her through my eyes/she wouldn't look Jewish at all."[91] The effect was chilling. The audience was able to witness its own reaction to the racist joke. Some in the audience laughed, some were shocked, while others were simply hypnotized into watching their own reactions and the those of their fellow spectators.

A product of its cultural moment, Follies (1971) was written as the tumultuous 1960s came to a close. Exploring America's crumbling values and shifting social arrangements, it exploded the post-war mythologization of America that was so endemic to the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon. In addition to songs that reveal character and emerge from dialogue, Sondheim uses pastiche and performance numbers to comment on the dichotomy between present and past, youth and maturity, reality and fantasy. The score, like that of Johnny Johnson and other Weill scores of the 1930s, is incredibly eclectic, a kind of time travel through varying musical theatre styles. One hears echoes of Romberg in "One More Kiss," Cole Porter in "Lucy and Jessie," DeSylva, Brown, and

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[91] Joe Masteroff, John Kander, and Fred Ebb, Cabaret (New York: Random House, 1967), 93. This is the punchline from the published version of the script. The Anti-Defamation League was so offended by the line during previews that it was changed to "She isn't a meeskite at all."

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Henderson in "Broadway Baby," and Irving Berlin and the Ziegfeld Follies in "Beautiful Girls." Through these performance numbers, Sondheim enables the characters to express neuroses they would otherwise be unable to verbalize. Indeed, the "Loveland" sequence becomes a kind of Walpurgisnacht, in which the four principle characters expose their psychological demons to the audience and to themselves.

Admitting to a theatricalist bent and crediting Meyerhold as his inspiration, Prince staged the more realistic book scenes as well as the performance numbers with onstage ghosts, costumed in black and white. By juxtaposing young and old versions of the principals, Prince was able to comment on their false dreams and illusions. During an emotional scene between Sally and Ben, where both realize the foolishness of their illusions, one of the ghosts, a tall, statuesque showgirl, turned her back to the audience, whereupon a strand of pearls she was wearing fell to the ground. The effect was spellbinding. The shattered pearls mirrored Ben and Sally's shattered illusions about their relationship.

Sondheim credits Hammerstein's theatricalist techniques in Allegro as the inspiration for much of his own work. Both Prince and Sondheim, however, swear they are not influenced by Brecht. According to Sondheim, "Brecht and Weill worked in a tradition of *Lehrstück*; my background is Broadway and the two are very different . . . I like *Threepenny Opera* but not really anything else. Basically, I hate Brecht."[92] True, Sondheim and Prince are commercial Broadway showmen, not Marxists. But in the kinds of intellectualized ideas they feed audiences and in the ironic, often jeering commentary

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[92] Hirsch, 15.

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and use of musical comedy and vaudeville conventions to underscore ideas, they incorporate elements of anti-cathartic epic theatre, as well as other forms of anti-realism. The use of narration and the Christlike protagonist on the road to self knowledge in a musical like Sweeney Todd is reminiscent of expressionism, while the ironic choral commentary and the emotional distancing of actors through song are characteristic of Brecht and epic theatre, despite Sondheim's denials.

Prince, on the other hand, likens himself to Meyerhold, rather than to Brecht:

> Unlike Brecht, my purpose is not to eliminate emotional response--it isn't by design that a show of mine is cold. Brecht flooded his stage with white light; I like shadows. I was flattered when the widow of [Brecht's teacher] Erwin Piscator said Evita was close in spirit to her husband's work, but in fact Russian theatre has influenced me far more than Brecht's tradition; Joshua Logan told me my work resembled Meyerhold's. Furthermore, I've been bored to death by Brecht-inspired productions.[93]

Prince seems to ignore some important information here. Brecht did not totally eliminate emotional response. His characters are sufficiently complex that they often elicit emotional response and empathy. Secondly, Brecht was a disciple of Piscator, who borrowed many ideas from the expressionists and, before them, from Meyerhold. It was Meyerhold who first advocated a kind of theatricalism, using vaudeville and circus conventions and constructivist sets to tell his tales. What Meyerhold, Piscator, and Brecht have in common is the use of anti-realistic theatrical conventions to frame their politicized

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[93] Ibid., 15.

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ideas. This is also the tradition that Weill's American musicals followed in the 1930s, as well as the American satirical musicals of the Gershwins, Kaufman, and Ryskind. We also see the tradition in Allegro and in Love Life in the 1940s. Once again, the development of the form is not linear but the history of a mutual genealogy.

The Contemporary Musical: Searching for a New Horizon of Expectations

At the same time that the concept musical was emerging as force with which to be reckoned, artists like Tom O'Horgan and Tom Eyen tried to apply what was vital in the experimental New York theatre to the musical: O'Horgan with Hair (1968) and Eyen with Caution: A Love Story (1968), which combined the saga of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor with a band of gypsies performing excerpts from The Kama Sutra.[94] Both O'Horgan and Eyen worked at LaMama and were part of a cultural zeitgeist that included the experiments of the Living Theatre, the Performance Garage, Robert Wilson and an emerging eclectic post-modernism that began to chip away at the realism of commerical non-musical theatre. As non-musical theatre struggled to find new structural and performance conventions, the conventions of the serious musical began to change as well. Popular music was forever altered with the emergence of rock, which became the music of the hit parade, rather than the peculiar hybrid of Jewish/Eastern European/African-American jazz that had influenced tin pan alley and show music for most of the century.

Hair, the first successful rock musical, with book and lyrics by Gerry Ragni and

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[94] The score was by the author of this dissertation. Also see Tom Eyen and Bruce Kirle, Kama Sutra, in Tom Eyen: Ten Plays (New York: Samuel French, 1971).

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James Rado and music by Galt McDermitt, emerged concurrently with the concept musical. If the concept musical was a product of its cultural moment, so was Hair, but in a different way. Whereas one can trace influences from Hammerstein to Brecht and Weill in the Prince/Sondheim collaborations, one can see remnants of the Gershwin political satires of the 1930s in Hair, which involved the day to day concerns of young people in the turbulent 1960s: the war in Vietnam, the draft, sexual identity, and a post-Romantic concern with individuality threatened by the establishment. The musical broke many musical theatre conventions. The minimal dialogue was hardly realistic; the plot, thin as it was, was told in a revue-like format. Hair was as much a happening as a musical. Presentational in style, the concept was metatheatrical. The Hair tribe appeared before the show and wandered through the audience, much like the members of the Living Theatre troupe that had performed Paradise Now a year earlier. Like the Living Theatre actors, the actors in Hair generally used their own names in the show. It was clear from the beginning of the performance that the musical was just that, a performance. The tribe consisted of actors, telling their counter-culture story to what was largely a middle class audience.

The seriousness of the anti-war theme was undercut by the campy staging of O'Horgan and the casting of authors James Rado and Gerry Ragni, both of whom were approaching middle age, which seriously dislodged a sense of reality in their portrayal of draft aged teenagers. O'Horgan's staging was probably more concerned with drug fantasies and gender ambiguity than with the war in Vietnam. The book scenes, as well as the musical numbers, were characterized by gender role reversals, in which men played

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women and women played men. Jonathan Kramer played Margaret Mead in drag and sang "My Conviction," while another character, Woof, was avowedly bisexual. The musical also featured a now legendary nude scene, which was an outgrowth of the nudity prevalent at performances of experimental works by The Living Theatre, the Performance Garage, and LaMama.

In "The Haunted Stage" and Places of Performance, Marvin Carlson discusses the location of the theatre, the neighborhood surrounding the place of performance, the lobby, and the auditorium itself as crucial elements in reception.[95] Hair played at the Biltmore in New York. The outside of the theatre was spray painted to look like an East Village tenement. The inside of the Biltmore was deliberately defaced and decorated with old tires and refuse to resemble the kind of neighborhood its middle class audience probably didn't want to traverse. In its alteration of the theatre building, Hair anticipates Rent (1996). Both musicals enable a middle aged, middle class audience to "visit" a provocative Bohemian milieu in a safe, protected environment

Hair's disregard of standard musical theatre conventions was symptomatic of changes in Broadway audiences' horizons of expectations by the 1970s and 1980s. As both the rock musical and the concept musical thrived, the British poperetta, a sung through musical with operatic aspirations, arrived in America with Tom O'Horgan's staging of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Jesus Christ Superstar (1972), and continued with

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[95] See Marvin Carlson, "The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre," Theatre Survey 35 (May 94): 5-18. Also see Marvin Carlson, Theatre Semiotics (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990) and Places of Performance (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989)

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Prince's Evita (1979), the revue-like Cats (1982), Phantom of the Opera (1988), and Les Miserables (1987). Sometimes the genres were mixed: Superstar is a poperetta with a rock score, while Evita is arguably a sung through concept musical. The mutual genealogy is again at work.

Like the rock musical and the concept musical, the poperetta renegotiates musical theatre conventions. Poperettas have no dialogue. The assumption is that everything that is sung is emotionally heightened, which often makes the faux opera recitatives, particularly since they are in English, sound banal. With the use of recitative comes another alteration in the musical's ongoing negotiation between the realistic and the presentational: amplification. Body mikes are easily detected on the current Broadway stage. Seeing a microphone stick out of a performer's spit curls is a fourth wall shattering experience, at least for me. My own sense of disbelief is not heightened when I hear an amplified voice but can't tell where it's coming from.

One wonders the extent to which amplification in the late 1960s encouraged the birth of the sung through poperetta. One of the first fully amplified musicals was Promises, Promises (1968), which offered a rather conventional Neil Simon libretto of realistic dialogue scenes and a contemporary score by Burt Bacharach. Bacharach insisted on an amplified sound for the songs. He installed pit voices in the orchestra to replicate a recording studio style rather than the sound of the typical hard sell Broadway show tune. What happens to realistic dialogue scenes, however, when all the songs are amplified? It is almost impossible to make a seamless transition between dialogue and song when orchestra and voice are amplified but dialogue is not. The realism of unamplified book

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scenes and the artificiality endemic to vocal and musical amplification make for an unbridgeable chasm. If one agrees to mike the dialogue, the lines no longer sound realistic. One solution, of course, is to eliminate the dialogue, which is exactly what poperettas do.

Phantom, a Webber poperetta directed by Prince, is virtually devoid of dialogue. Like Evita, it has metatheatrical elements. The play is set in a theatre; at times, we see onstage performances at the opera house haunted by the phantom. But where Evita is a complex character, with complex relationships, the score for Phantom offers considerably less psychologizing than a Hammerstein libretto. Whereas the film and novel detail the phantom's unhappy medical history, Christine's childhood relationship with Raoul, and her adoration of her father, she becomes a singing cipher in the musical. What are we to make of her relationship with the phantom? Foster Hirsch argues that Michael Crawford played the role "with unexpected realism, as an obsessed lover craving acceptance."[96] This may be true. Crawford is a wonderful actor. I would argue that the relationship between the phantom and Christine, as written, is undefined and murky. Are we supposed to believe that Christine is sexually attracted to the phantom? Are they sleeping together? In terms of psychologized relationships, the work seems puzzling and unresolved; nevertheless, it is one of the most commercially successful musicals in the history of the American theatre.

Musicals are stubborn and not easily amenable to change, since they are written to please a large, popular audience not particularly interested in adjusting their horizon of expectations or deviating from the cultural hegemony. What is the horizon of

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[96] Hirsch, 169.

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expectations for musical theatre audiences in 2001? In "The Haunted Stage," Marvin Carlson argues than an audience's reception of a theatrical event is enriched by elements of performance familiar from other theatrical experiences.[97] For older audiences, who expect the serious book musical to echo the Rodgers and Hammerstein aesthetic of realism cum musical comedy convention, contemporary musicals offer little that is familiar or comforting. Going to musicals for an audience reared on a Rodgers and Hammerstein horizon of expectations is a bit like visiting a dismembered friend. He's still around, but certainly he's lost a lot of his vitality and joy. These are partly the audiences that throng to the Encores series of revivals in New York City and increasingly, musical revival companies in other cities around the country as well as in London. For younger audiences, raised on television and film, there is no horizon of expectations concerning stage conventions when they enter a legitimate theatre. They have been brought up to expect the realism of film and television. Musicals that at least purport to deal with serious subject matter in a guise of social realism embrace comfortable territory. In Beyond Naturalism, William Demastes writes of the way non-musical theatre has been influenced by the realism of film and television:

> Thanks to television and cinema, today's audiences come to the theatre "trained" in realism, given the fact that with the last few generations of audiences a circle has been completed--the theatre trained moviegoers and now movies train theatregoers. As a result, the doors of American theatre remain open to the widest spectrum of the American public as long as it

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[97] Carlson, "The Haunted Stage," 6.

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offers a realistic format.[98]

A popular art form, musicals to some extent capitalize on elements of realism familiar to film and television audiences to sell tickets. But these younger audiences are not locked into any musical theatre conventions. Outside of Disney cartoons, musicals by and large are not part of their frame of reference; consequently, they are more apt to accept new conventions. I suspect younger audiences, unfamiliar with older conventions of the musical stage, find the sung-through form more believable and "realistic" than the aesthetic of seamless transition between dialogue and song. Dialogue interspersed with song is, after all, no less artificial than the sung-through musical. Since there is no realistic dialogue in poperetta, songs never interrupt one's sense of disbelief: with song established as unbroken throughout the performance, many younger audiences seem to find the sung-through form more palatable.[99]

Obviously, the musical is changing and evolving, but like the eclectic postmodern non-musical theatre, into what? As a result, it is hard to define precisely what a musical is, as the spring 2000 Tony nominees suggested.[100] Is it Contact, which is really ballet theatre with recycled music and a taped band? Is The Wild Party, a sung-through piece without

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[98] William W. Demastes, Beyond Naturalism (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 30.

[99] In my musical theatre classes, students are often disturbed by the transition from dialogue to song in musicals like Carousel and West Side Story. On the other hand, they readily accept the believability of sung-through musicals like Les Misérables.

[100] With the triumph of The Producers and the revival of Forty-Second Street during the 2001 Tonys, oddly musical comedy took its place beside the integrated, serious musical. Only time will tell if these two shows, reflections of the past, are also harbingers of the future and a new cultural moment.

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realistic book scenes but with a dour dose of social realism, the way poperettas will progress? Is Swing, a revue of 1940s swing music without an original musical score, a musical? Or is The Dead, which is a realistic play interrupted by Irish songs which are performed realistically during a New Year's Eve Party, a harbinger of musicals to come? Older friends of mine complained that there wasn't a "genuine" musical in that year's list of Tony nominees. Younger acquaintances were excited by the variety of the nominees. What is undeniably true and what has always been true is that more than one genre of serious musical is happening at the same time. Hammerstein did not work in a vacuum; neither did Weill or Gershwin or Sondheim. Musicals are not linear, but a history of collaboration and mutual influence. They also document their own cultural moment, which itself is often confusing to those living in it.

The musical has always reflected aspects of the non-musical stage. The non-musical today is incredibly eclectic--witness the work of Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, and Trevor Nunn, among others. Today's integrated musicals by and large struggle to be taken seriously, at least in the subject matter and social problems they choose to tackle But what is important about a musical like Parade (1998), a throwback to the liberal social platitudes of Kurt Weill in the 1930s and Oscar Hammerstein in the 1940s? The musical, about the lynching of a Jew in Atlanta in the 1920s, was produced at Lincoln Center for a prosperous, older, liberal audience, a large percentage of whom happen to be Jewish. What is the important message here? It's not a good idea to lynch Jews in the South? Bigotry is bad? Like Hammerstein and Wilder in the 1940s, this is preaching to the choir. Musicals need to reflect their cultural moment. Parade reflects a cultural moment that

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became passe with the birth of the counterculture in the 1960s. Successful musicals tell us something about shifting social arrangements through the century. Musicals like Parade reflect the *Zeitgeist* of the day before yesterday.

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Chapter Four:

The Serious Musical: Popularity, Reception, and Utopia

Musicals are products of their given cultural moments; they can be both reactionary and subversive, conservative and progressive. The non-integrated musical, which I discussed in the first two chapters, was characterized by privileging the performer as co-creator and by plots that tended to be frivolous. Ironically, these musical comedies, trivial as their plots may have been, promoted performativity of identity in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. As such, they were often subversive in that the performers invited transgressive, coded readings from a heterogeneous audience. On the other hand, the integrated musical, whose development I charted in chapter three, has privileged the text and tackled increasingly serious subject matter for the past sixty years, but, ironically, tends to be more conservative in dealing with issues of class, race, ethnicity, and gender. As a result, the integrated musical, when choosing to tackle serious subject matter, often offers utopic solutions to perceived needs and desires of an audience that has grown increasingly elitist during the latter half of the twentieth century.

My interest in this chapter is to look at the textually privileged, integrated musical to determine how salient examples reflect changing American attitudes toward class, ethnicity, race, and gender. I have chosen four long-running musicals which seem representative to me of shifting cultural moments during the last half of the twentieth century: Oklahoma! in the 1940s, Fiddler on the Roof in the 1960s, A Chorus Line in the 1970s, and Les Misérables in the 1980s. Each of these musicals addresses social needs

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with which audiences of the time needed to grapple.

Richard Dyer suggests that musicals, at least musical films, mythologize entertainment as utopia.[1] Dyer's theory borrows from neo-Gramscian theorists and, to an extent, cultural populism, and suggests that musicals negotiate conflicts between the dominant hegemony and resistant forces within society to find non-transgressive solutions to social problems.[2] These solutions are often highly optimistic, even progressive, but they are basically solutions to social conflicts that capitalism or hegemony itself potentially can supply. It should be no shock that musicals with a broad popular appeal don't preach revolution.

I will frame the serious, integrated musical in a given cultural moment and show how the form often offers a utopic solution to a social problem. As Broadway audiences become more elitist and as class arrangements shift over the course of the past sixty years, musicals become markers that document shifts in American attitudes toward class, which

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[1] Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," The Cultural Studies Reader, ed. Simon During (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 371-81.

[2] Antonio Gramsci, Selections from Prison Notebooks, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971). For an overview on neo-Gramscian cultural theory, see John Storey, An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 123-29; John Storey, Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Roger Simon, Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982). For an application of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony to nineteenth century melodrama, see Bruce A. McConachie, "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History," Interpreting the Theatrical Past, edited by Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 37-58. For cultural populism, see John Fiske, Understanding Popular Culture (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). For an attack on Fiske and cultural populism, see Jim McGuigan, Cultural Populism (London: Routledge, 1992).

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is often inextricable from ethnicity, race, and gender. I have chosen popular, long-running integrated musicals because they are the best markers of their cultural moments; they have the widest and longest range of appeal. I will begin by discussing consumption and changing patterns of leisure activities during the first part of the twentieth century, providing a basis for the appeal of the Rodgers and Hammerstein integrated musicals of the 1940s and 1950s. The section on consumption also reveals changing Broadway economics, marketing strategies, and audience demographics that contributed to the influence of musicals like A Chorus Line and Les Misérables. After considering this practical framework, I will then address theoretical approaches to the "reading" of shifting class arrangements in popular culture and apply them to Oklahoma!, Fiddler on the Roof, A Chorus Line, and Les Misérables, each of which is a significant marker of a changing cultural moment.

Consumption and Changing Leisure Patterns

During the 1940s, Oklahoma! ran for 2212 performances, which was almost four times the number of performances of any preceding Broadway musical.[3] Clearly Rodgers and Hammerstein filled a need with the integrated musical in the 1940s and 1950s that audiences found irresistible. Part of the phenomenal success of Oklahoma! drew from changing leisure patterns that began during the 1920s and 1930s, and which eventually

[3] The longest-running musical of the 1930s was Of Thee I Sing (1931) with 441 performances, the long-run champion of the 1920s was The Student Prince (1924) with 608 performances, and the longest-running musical of the 1910s was Irene (1919) with 670 performances.

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affected audience demographics for the integrated Broadway musical by the 1940s.

An often quoted statistic involves the 1927-1928 theatre season as the peak season in Broadway history. There were 270 plays produced in 1927; by 1932, the number of productions would dwindle to 180.[4] It is important to realize that 1927 was also the year The Jazz Singer was released and talking films were born. As movies grew in popularity during the 1920s, Broadway musicals and straight plays managed to keep their audiences. Change is slow. But combined with the popularity of the radio, which by 1927 had become a staple in American homes, and the stock market crash in 1929, audiences easily found cheaper, alternate forms of leisure.

In 1923, Arthur Hammerstein tried to use radio to promote his new musical, Wildflower, on WEAF, New York City. Box office receipts jumped. Thomas Gozzola, manager of the Studebaker Theatre in Chicago similarly encouraged a radio broadcast of Abie's Irish Rose, which was currently running at his theatre. The result was a marked increase in ticket sales.[5] Both of these plays were already bona fide hits. Although radio broadcasts may have benefitted their box office takes, radio's proliferation probably hurt the run-of-the-mill play or musical. According to Richard Butsch, radio undoubtedly weakened the theatregoing habit and caused producers to worry about their product as well as their audiences: "Arthur Hornblow, editor of Theatre Magazine, claimed that

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[4] Steven Bach, Dazzler: The Life and Times of Moss Hart (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2001), 103.

[5] See Richard Butsch, The Making of American Audiences from Stage to Television, 1750-1990 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 220-21).

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'common sense tells anyone that broadcasting plays cannot possibly do theatre any good' and that most producers were 'bitterly opposed to it.'"[6] In reality, radio probably hurt the "ten-twenty-thirty" theatres and subway circuit far more than the Broadway stage, although as major vaudeville and musical theatre stars developed their own radio programs, theatregoing patterns were bound to be enervated.[7]

The 1920s were also the decade in which women received the vote. The motion picture industry was quick to copy vaudeville and theatre in feminizing its product. Like Tony Pastor's vaudeville in the 1880s and the Keith-Albee Sunday school circuit in the early 1900s, the film industry focused on the patronage of women and families in marketing and merchandising their product. As a result, women constituted sixty percent of film audiences in 1920. By 1927, Moving Picture World estimated the percentage of women audiences at the movies at a staggering eighty-three percent.[8] According to David

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[6] Ibid., 221.

[7] The "ten-twenty-thirty" theatres were popularly priced playhouses. The term derives from nineteenth-century melodrama. In that context, it referred to theatres housing popularly priced melodramas that catered to a working-class audience. During the early years of the twentieth-century, it denoted theatres presenting standard plays (those that had been presented on Broadway, popular plays, or classic) at popular prices. See Michael Marks Davis, Jr. The Exploitation of Pleasure: A Study of Commercial Recreations in New York City (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1911), 28. "Ten-twenty-thirty" later referred to the "subway circuit," theatres throughout New York City that often featured touring versions of hit Broadway shows at popular prices. This lasted until approximately the middle of the twentieth century. For example, after The Glass Menagerie (1945) closed on Broadway, it toured theatres in the other boroughs at popular prices with Pauline Lord, a significant stage star of the period.

[8] David Nasaw, Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 233. For a social history of the American performing arts during the twentieth century, see Russell Lynes, The Lively Audience (New York: Harper and Row, 1985). For more information on leisure patterns during the early part of the twentieth

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Nasaw, movie palaces, prolific in the 1920s, were designed with women and families in mind. Every effort was made to make films appealing and safe for unescorted women, who often patronized these urban palaces during the daytime while shopping. Not everyone was pleased with the new demographics of these downtown film palaces: "A 1925 letter to the editor of the Balaban and Katz magazine headed 'wants to get away from wimmin' requested that a new theatre be built for men only because women dominated all the existing palaces. Balaban and Katz responded to the request with a simple, 'No, it wouldn't pay.'"[9] As M. Alison Kibler notes, the paradox between venerating the feminine to draw them into popular culture and the denigration of popular culture as feminine only emphasizes the centrality of gender to social change and the public reaction to these changes.[10]

Classless and utopic, the film palaces offered total escapism for audiences hungry for beauty in a form they could comprehend and assimilate.[11] The decor of these shrines to democracy was not representative of local ethnicities or neighborhoods. Rather than Eastern European, Russian-Jewish, or even Italianate motifs, the architecture of these

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century, particularly among working women, see Katy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). For a more general overview of cabaret and nightlife in the early part of the twentieth century, see Lewis A. Erenberg, Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930 (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1981).

[9] Nasaw, 233.

[10] M. Alison Kibler, Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 212.

[11] Lynes, 279-83.

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palaces suggested escapist, exoticized fantasies for those who patronized them. Often, the lobbies were oriental, Egyptian, Moorish, or even Mexican Baroque.[12]

A heterogeneous crowd required this kind of escapism from a class-bound, ethnically divided, gender stratified society. Part of the escapist aesthetic involved the design of the theatres, which purposely made no one feel at home:

> All felt equally welcome inside the picture palaces, because all were equally out of place. . . . There were no reserved seats, no privileged tiers. The balcony was "just as desirable [as] the main floor [with] the same architectural beauty, the same comfortable chairs, the same ventilation, the same rich carpeting, and furnishings as characterized the main floor." As Balaban and Katz [owners] declared with pride, they had not "attempted to establish financial class distinctions, or to divide our auditoriums by means of reserved sections which seem to be more desirable and exclusive [because] *the American people don't like this distinction*." To make absolutely sure that their one-price, no reserved-seat policy was not violated by customers who paid ushers to save seats for them, tipping was strictly forbidden.[13]

These palaces encouraged heterogeneous audiences to intermingle while waiting in the elaborate lobbies and grand foyers. The diverse crowd then shared the experience of

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[12] See Nick Browne, "Orientalism as an Ideological Form: American Film Theory in the Silent Period," Wide Angle 11 (October 1989): 26.

[13] Nasaw, 231-32.

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watching a film and being part of a diverse but non-threatening audience.

To make women and families feel safe, ushers were hired who looked like West Point cadets. In Fundamental Principles of Theatre Management, Balaban and Katz specified that only white males, seventeen to twenty-one, could be hired as ushers. African-Americans were hired for more menial positions, like footmen, service boys, maids, and porters, basically servants dressed in "livery."[14] Ushers were also careful to segregate African-American patrons, who were shunted to seats on the side or in the balconies.[15]

In effect, these palaces were *limited* shrines to democracy. They promoted a populist ideal of egalitarianism, while conforming to populist rhetoric that excluded the African-American and that was wary of racial minorities. All ethnicities were welcomed and could be assimilated, *as long as they behaved according to white middle class standards*. The grandeur of the film palaces encouraged this behavior. The aesthetic was also reflected in the films that Hollywood produced. Unlike Broadway, which thrived on the ethnicity of its star performers, the film industry, according to Gary Giddins, encouraged a feeling of community by downplaying the ethnicity endemic to Broadway musical comedy of the 1920s and 1930s.

> Unlike minstrelsy and vaudeville, which were steeped in ethnic stereotypes, Hollywood and radio insisted upon common denominators. The thinking

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[14] The Fundamental Principles of Balaban and Katz Theatre Management (Chicago, 1926), 17-20.

[15] Harold B. Franklin, Motion Picture Theatre Management (New York, 1927), 135-36.

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was that a picture about Jews would attract only Jews, and a picture about Catholics would attract only Catholics and so forth. No all-Negro picture had ever earned much money. Leo McCarey's affecting Make Way for Tomorrow (1937) flopped, it was argued, because it was about old people, and they never turned out in sufficient numbers. The picture business was tough enough without deliberately limiting the number of ticket buyers.[16]

Films were produced for mass audiences and tended to avoid plots and stars that would limit spectatorship; Broadway shows still catered to New York audiences, many of whom were Jewish, Irish, and Italian, who laughed at star comics and their portrayals of fluid ethnicities and gender. When the shows toured, they tended to play urban centers with diverse spectatorships. Whereas live theatre tended to be located in urban centers, it was difficult to find a small, rural town in America that did not have at least one movie theatre. Moreover, with the popularity of radio in the 1920s and 1930s and emergence of national networks, programs that catered to marginalized audiences had limited appeal outside major cities. The more specialized the audience, the more limited the ratings. The commercial theatre was still centralized in New York, where Broadway plays were marketed for a more ethnically diverse, urban audience. The distinction probably marks the beginnings of the separation of theatre and mass culture in America.

Writing of vaudeville in New York City, Robert W. Snyder acknowledges the diversity of audiences and their demands for entertainment that would promise

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[16] Gary Giddins, Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams (Boston, New York, and London: Little, Brown, and Company, 2001), 556.

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assimilation:

> New Yorkers were too divided by class, race, ethnicity, and gender to find satisfaction in one standardized vaudeville theatre. Vaudeville, like the people of New York, spoke in many dialects. The entrepreneurs who sold vaudeville to New York City had to tailor their appeal to a diverse constituency. No other approach was possible, especially in an industry that grew so closely with the city.[17]

Similarly, Broadway musicals catered to a diverse, urban culture as well as to tourists who reveled in their exposure to that culture, if only briefly. Musicals did not fulfill the same egalitarian desires that the film industry satisfied until the phenomenal success of Oklahoma! in 1943.[18]

One need that Rodgers and Hammerstein fulfilled with Oklahoma! and, for that matter, the bulk of their canon, was their conviction that the characters of a Broadway

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[17] Robert W. Snyder, The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 103.

[18] With the stock market crash of 1929, the Depression managed to kill vaudeville and very nearly destroyed the Broadway theatre as well. The Shuberts, who owned many of the theatres on Broadway, went into receivership and almost lost their empire. Production was cut in quarters, and legitimate theatres closed and were converted into movie houses. By 1932, the Palace, the most famous vaudeville theatre in the country, had become a film house. The Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit became part of RKO, which bought the remaining vaudeville theatres and converted them to film palaces. Movies felt the Depression as well, but by 1935, the film industry had regained the audiences it had temporarily lost. Film going thrived until 1948, when post war suburbanization appropriated urban audiences from the downtown film palaces. See Nasaw, 241.

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musical did not have to be limited to New Yorkers, city slickers, or urban types.[19] Their musicals were targeted to a large, newly emerging post World War II middle class, not a specialized New York market. Compare Oklahoma! and South Pacific, the longest running musicals of the 1940s, with the longest running musicals of the 1930s. DuBarry was a Lady (1939; 408 performances) involved the fantasies of a washroom attendant in a sophisticated New York City nightclub. Flying High (1930; 357 performances) told a dual story. One concerned a pilot who parachutes onto a woman's New York City roof. The other concerned an airline mechanic who doesn't know how to land a plane and ends up establishing an air endurance record over New York City.[20] Anything Goes (1934; 420 performances) concerned the adventures of New Yorkers aboard an ocean liner, whereas Of Thee I Sing (1931; 441 performances) chronicled the conflict between city slicker politicians and the meek, unsophisticated Alexander H. Throttlebottom. The New York locale, or at least the presence of New Yorkers and/or sophisticated urban types, is important to musical comedy in the pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein era. The Cole Porter, Rodgers and Hart, Berlin, and Gershwin musicals of the 1920s and 1930s appealed to an audience that yearned to be urbane, sophisticated, and part of the sprawling diversity that made New York so exciting.

Rodgers and Hammerstein appealed to a different horizon of expectations. Performance statistics show that they changed the pattern for long-running commercial

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[19] The only exceptions were Allegro (1947), a financial failure, and Me and Juliet (1953), a valentine to the Broadway musical, which barely recouped its investment.

[20] Both of these musicals, incidentally, were vehicles for the comic Bert Lahr.

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Broadway musicals in the 1940s and 1950s.[21] Rodgers and Hammerstein helped reinvent the post war image of America and what it meant to be an American, a vision that still haunts us whenever election time rolls around and politicians harken back to family values and a post World War II set of morals and standards. That vision embraced Hammerstein's own brand of romanticism: the elevation of the country versus the city, simplicity versus sophistication, the glorification of the middle class, and, to an extent, the demonization of the wealthy and the highly educated. The plots of the Rodgers and Hart, Cole Porter, Berlin, and Gershwin shows of the 1920s and 1930s appealed to a different, urban audience. If the shows didn't take place in New York, there was usually a New Yorker on hand to comment on the locale and its hayseed denizens. Much of the humor involved the out-of-towner who is helpless in the face of New York sophistication, or, in shows like Girl Crazy (1930), the New York sophisticate who is trapped with hayseeds on a western dude ranch. Rodgers and Hammerstein changed all this by marketing their shows to mainstream Americans. Characters spoke simply about their lives and their problems. No New Yorker comments about Oklahoma; instead, Oklahoma is presented by characters who are its citizens.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein audience embraced a changing middle class--scores of GI's returning home, who visited New York before returning to America's heartland to rebuild their lives. If this new audience was not reared on Lorenz Hart's more intricate rhymes, which were sung by educated, witty, and often wealthy urbane characters, it could

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[21] Oklahoma! (1943; 2212 performances), South Pacific (1949; 1925 performances), The Sound of Music (1959; 1443 performances); The King and I (1951; 1246 performances); and Carousel (1945; 890 performances).

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recite the lyrics to Oklahoma! and South Pacific chapter and verse.

Leisure patterns shifted dramatically by the 1950s and 1960s and paved the way for different patterns of consumption on Broadway. Much of this involves the infiltration of television into American homes in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the migration to the suburbs of newly married World War II veterans and their families, and, by the 1960s, the decay and lurking danger in urban centers where legitimate theatres were located. Broadway was not the only victim of these shifts in leisure patterns; the film industry also suffered. According to Richard Butsch, "movie attendance reached its all-time peak of four billion admissions a year just as regular television declined steadily until it leveled off in the early 1960s to one billion."[22] It would be logical to attribute this decline to the new television industry, but the greatest attendance fall in movies occurred between 1946 and 1950, before television was a fixture in most households, and between 1965 and 1969, long after television had become entrenched.[23] According to film historian Douglas Gomery, it is counterintuitive to blame television for the twenty-five percent drop in annual movie attendance between 1946 and 1950, since only nine percent of American families owned a television by 1950.[24] Gomery, Butsch, and Nasaw attribute the crisis in film attendance to the postwar baby boom and migration from urban centers to the suburbs. As suburbanization thrived during the 1950s, inner cities decayed. In addition to

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[22] Butsch, 246.

[23] See Butch, 248; Nasaw, 248.

[24] Douglas Gomery, Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 83-8.

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the polio scare during the 1950s, movie palaces, the former shrines to democracy, had become too democratic by the late 1960s:

> In the postwar period, this economic polarization was exacerbated by racial division, as the percentage of African-Americans in the central cities increased dramatically. "After World War II, the racial and economic polarization of large American metropolitan areas" in Kenneth Jackson's words, "became so pronounced that downtown areas lost their commercial hold on the middle class. Cities became identified with fear and danger rather than with glamour and pleasure."[25]

The movie palaces no longer represented a democratic ideal. They were cavernous, enclosed spaces, whose vast lobbies, staircases, and lounges promised potential danger and violence. Downtown ball parks and amusement parks posed similar threats, and by the late 1960s many had been converted to other uses or razed. Filmgoers now went to suburban multi-plexes, where a variety of films appealed to various homogeneous audience groups divided by age, gender, education, and race.[26]

Despite these dramatic shifts in leisure patterns, the Broadway show, or its touring counterpart, remained fixed in decaying urban areas. Older audiences, to whom theatregoing had become a lifetime habit, still patronized Broadway shows, as did tourists, but Times Square had become dangerous and curtain times were rolled back from 8:30 to

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[25] Nasaw., 249.

[26] Ibid., 250.

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7:30 to allow audiences to leave a potentially menacing theatre district earlier.[27] By 1970, younger audiences, part of a new counterculture, were not attending Broadway musicals. Obviously, a new audience had to be built, but this did not happen until the beginnings of urban gentrification and new marketing strategies in the 1980s.

From the late 1960s through the early 1970s, there was a slump in box office attendance at Broadway shows. Ticket prices soared, partly from rising union demands and largely due to escalating production costs. From 1974-1981, the box office grosses on Broadway increased from about fifty million dollars to about 200 million dollars annually. By 1987, the combined revenue from Broadway and the road annually was 420 million dollars. By 1989, that revenue had increased to over 650 million. The top ticket price in 1989 was sixty dollars.[28] The top priced ticket in 2001 is one hundred dollars. Compare this with the top ticket prices on Broadway from the 1930s through the early 1960s: a rise from six dollars in the mid-1930s to $9.90 by the early 1960s.[29] Clearly, such a steep rise in prices would change the demographics of the Broadway audience, as well as methods of production and capitalization. Inflation was certainly a factor in the astronomic price increases since the late 1960s, but the rise in Broadway ticket prices was not consistent with the percentage in the rise of film admissions. Again, this discrepancy underscores the growing separation of theatre from mass culture during the second half of

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[27] The curtain time for Broadway shows eventually was compromised at 8 P.M.

[28] Bernard Rosenberg and Ernest Harburg, The Broadway Musical: Collaboration in Commerce and Art (New York and London: New York University Press, 1993), 43.

[29] Bach, 103. For ticket prices in the early 1960s, see advertisements in Theatre Arts, February 1963, 2.

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the twentieth century.

According to lighting designer Jules Fisher, there are a finite number of seats in Broadway houses, which tend to be fairly intimate (under 1500 seats) and were not built to accommodate the dramatic rise in production costs after 1970.

> The economics of the Broadway theatre are very strange. We have a finite number of seats. Everything else escalates every year; inflation causes the price of scenery, the cloth to make costumes, taxes, plus union rates for actors, technicians, stagehands, and porters to go up. We do not add another seat to the theatre. There are still 1150 seats to the Broadhurst Theatre. No matter what you do, you can't get more people to see it in one evening.[30]

Musicals, from the late 1970s onward, had to escalate ticket prices and run considerably longer to earn a profit.

By the late 1960s, it was not financially feasible to take a Broadway musical out-of-town for a break-in engagement before its Broadway opening. Instead, shows previewed in New York after a five or six week rehearsal period. As a result, Jerome Robbins reputedly left the Broadway musical to concentrate on ballet. According to journalist and interviewer Ken Mandelbaum, he could no longer function under the economic climate of Broadway: "Jerome Robbins had given up working in the commercial theatre because he recognized that it was impossible to achieve his goals with five weeks of rehearsal and four weeks out of town. He attempted to develop musicals at his

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[30] Rosenberg and Harburg, 43.

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American Theatre Lab, but no production ever emerged, so it was difficult to gauge how successful this earlier attempt at a musical workshop situation had been."[31] Michael Bennett changed the way musicals were developed in 1976 with A Chorus Line, when he mounted four workshops of the piece at the New York Public Theatre, under the auspices of Joe Papp. Under a workshop subsidy, Bennett was free to experiment and develop his property until it was ready for a commercial, Broadway transfer.

The role of producer also changed radically as capitalization mounted. Since the 1910s, Broadway musicals were typically mounted by a single producer, who raised money from backers or "angels" willing to gamble on a loss. This was not terribly difficult during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s when a musical could be mounted for $100,000. Fifty backers with an investment of $2000 each could provide the capitalization for a musical. This kind of backing existed until the 1960s, when zooming production costs precluded a single producer and demanded the kind of financing only corporate money could provide. Actually, as early as 1956, My Fair Lady was financed by Columbia Records for $300,000. In 1982, Universal Pictures developed and financed The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, a multi-million dollar enterprise. By 1989, Jerome Robbins' Broadway was capitalized at eight million dollars. In 2001, the costs would be considerably higher. With film studios and corporations like Sony financing Broadway musicals, creative decisions are no longer the province of a single producer like David Merrick, but are decisions by proxy, which make the creation of musicals more difficult

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[31] Ken Mandelbaum, A Chorus Line and the Musicals of Michael Bennett (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 139.

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and certainly more bureaucratic.[32] Here, too, is a complex genealogy of mutual influence between those who capitalize and produce the product and those who actually create the product. The end result is an increasingly difficult negotiation between the two, since multi-producers and creators may be at odds not only with each other, but among themselves.

Since my argument is that musicals are framed by their cultural moment, their form and content very much depend on changing patterns of consumption and production. The Golden Age of the musical is generally thought to have ended during the 1960s, after which the form changed drastically with the introduction of the concept musical, the rock musical, and the British poperetta. It would be facile to attribute these new forms solely to economics, but certainly one must take shifting consumption patterns into account in historicizing changes in the form. These shifting patterns change in the late 1960s and early 1970s. With the steep rise in capitalization for musicals, the escalation of ticket prices, and changing urban demographics, it was inevitable that audiences for Broadway musicals and for Broadway shows in general would change. Reliable statistics about demographics in terms of age during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s are at best scarce. According to Rosenberg and Harburg, however, audiences in 1971 tended to be middle-aged or older and had been veteran theatregoers for years.[33] These audiences were not

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[32] For more on corporate producing, see Rosenberg and Harburg, 28-9. An exception to the dearth of super-producers is Cameron MacIntosh, who is based in London, where production costs are considerably lower than on Broadway, and where most of MacIntosh's musicals originate.

[33] Rosenberg and Harburg, 40.

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only resistant to the dramatic increase in ticket prices, but their age implied that the musical itself would have to change if it were to nurture new audiences and continue to thrive.

During the late 1970s, the League of New York Theatres organized a research and development unit. The goals were to attack problems in inner city theatre neighborhoods, most notably Times Square, to begin detailed audience surveys, to introduce new marketing techniques, to incorporate television advertising, to computerize both Broadway and national ticket sales, to explore raising ticket prices, to search for products in regional theatre that could be transferred to Broadway, to stress marketing and megaspectacles, to invade world markets with international tours, and to encourage international tourists to attend Broadway musicals.[34] To accomplish these goals, the League, under George Wachtel, the research director, collected data about changing audience demographics through Consumer Behavior, Inc.:

> The composition of the Broadway audience has changed dramatically over the last several years. The study shows a large influx of new theatregoers--almost one out of three have apparently become Broadway patrons within the last five years. It is significant that a vast majority of the new patrons are young people--almost one out of two is under twenty-five, and close to nine out of ten are under thirty-five.
>
> As a result of these trends, the composition of the Broadway audience has changed significantly in recent years. It is exceedingly young

[34] Ibid., 37.

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today, with six out of ten theatregoers being under thirty-five years of age. In 1971, more than half were over thirty-five. [In 1980, eighty-one percent were under fifty.]

The suburban areas account for forty-five percent of the volume--almost one out of two persons in the audience. The heavy theatregoers (four-plus a year) account for an estimated seventy percent of the total volume. A similar concentration of the audience also exists for specific types of shows.[35]

By the late 1970s, half of the Broadway audience earned well over the national income average. Fifty-four percent were college graduates. In short, they were affluent, educated, professional, and young.[36]

The study identified four types of segmentation in audiences. The first segment consisted of "traditionalists": veteran, serious theatregoers, who had attended Broadway productions regularly throughout the years. The second group were "theatre enthusiasts," who viewed Broadway as a special event and liked musicals and plays with a contemporary slant. The third segment were labeled "entertainment seekers." These preferred musicals. Finally, there were the "dispassionate theatregoers," patrons attracted by a particular show often through television advertising. Of the four segments, only the traditionalists, the older, veteran theatre enthusiasts, complained about higher ticket

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[35] George Wachtel, A Study of the New York Audience for the Broadway Theatre, 1980. Sponsored by the League of New York Theatres. Data collected by Consumer Behavior, Inc., 10.

[36] Rosenberg and Harburg, 40.

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prices. By the 1990s, they were in the minority. Most contemporary audiences for musicals are younger and willing to pay what the market bears.[37]

Selling tickets for major entertainment events by credit card and telephone order dates back to the late 1960s, but Broadway was slow to incorporate a new system of marketing. By the late 1980s, private companies launched nationwide ticket services like Ticketmaster. Half priced seats were also made available on the day of performance at TKTS, a booth in Times Square. All of these measures helped increase attendance and build new audiences. Gerald Schoenfeld, one of the attorneys who still runs the Shubert empire in 2001, has been optimistic about the state of the Broadway musical for almost twenty years: "In my opinion, there is a limitless [New York] market. Seventeen to eighteen million tourists [in 1983; more like twenty million in 1990] last year and the New York megalopolis conservatively, within a narrow radius, means fifty million people. Let's say only half are potential theatregoers. Or a third. That's a third of seventy million. You have a lot out there to tap."[38] Contemporary musicals, usually sponsored with corporate money, invest considerable time in marketing research to advertise most effectively. For example, the producers of Black and Blue (1989), an all black musical revue, discovered the show attracted seventy percent of its audiences from outside the New York metropolitan area. Fifty percent were foreigners. Only ten percent were African-Americans. As a result, the producers advertised extensively in foreign publications. The marketing strategy kept the musical alive for 824 performances.

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[37] Ibid., 40.

[38] Ibid., 42.

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It is not surprising that the rise of the British poperetta coincided with the marketing strategies and changing demographics of the 1980s. Although I have no conclusive statistics to support the percentage of the market for Broadway musicals in 2001 that is not from the United States, approximately thirty-five percent of the London audiences for Cats were foreigners.[39] My hunch is that both the tourist audience and foreign audience is considerably higher than ever before. The megaspectacle, at least in part, appeals to tourists who are not conversant with English.

If the Broadway musical has changed during the last twenty years, much of this is due to marketing strategies and a deliberate attempt to build a new Broadway audience to supplement, if not replace, the "traditionalists" of the 1980 study. While patterns of leisure have become increasingly democratized since Rodgers and Hammerstein and the post World War II baby boomers, paradoxically, audiences for the Broadway musical have become increasingly elitist and homogeneous. Musicals that cost one hundred dollars per ticket are going to attract the well-to-do, rather than the old gallery gods and goddesses who were so important earlier in the century.

Leisure patterns, consumption, and audience demographics are important because they help define the appeal of various musicals at different points during the twentieth century. At the same time, musicals are not only the results of marketing strategies and the invention of Ticketron, but also significant markers of changing cultural moments. With the privileging of the integrated musical over non-integrated musical comedy, the

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[39] Sheridan Morley and Ruth Leon, Mr. Producer (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1998), 74.

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growing prestige of the serious musical as a staple of opera houses throughout the world, the emergence of the concept musical, and the intellectualism of the Sondheim/Prince collaborations, the integrated musical increasingly chooses subject matter that tackles social problems.

As far back as 1927, Show Boat chose to deal with miscegenation. South Pacific (1949) and West Side Story (1957) focused on the poison of racial intolerance, Pacific Overtures (1976) condemned the Westernization of Japan, and A Chorus Line (1975) dealt with the conflict between the individual and the American corporate machine. The differing viewpoints about Western and Eastern culture exemplified by South Pacific and Pacific Overtures, produced twenty-six years apart, confirm my point that musicals are subject to historical relativism and document shifts in American hegemonic attitudes toward social problems. Despite its well-intentioned liberalism, South Pacific fosters the notion of Western supremacy over Asian culture, whereas Pacific Overtures angrily denounces the Westernization of Japanese culture. Both musicals reflect American attitudes toward race and diversity during two very different historical moments.

The same can be said of West Side Story and Aida (2000). Both deal with lovers separated by racial bigotry. West Side Story confirms the failure of the Anglo-American melting pot, which was beginning to collapse along with America's inner cities when the show was originally produced in 1957. The Sharks can't become Americans because they are a racialized "other." The Jets, a combination of ethnicities including Polish, similarly find assimilation in the "white" melting pot a dubious proposition, not only because of ethnicity, but also because of class barriers. Aida, forty years later, champions a different

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aesthetic: multiculturalism and racial diversity. Aida conveniently relegates racial bigotry to ancient Egypt. The tragic love between Radames and Aida is bookended at the beginning and end of the show by scenes in contemporary New York, where the two lovers meet after thousands of years, and are finally free to express their sexual attraction without worrying about issues of race or class. Whereas "Somewhere" is a wistful, fanciful dream in West Side Story, a limbo that exists only in the imagination, it becomes New York's Museum of Modern Art in Aida.

With changing patterns of consumption, increasingly elitist Broadway audiences, and the inevitable process of historical relativism, the often utopian solutions musicals suggest to address perceived social needs and desires reflect changing popular attitudes toward class, race, and ethnicity over the past sixty years. The more popular the musical, the more significant the marker of shifting American attitudes toward these problems.

Cultural Studies: Entertainment as Utopia

In "Entertainment and Utopia," Richard Dyer argues that musicals mythologize certain cultural moments. For Dyer, who writes about the Hollywood musical, entertainment provides utopian solutions to lacks in given cultural moments. As such, musicals can be both conservative and transgressive:

> The fact that professional entertainment has been by and large conservative in the twentieth century should not blind us to the implicit struggle within it, and looking beyond class to divisions of sex and race, we should note the important role of structurally subordinate groups in society--women,

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> blacks, gays--in the development and definition of entertainment. In other words, show business's relationship to the demands of patriarchal capitalism is a complex one.[40]

For structurally subordinate groups like women, gays, and African-Americans, musicals can provide progressive, even radical answers to patriarchal capitalist ideology. In terms of solving social problems, entertainment offers escapism, which implies that there must be something better into which audiences can escape.

Using binary oppositions, Dyer lists the social problems experienced by audiences and the textual solutions provided by popular entertainment: scarcity versus abundance, exhaustion versus energy, dreariness (monotony and predictability) versus intensity (excitement and effectivity of living), manipulation (bourgeois democracy and sex roles) versus transparency (honest communication and open, spontaneous relationships), and, finally, fragmentation versus community.[41] In other words, Dyer suggests that musicals imply alternatives to needs or desires in society that can make life better. In terms of class, however, he maintains the musical is basically "nowhere," by which he means politically conservative, since it only suggests solutions to social problems that capitalism or hegemony itself can provide:

> The ideals of entertainment imply wants that capitalism itself promises to meet. Thus abundance becomes consumerism, energy and intensity, personal freedom and individualism, and transparency, freedom of speech.

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[40] Richard Dyer, "Entertainment as Utopia," 372.

[41] Ibid., 376.

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> In other (Marcuse's) words, it is a partially "one dimensional" situation. The categories of the sensibility point to gaps or inadequacies in capitalism, but only those gaps or inadequacies that capitalism proposes itself to deal with. At our worst sense of it, entertainment provides alternatives to capitalism which will be provided by capitalism.[42]

For instance, scarcity (poverty) becomes abundance (elimination of poverty for self and others) in My Fair Lady. The pressures of urban life become utopic in On the Town, which creates a fantasy world of New York City during wartime, or pastoral in The Sound of Music, in which the Von Trapp family escape the *Anschluss* by singing and climbing over the Alps. The conflict between the farmer and the cowman, a fragmentation of community in Oklahoma!, is resolved when the territory becomes a state. Again, for Dyer, these solutions tend to be more conservative than progressive, since it is hegemony which is providing mythological solutions for problems it has generated itself.

Dyer's theory of entertainment as utopia derives from neo-Gramscian cultural studies, which argue that cultural hegemony is maintained (and must be continually maintained, since it is an ongoing process), by dominant groups and classes negotiating with and making concessions to subordinate groups and classes.[43] Cultural studies based on hegemonic theory maintain that popular culture is a compromise equilibrium--a shifting balance between competing interests and values: middle and working class, racist and non-

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[42] Ibid., 377.

[43] John Storey, An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, 129.

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racist, sexist and non-sexist, homophobic and homophile.[44] As a result, often consumers read products in ways that were not intended: "The commercially provided culture of the culture industries is redefined, reshaped, and redirected in strategic acts of selective consumption and productive acts of reading and articulation, often in ways not intended or even foreseen by its producers."[45] Cultural populists like John Fiske take this argument even farther.

For Fiske, Russian Jews watching Dallas on television see it as a self criticism of capitalism. Sylvester Stallone's portrayal of Rambo becomes relevant to Australian aborigines' political struggles. Fiske's theory explains how musicals can be read by audiences in ways never intended by the writers and producers: "But audiences constantly engage in 'semiotic guerilla warfare.' Whereas the industries seek to incorporate audiences as commodity consumers, the audience often excorporates the text to its own purposes."[46] Fiske's theory can be applied to the reception for a musical like Evita, in

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[44] Antonio Gramsci introduced the concept of cultural hegemony in his Prison Notebooks, written during the late 1920s and early 1930s. His ideas about domination by consent have been taken up by Marxist scholars like Raymond Williams and Bruce McConachie and applied to theatre. As McConachie points out, Gramsci's work is relevant to more than self-consciously Marxist historians. Both Dyer and John Fiske, whom I mention here, are neo-Gramscian in that they deal with the concept of cultural hegemony, although they are not strictly Marxist culture critics. For more on Gramsci's concepts as related to theatre, see Bruce A. McConachie, "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History," Interpreting the Theatrical Past, edited by Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 37-58. McConachie applies Gramsci's theatre of hegemony to show how Boucicault's nineteenth century melodramas helped reinforce existing class and social relations.

[45] Storey, 127.

[46] Ibid., 207.

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which the text itself condemns the media for canonizing the unworthy. Whereas Harold Prince tried to make the audience question the celebrities it worshiped, spectators seem to respond to the musicalized Evita as they would to Dolly or Mame, cheering her on for her grit, determination, and charisma. Fiske's theory can similarly be applied to Sweeney Todd. Prince's original production likened industrialization to the holocaust; the character of Sweeney Todd becomes a monstrous product of a rotted, decaying social order. At the same time, audiences invariably rooted for him. Despite Prince's intentions and the Brechtian distancing strategies he employed in the original production, audiences tended to see the musical as a melodrama, with Sweeney emerging as an odd, distorted hero. Broadway audiences are more comfortable with the conventions of melodrama than with those of the theatre of alienation.

Fiske does not specifically discuss musicals, but his theories, like Dyer's, are certainly applicable to popular, long-running examples of the form. Unlike Dyer, who recognizes elements of the transgressive only in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity in popular entertainment, Fiske envisions a more complex cultural studies approach, in which solutions to class problems are potentially progressive, although not transgressive or revolutionary:

> Instead of concentrating on the omnipresent, insidious practices of the dominant ideology, it attempts to understand the everyday resistances and evasions that make that ideology work so hard and insistently to maintain itself and its values. This approach sees popular culture as potentially and often actually progressive (though not radical), and it is essentially

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> optimistic, for it finds in the vigour and vitality of the people evidence both of the possibility of social change and of the motivation to drive it.[47]

For Fiske, popular culture is semiotic warfare, where dominant meanings are challenged by subordinate meanings. Like Dyer, he doesn't envision revolutionary solutions to the status quo, but sees the potential for conservative, even progressive solutions to social problems and class conflicts.

In the rest of this chapter, I will apply a cultural studies approach, using neo-Gramscian theories of hegemony to several of the most successful integrated musicals from the 1940s to the 1990s: Oklahoma!, Fiddler on the Roof, A Chorus Line, and Les Misérables. In each instance, I will frame the musical in a given cultural moment and show how the form often offers a utopic solution to a social problem. As Broadway audiences become more elitist and as class arrangements change over the course of the past sixty years, musicals become markers that document shifts in attitude toward class, which is often inextricable from ethnicity and race.

Oklahoma! and the 1940s

Dyer's theory of entertainment as utopia is applicable to Oklahoma! Rodgers and Hammerstein were able to meld a grassroots, populist vision of small town America with New Deal notions of an interventionist, assimilationist society in the 1940s. The result was a mythologization of America and middle class post-war American values that appealed to a new Broadway musical theatre audience, not just in New York but across

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[47] Fiske, 208.

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the country. Oklahoma! toured for an unprecedented sixteen years and ran almost four times as long as any musical that had preceded it. By cannily mixing what Michael Kammen terms a soothing nostalgia for a lost America with assimilationist, interventionist strategies, Oklahoma! not only contributed to healing a nation divided by America's role in World War II, but helped mythologize an America where middle class values could potentially be inclusive of ethnic outsiders as well as the white Protestant patriarchy.[48]

Just as Curly must settle down, become a farmer, marry, and spawn a new generation of Oklahomans, the Oklahoma territory itself must become a state that embraces the Union. Rodgers and Hammerstein fashion an utopian, middle class ideal where New Dealers and conservatives, interventionists and isolationists can be unified.[49] Rodgers and Hammerstein, both Jewish liberals and loyal New Dealers, ironically present this idyllic version of American life under a mythical, populist banner. Part of the conservative, grassroots rhetoric against the New Deal was Roosevelt's alliance with the labor unions and his support from urban constituencies, which were perceived as ethnic, Jewish, or communist, depending on the rabidity of FDR's detractors. Rodgers and

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[48] For Kammen's discussion of history versus memory, see Michael Kammen, Mystic Chords of Memory (New York: Vintage, 1991), 655-88.

[49] Before entering World War II, America was divided between interventionists, those who wanted to join the Allies and fight fascism in Europe, and isolationists, those who felt America had no business meddling into European affairs. Part of the rhetoric of this debate involved America's own anti-Semitism. Isolationists often accused the media and entertainment industry, which many perceived as predominantly Jewish, as trying to coerce the United States into joining a war that was about Jewish persecution and that consequently was filled with self-interest for the Jewish-American. Although Roosevelt's administration was officially neutral, New Dealers were linked with interventionists, while conservatives were aligned with isolationists.

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Hammerstein provide a utopic healing of isolationist and interventionist, conservative and New Dealer, by redefining populism as all inclusive. They maintain the nostalgic, rural, conservative middle class aesthetic, but meld the New Deal and rural populism by not only joining the farmer and the cowman, but also by assimilating the foreigner or Jewish outsider into the community in the guise of Ali Hakim, despite his "otherness." They likewise warn against the politics of exclusion by psychologizing Jud Frye, whose paranoid conviction that he is doomed to outsider status because he is a hired hand, a function of class rather than race, excludes him from the egalitarian ideal of the rest of the community.[50]

In order to understand the political ideology behind Oklahoma!, it is important to understand the conflict between isolationist and interventionist, conservative and New Dealer, and the origin of American anti-Semitic populist rhetoric that was key to the debate about entering World War II. Before America joined the war, the country was bitterly divided between isolationists and interventionists. The war in Europe foregrounded anti-Semitism, and, to an extent, the argument between isolationists and interventionists mirrored America's own anti-Semitism. Grassroots populism, a movement that originally dates back to the 1890s and the defeat of the People's party, emerged during the economic depression of the 1890s, just as isolationism and the re-emergence of populist rhetoric in the 1930s was partly a product of the Great Depression. 1890s populists, many of whom were small farmers or small businessmen with whom the

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[50] For a further discussion of the racial "otherness" of Ali Hakim and Jud Frye, see Andrea Most, "'We Know We Belong to the Land': The Theatricality of Assimilation in Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!," PMLA 113.1 (January 1998): 77-89.

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farmers traded, were convinced that big business and government were anti-grassroots America and anti-middle class. Since then, populist rhetoric, according to Michael Kazin, has periodically reared its head, venerating a self-sufficient middle class: "Populist speakers typically expressed their highest esteem for citizens who inhabited what the novelist E.L. Doctorow calls 'the large middle world, neither destitute nor privileged. . . that of the ordinary working man': yeoman farmers, urban craftsmen, native born factory workers, home owners struggling to pay their taxes."[51] "Native born" is a significant phrase here, since Jewish control of the media, the press, the theatre, and the film industry had long served as a mainstay of populist rhetoric.[52]

For example, The Representative, the official paper of the Populist Minnesota State Farmer's Alliance, wrote of the sale of the New York Times in 1894 and compared Jewish control of the press to fin-de-siècle industrialism:

> In these evil conditions, made by bad laws, the Jews alone thrive. . . . The reason is they deal only in money, they have no belief in farming, manufacturing, or any other industry; they are money-mongerers. The Spanish Inquisition had been a rebellion against usury. Now, Jewish cunning, the folly of mud-headed Christians, had man, industry, property, [and] wealth all slaves of an artificial thing called money.[53]

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[51] Michael Kazin, The Populist Persuasion: An American History (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 2.

[52] See Steven Carr, Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 38-9.

[53] Ibid., 39.

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Populist rhetoric maintained that Jewish capitalists squeezed the lower and middle classes, Jewish journalists printed lies and distorted truths, and Jewish entertainment moguls polluted high culture.

These assertions of the Jewish threat were not unique to populism, whose anti-Semitic rhetoric reflected a growing anti-Semitism within American society. Life (the humor magazine popular during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, not the pictorial of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s), edited by Harvard graduates and fashioned as an American version of the British Punch, repeatedly printed cartoons and editorials railing against the Jewish theatrical trust.[54] The cartoons portrayed Jewish producers and theatrical managers as sexually rapacious, money-grubbing, and physically repulsive.[55]

By the late 1930s, isolationists like John Rankin, Burton K. Wheeler, and Gerald P. Nye, appropriated populist or progressive traditions, as well as anti-Semitic rhetoric.

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[54] The trust refers to the American Theatrical Syndicate, founded in 1896 by Abraham Erlanger, Marc Klaw, Al Hayman, Charles Frohman, Samuel Nix, and Fred Zimmerman, who basically controlled legitimate theatre throughout the United States through the first decade of the twentieth century. The Shubert brothers eventually usurped their position and, by 1950, controlled sixty percent of the theatres in New York and ninety percent of the theatres on the road through their United Booking Agency. Life attacked the syndicate on the basis of race. On February 21, 1950, two years after the government successfully wrested control of motion picture theatres away from the Hollywood studio moguls, many of whom were Jewish, United States Attorney General J. Howard McGreath launched a massive antitrust suit against the Shuberts. According to biographer Foster Hirsch, evidence exists that the government had tried to break the Shubert trust as early as 1943. See Foster Hirsch, The Boys from Syracuse: The Shuberts' Theatrical Empire (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 216-217.

[55] See Carr, 45-53. Several of these cartoons are reproduced.

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Rather than focusing on the native born, middle class worker and small businessman, the isolationists transformed populism into a mythologization of small-town American life: "The America that. . . most western progressive isolationists spoke for. . . was overwhelmingly rural and small town. It was an America consisting largely of farmers on the soil and of small businessmen buying and selling to those farmers in countless small towns scattered across the prairies and Great Plains."[56] This populist view of American small town life not only excluded the ethnic outsider, but demonized the Jew as a threat to these nostalgic, mythologized American values.

By 1938, Social Justice, the weekly newspaper printed by isolationist Father Charles Coughlin, began printing excerpts from the notorious Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, a specious record of an international Jewish conspiracy to conquer the world.[57] As a result of Father Coughlin's broadcasts and newspaper editorials, his foot soldiers smashed windows of Jewish owned stores in Brooklyn and in the Bronx. Sellers of Social Justice voiced anti-Semitic remarks and slogans while hawking their newspapers.[58] Perhaps worst of all, editorials in Social Justice opposed any United States sanction for Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany and fascist Europe:

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[56] Ibid., 178.

[57] See Kazin, 131. The Protocols first appeared in America when Czarist officers tried to enlist United States support to overthrow the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. It had originally been published in Europe late in the nineteenth century. The book was published intermittently, most notably during the 1920s anti-immigration fervor. By 1934, a trial was held in Berne, Switzerland that discredited their authenticity. This, however, did not deter Father Coughlin from reprinting excerpts in Social Justice in 1938.

[58] Kazin, 131.

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> A kind of populism animated the horrific challenge. Since the late nineteenth century, most American anti-Semites, like Coughlin, identified Jews as both non-productive manipulators of "other people's money" and the carriers of decadent, radical doctrines from abroad. . . . But his assumption that they could be nothing but a rapacious elite paralleled the arguments Tom Watson had made to justify the lynching of Leo Frank in 1915 and Henry Ford had circulated in his notorious 1922 publication The International Jew. Hitler himself defined Jews as a naturally parasitic race that gained positions of power in order to strip ordinary Germans of their hard earned material resources and cultural cohesion.[59]

Clearly, one problem interventionists faced in fighting Hitler was American anti-Semitism. Just as the original populists of the 1890s were suspicious of Jewish control of the theatre, isolationists during the late 1930s were similarly suspicious of Jewish control of the media. After all, the war in Europe involved the persecution and annihilation of Jews. Hollywood studios were run by Jews; it was clearly in their best interest to distribute films propagandizing that America join the war effort.

In 1936, Joseph Breen, speaking for the Production Code, warned Hollywood film producers against making anti-Nazi propaganda films: "There is a strong pro-German and anti-Semitic [sic] feeling in this country . . . and while those who are likely to approve of an anti-Hitler picture may think well of such an enterprise, they should keep in mind that

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[59] Ibid., 131-32.

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millions of Americans might think otherwise."[60] Joseph Kennedy, ambassador to Great Britain, similarly warned American film producers against an interventionist stance in 1941. After one of Kennedy's banquet speeches, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. wrote to President Roosevelt that "the less than admirable [Kennedy] apparently threw the fear of God into many of our producers and executives. . . . The Jews were on the spot, and they should stop making anti-Nazi pictures or using the film medium to promote or show sympathy to the cause of the 'democracies' versus the 'dictators.'"[61] Since Jews had founded the motion picture industry at the turn of the century and were responsible for many of the films distributed throughout America, they were indeed in a spot. If they did nothing, they were turning their back on their fellow Jews in Europe. If they intervened, they would be attacked as warmongers coercing the nation to join the war on their behalf. If they used their influence to bring in Jewish refugees to write and direct their films, they were accused of harboring communists.

A 1939 Gallop poll confirmed that forty-two percent of Americans were more concerned with Jews and European refugees promoting war propaganda than with the infiltration of Nazism, Fascism, or Communism in America.[62] Ironically, by the end of the war, American distrust of Jewish power was at an all-time high:

> According to a series of polls commissioned by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation

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[60] Quoted in Carr, 159.

[61] Ibid., 160.

[62] Carr, 172.

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> between 1938 and 1946, approximately one-third to one-half of all U.S. citizens believed that Jews held too much power. By April 1940, more Americans expressed this belief than those who did not. By July 1945, the number of people who responded yes to the question "Do you think the Jews have too much power and influence in this country?" had peaked to 67 percent."[63]

Anti-Semitic attitudes toward Jewish control of the media actually increased by the end of the war.

By 1941, not long before Pearl Harbor, a senate committee was formed to investigate war propaganda. Senate Resolution 152 authorized an inquiry to conduct "a thorough and complete investigation of any propaganda disseminated by motion pictures and radio or any other activity of the motion-picture industry to influence public sentiment in the direction of participation by the United States in the present European War."[64] Eventually the committee advocated censorship of Hollywood films, a tactic that was condemned by both FDR and Wendell Wilkie.

A large portion of Americans by 1941 may have believed that Jews held too much power in the media, but, at the same time, there was a backlash against isolationism and sympathy for the plight of the European Jew. Despite this backlash, it is impossible to ignore a strong core of isolationist sentiment that resented the power of the film industry as a means of propaganda and equated that power with the Jew. These isolationist

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[63] Ibid., 238.

[64] Ibid., 251.

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sentiments led to violence. In October 1941, Variety "devoted much coverage to a vandalized Pittsburgh theatre. . . . Throughout the theatre the word "Jew" appeared, painted in red, white and blue" and was signed by a "true American."[65]

After Pearl Harbor, isolationist anti-Semitic rhetoric became less overt, as America joined the fight against Hitler. In 1941, Charles Lindbergh, Jr. made a speech in Des Moines in which he was accused of appropriating Nazi rhetoric and became a fallen idol to many. The Catholic Church, afraid of being perceived as anti-Semitic, stopped publication of Coughlin's Social Justice. At the same time, however, the nation remained deeply divided between New Deal aesthetics and conservative, populist values. Phillip Murray, John L. Lewis' successor as leader of the CIO, forged an alliance with FDR, but by 1943, the year that Oklahoma! opened, this union was perceived by conservatives as unholy:

> "The new Deal-CIO alliance," writes the historian Steve Fraser, "seemed to embody everything . . . that offended the pieties and prejudices of Middle America: its gaudy cosmopolitanism, its Jewishness," its flirtations with radicalism, its bureaucratic collectivism, its elevation of the new immigrant, its statism, its intellectual arrogance, and its racial egalitarianism. The strains of right wing populism, intermittently strummed by the KKK in the 1920s and by Coughlin in the 1930s, were swelling again.[66]

According to Kazin, the thinnest of lines separated the myopic isolationist from the closet

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[65] Ibid., 267.

[66] Kazin, 158.

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fascist.

As a footnote to the political background of Oklahoma!'s enormous appeal, the CIO set up PAC, the Political Action Committee, in the summer of 1943. PAC mobilized union staffers to register voters, canvass workers, and seduce potential voters to believe that grassroots liberalism could curtail the momentum of the resurgent Right and provide a new era of reform in which every American would find a good job in a thriving economy: "'This Is Your America' was the title of the PAC's widely distributed introductory pamphlet. Superimposed over the photo of a small farm on a gently rolling hill with cows grazing behind a picket fence, those four words were meant as a declaration and a promise. The PAC's program would enable "the Common Man of this earth" to realize his dreams."[67] The photo on the pamphlet looked surprisingly similar to the original sheet music design for Oklahoma!, which also pictured a small farm with a picket fence in a rural setting.[68] Oklahoma! opened the preceding March. Here is an instance where the musical offers a utopian solution not only to the conflict between the New Deal and mid-American conservatives, but to the inclusion of the ethnic outsider in the American community.

By 1943, America had entered the war and Hollywood had thrown its support into films mythologizing democracy and condemning fascism. Americans, of course, were at their most patriotic, despite a predilection to distrust Jews and their control of the media.

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[67] Ibid., 159.

[68] See Max Wilk, OK! The Story of *Oklahoma!* (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 226.

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Theresa Helburn introduced Rodgers and Hammerstein to Green Grow the Lilacs, a play that had run a mere 64 performances in 1931, but that mythologized a grass roots, populist vision of America. In choosing to musicalize the piece, Rodgers and Hammerstein carefully retained the vision of small town, rural America that would appeal to conservatives, populists, and isolationists, while inserting a message that even small town America could be a model of assimilation and tolerance. In mythologizing a populist ideal which would appeal to conservative rhetoric, Rodgers and Hammerstein cannily added a New Deal aesthetic about incorporating and assimilating the ethnic outsider into the community dynamic. New Dealers and Jewish liberals, Rodgers and Hammerstein managed to provide a utopian solution to conservative opposition to FDR and isolationist rhetoric that the Jew posed a threat to American society. They carefully framed their political agenda in a soothing, nostalgic, populist image of rural American values.

The character of Ali Hakim, the libidinous Persian peddler, is representative of the ethnic foreigner in this idyllic populist landscape, and it is fairly obvious, from his profession, that he is meant to be Jewish. Hakim is a clown, written in the tradition of the Jewish star comics of the 1920s and 1930s. His one number, "It's a Scandal, It's an Outrage" is presentational, as are his dialogue scenes, particularly his "Persian Hello's" and "Persian Goodbye's." By turning the Jew into a presentational, comic character, as Andrea Most notes, Rodgers and Hammerstein removed the threat of the ethnic outsider from the American community. Despite his "otherness," Hakim is accepted by the community and assimilated socially. The play ends with his comic declaration that he is to be married in a shotgun wedding. The message is clear: everyone can be assimilated in

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this populist vision, as long as he buys into the middle class aesthetic and agrees, even at gunpoint, to be a fruitful member of the community.

Most attributes a more sinister motive to Hakim's function in the musical. She argues that Oklahoma! provided an assimilationist strategy for the Jew by promoting racist ideology:

> Unlike race, ethnicity was presented as a set of transient qualities that was nonthreatening because it could easily be performed away. As long as the characters could learn to speak, dress, and sing, or dance in the American style, they were fully accepted into the stage or screen community. . . . The emphasis on ethnic inclusiveness did not preclude the perpetuation of racial stereotypes about blacks. Jews (and many other immigrant groups) found that a powerful strategy for becoming fully American was to adopt the prejudices of whites toward blacks.[69]

According to Most, Ali Hakim and Jud both represent the foreign and the subversive. She astutely argues that during the number "The Farmer and the Cowman Must Be Friends," Hammerstein cleverly includes the merchant along with the farmer and the cowman in his lyric; everyone, including the Jew, must be friends and part of the community if it is to thrive. Jud, on the other hand, is also dark and foreign. Most argues that Rodgers and Hammerstein assimilate the Jew, in the persona of the non-threatening, presentational Hakim by demonizing Jud as the racial "other" or metaphorically, as the African-American.

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[69] Andrea Most, "'We Know We Belong to the Land,'" 77-8.

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I agree with Most's assessment of Ali Hakim, but I am skeptical about Jud being a double for the unassimilable African-American. In effect, Most is applying Michael Rogin's theories of Jewish blackface to Jud. Rogin argues that Jews who performed in blackface were able to assimilate into white society by essentializing and consequently demonizing the African-American.[70] In chapter two, I questioned the practicality of Rogin's theory. Blackface was a stage convention of the time which was also practiced by African-Americans. It's facile to ascribe one motive to all Jews (or any other racial or ethnic group) who were forced to subscribe to this convention, except that it was a necessary evil if they desired a career in the show business of their day. I similarly question Most's application of Rogin's theory to Jud. It seems unlikely that the liberal Hammerstein, whom Most herself identifies as having served as a vice-president of the NAACP, would demonize the African-American as a sexual psychopath to provide an assimilationist strategy for the Jew.[71]

Both Ali Hakim and Jud Frye appear in the source play, Green Grow the Lilacs, although Jud is called Jeeter in the Riggs' play. Jud is a sexual psychopath in both plays, but his sociopathology seems more a product of class than race. According to Filmer, Rimmer, and Walsh, Jud is a threat to middle class values: "The challenge to the integrity

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[70] For a discussion of Jewish blackface as an assimilationist strategy for essentializing the African-American, see Michael Rogin, Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[71] See Andrea Most, "'You've Got to Be Carefully Taught,': The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein's South Pacific." Theatre Journal 52.3 (October 2000): 326. In this article, Most notes that Hammerstein was vice-president of the NAACP.

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of this envisioned order comes in the form of the primordial instinctuality of Jud Frye. Jud is an outsider in every sense: neither farmer nor cowman, he is Aunt Eller's hired hand, a status which he uses to justify his low self-esteem, despite Aunt Eller's insistence that she and Laurey could not manage to run the farm themselves without his aid."[72] He is motivated by a sense of injustice. Aunt Eller acknowledges that she may not be better than anyone else, but she is certainly just as good. Jud, on the other hand, bitterly informs Laurey that she looks down on him because he is only a hired hand. In fact, Jud disrupts and threatens the community because he is convinced that his position as a hired hand excludes him from the middle class values of the rest of the community. His isolation is self-made and revealed in the lyrics of "Lonely Room," which stress his self-created isolation from the rest of the community. No one stops Jud from taking Laurey to the box social. The community allows Jud to bid for Laurey's box lunch. Most and Filmer, Rimmer, and Walsh imply that Jud is a product of the city and poses an urban, racial threat to small town values. In truth, Jud is a hired hand whose employment history precludes the city. His last job was on another farm, where he developed a similar, psychotic sexual obsession with his female employer. His reaction to sexual rejection in that situation mirrors his reaction when he is rejected by Laurey. He sets fire to the farm. Jud's "otherness" is an issue of class rather than racial "otherness." On the other hand, Ali Hakim, arguably as sexually driven as Jud, buys into the values of the community and is accepted, despite his ethnic "otherness." Presumably, he will open a store, settle down,

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[72] Paul Filmer, Val Rimmer, and Dave Walsh, "*Oklahoma!*: Ideology and Politics in the Vernacular Tradition of the American Musical." Popular Music 18.3 (1999): 386.

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and become a productive member of the community.

In many ways, Jud is a precursor to Carousel's Billy Bigelow, although he lacks Billy's charm and sexual charisma. Like Jud, Billy is an outsider, convinced not only that he will never be accepted by polite society, but also that he is not good enough to face "the highest judge of all" when he dies. If Jud is a sexual psychopath, Billy is a wife beater. Billy stabs himself to avoid going to jail after being caught in a robbery, whereas Jud falls on his knife after trying to murder Curly and Laurey on their wedding night. Structurally, Hammerstein's plots usually involve characters who are doubles. In Carousel, Billy's inability to buy into middle class values is contrasted with Mr. Snow, a poor fisherman, who yearns to be accepted by the community and is rewarded with money and social position for his efforts. Jud's double in Oklahoma! is Curly, not Hakim. Both Jud and Curly vie for Laurey's attentions and offer clear choices: Curly may be a wild cowboy, but he accepts his need to be domesticated and socialized. Jud deliberately excludes himself from the social contract. Hakim's double is Will Parker, both of whom are romantically interested in Ado Annie. Rodgers and Hammerstein stress that Hakim and Will Parker are both welcome in the Oklahoma community, however, despite Hakim's ethnic "otherness."

In comparing the Riggs' play and the musical, the characters of Jeeter in Green Grow the Lilacs and Jud in Oklahoma! are remarkably similar. This is not true of Ali Hakim. Most is correct in arguing that Rodgers and Hammerstein make him non-threatening through his comic buffoonery and presentational singing and dancing. She does not pursue the casting of Hakim, however, in the source play and in the musical,

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except to acknowledge that Joseph Buloff, who played the peddler in the musical, was a veteran of the Yiddish theatre. Buloff was in fact a star of the Yiddish theatre as well as the Broadway stage and probably the most well known performer in the original cast. It is his picture that was featured in the New York Times review of the opening.[73] Lee Strasberg, hardly a burlesque performer, played the peddler in the original production of Green Grow the Lilacs. Both were Jewish, but it is probably safe to assume that Strasberg's performance was psychologized and non-presentational. In contrast, Buloff was more than a veteran of the Yiddish theatre; he was a Broadway musical theatre clown in the tradition of Webber and Fields, Leon Errol, and Bobby Clark--much closer to Zero Mostel than to Lee Strasberg. That Hakim becomes a non-threatening racial "other" in the musical, however, had much to do with Buloff's roots as an Jewish star comic of musical comedy. Celeste Holm, the original Ado Annie, recalled his antics in an interview with Max Wilk:

> The first day we did our scene he came on eating a banana. Well, the chorus girls thought that was the funniest thing they'd ever seen. The next day he came on with a cane, with which he began hitting me on the ass. He seemed to have no sense of the other actor's responsibilities or his needs. One day Joe stood on my foot; didn't even *know* he was standing on my foot! So I went to Mamoulian [the director] and I explained very quietly that I'd have to get this scene set, one way or the other. I said, "I'm his

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[73] William G. Hyland, Richard Rodgers (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 144.

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partner in this scene and I want to know what he's going to do!"

So Mamoulian went to Joe Buloff, and in front of the entire company he said to him, "Joe, you carry one more prop on this stage which I have not seen before and I come back and break every tooth in your head. I have seen you in show after show, always you get good notices, always you steal the show, and the show closes. You've never been in a hit in your life. This time I want you to be in a *hit*!"[74]

Buloff's behavior was similar to Zero Mostel's ad-libs and comic buffoonery in Fiddler on the Roof twenty years later. He was a Broadway clown in an integrated show, which caused friction with the other actors and with the production staff and writers. One can hear his thick, Yiddish accent, a relic of the Jewish vaudeville comics of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, on Oklahoma!, Volume 2, a two record LP album released in 1945, two years after the release of the original cast album.[75]

Ironically, by the time the film version of Oklahoma! was released in the mid-1950s, it was no longer necessary to make Ali Hakim explicitly Jewish. The role was performed by Eddie Albert, a quintessential WASP. By that time, Rodgers and Hammerstein had succeeded with their assimilationist strategy so well that the Jew no longer had to perform Jewishness to make the point that the farmer, the cowboy, and the

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[74] Wilk, 155.

[75] Oklahoma!, Volume 2, Music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein. Features three songs not on the 1943 original cast album: Joseph Buloff, Betty Garde, and Alfred Drake. Decca Original Cast Recording Decca A-383.23M Personality Series, 1945.

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merchant could all dwell in a productive community. His assimilation no longer demanded ethnic buffoonery. The merchant remained, but the performance of Jewishness vanished:

> Rather than defining ethnicity either for laughs or sympathy, the new image of America emphasized the American that the ethnic could become. One can thus view the disappearance of the Jew from the screen, not as acquiescence to the Hollywood Question, but as an ideologically charged assertion challenging an older set of assumptions.[76]

Oklahoma! had become an assimilationist fantasy, where ethnic differences were no longer of paramount interest.

Fiddler on the Roof and the 1960s

Fiddler on the Roof, a product of the 1960s, offers utopian solutions to the generational culture clash. Tevye and his contemporaries are faced with a younger generation who challenge the traditions of their village and of their faith. The play details the compromise necessary for Tevye to accept the marital choices of his three daughters and still retain his own belief system. During the final scene, Tevye and the villagers of Anatevka are forced to leave their homes, many for America. The implication is that they will carry their traditions with them. At the same time, assimilation will logically result in

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[76] Carr, 281. Buloff's rendition of "It's A Scandal, It's An Outrage," has been omitted from subsequent reissues of the original cast album, including the fiftieth anniversary reissue. Perhaps, the tracks have been lost; perhaps, Buloff's heavy Yiddish vocal inflections would be received with puzzlement in a different cultural climate.

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even greater compromise.[77]

Fiddler opened in September, 1964. Although one tends to associate social change in the 1960s with its most turbulent year, 1968, there was much by 1964 to threaten the mythologized post-war America of Rodgers and Hammerstein. The assassination of John F. Kennedy occurred ten months before Fiddler opened. Before Kennedy's death, Americans were glued to their television sets during the Cuban missile crisis (1962). For the first time, they were faced with the real possibility of nuclear war. Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have A Dream" speech in 1963 amidst racial unrest in America's cities, which resulted in the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 1963, Timothy Leary was fired from Harvard University for conducting experiments with LSD on campus. Even more threatening was the potential for radical activism and campus unrest when students occupied a building at Berkeley in the fall of 1964.[78]

Equally disturbing were challenges to the nuclear family as alternative lifestyles became more visible in urban centers, particularly New York City. One of these alternate lifestyles was homosexuality. In 1963, Robert Doty wrote an article for the New York Times entitled "Growth of Overt Homosexuality in City Provokes Wide Concern," which stressed the increasing visibility of homosexuals in New York City and the perception of

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[77] When approached to direct the film version, Jerome Robbins envisioned Fiddler opening with a family ensconced in New York City on West End Avenue looking at pictures from a family album of its past. Norman Jewison eventually directed the film. See Lawrence, 350.

[78] Charles Kaiser, 1968 in America (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 153.

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heterosexuals that public space was being threatened by this sexual subculture.[79] In 1964, a fourteen-page article appeared in Life magazine about gay male life in the United States: "This had the immediate effect of making it clear to mainstream culture that gay people existed and that they had claimed, by a conscious act, public space for themselves in the urban landscape. The gay ghetto, now exposed, could function more overtly as an erogenous zone."[80] With photographs of street hustlers, leather bars, and gay cruising spots in assorted urban areas, the Life article forced the heterosexual hegemony to recognize the existence and growing openness of gay life.

According to Martin Duberman, a growing awareness of homosexuality was only a signpost for the emergence of an increasingly visible New Left. In Stonewall, Duberman argues that the early 1960s telegraphed a significant shift in American consciousness:

> The new homosexuality was part and parcel of a much larger cultural upheaval. The conformity and dutiful deference to authority that had held sway during the fifties were giving way under the hammer blows of the black civil rights struggle, the escalating war in Vietnam, and the emerging ethos of a counterculture that mocked traditional pieties and valorized "doing your own thing." A rapid-fire succession of events from 1963-1965 marked a seismic shift in national consciousness. The number of civil rights

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[79] Robert Doty, "Growth of Overt Homosexuality in City Provokes Wide Concern," New York Times, 17 December, 1963. Quoted in Michael Bronski, The Pleasure Principle: Sex, Backlash, and the Struggle for Gay Freedom (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), 217.

[80] Bronski, 217.

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> demonstrations in 1963 alone reached 930; they were highlighted by "Bull" Connor turning his police dogs loose on demonstrators, the bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which took the lives of four little black girls, and the massive civil rights march on Washington.[81]

Duberman's assertion that there was a seismic shift in American consciousness sounds slightly hyperbolic; change does not occur overnight. Having lived through that period, however, I think it naive to underestimate the threat of events like the Cuban Missile Crisis, the JFK assassination, and the Civil Rights riots on the cultural hegemony.

In a similar vein, Sally Banes argues in Greenwich Village 1963 that the seeds for cultural change--for postmodernism and the emerging counterculture--were in place by 1963 in Greenwich Village. For Banes, 1963 was a pivotal year:

> In the early Sixties, the arts became an important arena in which aesthetic personal, and polemical energies were galvanized by people who were convinced, with evangelical fervor, that they had entered into a new covenant with history through the rediscovery of their chosen medium. . . . The early Sixties avant-garde artists did not aim passively to reflect the society they lived in; they tried to change it by producing a new culture.[82]

Banes believes that a radical egalitarianism was the motivating force of the avant-garde of this period and stresses that the ordinary became a crucial element of artistic content.

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[81] Martin Duberman, Stonewall (New York: Plume, 1994), 98.

[82] Sally Banes, Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1963), 10.

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Banes' argument supports 1963 as a time of change, at least in New York, but again, perhaps it is a bit hyperbolic. In reviewing her book, Robert Brustein commented, "The avant-garde of any period is ultimately significant less for its artistic postures than for its artistic achievements."[83] At the same time, there is something to Duberman and Banes' belief that the seeds of the sexual revolution, the counterculture, the peace movement, gay pride, and postmodernism were being sown in 1963.

Popular music was representative of mainstream change that was perceptible by the time Fiddler opened. With few exceptions, the hit parade no longer reflected the Broadway musical. True, songs like "Hello, Dolly" and "The Impossible Dream" could still be popular hits, and the soundtrack of West Side Story was phenomenally successful. But these were rarities by 1964, not the norm in terms of the music industry, which by then catered to a youth culture. Elvis Presley had become a national icon for young Americans by the mid-1950s. Motown, founded by Berry Gordy in 1960 with the Miracles singing "Way Over There," was entrenched in the national youth culture by 1964 with recording artists like Martha and the Vandellas and the Supremes.[84] Equally significant, the Beatles' first American recording was released on December 26, 1963.[85] By 1964, the British rock group was immortalized on film with A Hard Day's Night.

Granted, the birth of Motown and the rise of the Beatles did not totally change

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[83] Robert Brustein, Dumbocracy in America: Studies in the Theatre of Guilt, 1987-1994 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 51.

[84] For a discussion of pop music in the early 1960s, including Motown, see Charles Kaiser, 1968 in America, 209.

[85] Kaiser, xxi.

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American life for all its citizens. But it was difficult in 1964 to live in a vacuum, unaware of a rebellious youth movement, racial unrest, and the need for Civil Rights legislation. Fiddler spoke to a particular, elitist Broadway audience--the cultural hegemony that was being threatened. Its focus on tradition encapsulated the confusion and potential threat of disempowerment to its audiences.[86]

Director/choreographer Jerome Robbins, a Jew, was apparently scrupulous in reworking the material so that it was more than a Jewish show. He constantly asked librettist Joseph Stein, composer Jerry Boch, and lyricist Sheldon Harnick what the show was about during pre-production conferences, finally coming up with the concept of tradition.[87] Every effort was made to de-emphasize the Jewishness of the piece by eliminating any Yiddishisms that would limit its audience. In an interview with Stuart Little before the musical opened, Robbins tried to frame Fiddler in terms of the social conflict in America at that time: "The play is about tolerance. And about change. This community, because revolution was in the air, lived in a time of great change. And so do we today. When there is change, you gain many things. You also lose many things."[88] In

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[86] Although 1964 predates systematic marketing statistics and thorough surveys of audience demographics, Fiddler's success implies a middle-aged audience (or older) likely to identify with a musical about the generation gap and loss of parental authority. This is reflected in the non-musical theatre during this period as well by Broadway comedies like Generation (1965) and The Impossible Years (1965), both financially successful and both eventually turned into films, that dealt with sons and daughters forsaking family closeness and parental values.

[87] Greg Lawrence, Dance with Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001), 337-38.

[88] Stuart W. Little, "Robbins Casts Middle-Aged Dancers," New York Herald Tribune, 11 June 1964, n.p. Found in the Fiddler clipping file at the Lincoln Center

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addition to the emerging youth counterculture that threatened the establishment, Robbins referred to "the many parallels [that] exist between the life of the Jewish community in the play and the life of the negro in America today."[89] Ironically, for a man who testified as a friendly witness before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1953, Robbins had a history of investigating social problems, particularly those of discrimination, in his work. Civil rights foregrounds "The Small House of Uncle Thomas" in The King and I (1951) and the racial intolerance and bigotry of gang warfare in West Side Story (1957). During an early rehearsal, Robbins asked the actors to improvise a scene in which blacks would try to buy books in a white bookstore in the South.[90] Robbins was clearly trying to make parallels between the Jews in Anatevka and the cultural changes in America in 1964 by broadening the appeal beyond a strictly Jewish audience.

According to Robbins' biographer, Greg Lawrence, when Zero Mostel started ad-libbing to the audience and inserting yiddishisms, Robbins discouraged friends from seeing the show with Mostel.[91] He was well aware that without focusing on the larger issues of social change and the threat to tradition, the musical's chances for success were limited. Before Robbins' involvement in the project, librettist Joseph Stein maintained that most Broadway producers evinced little interest in the material.[92] Even after Fiddler opened to

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Library for the Performing Arts.

[89] Ibid., n.p.

[90] Jared Brown, Zero Mostel: A Biography (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 217.

[91] Lawrence, 349.

[92] Ibid., 336.

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affirmative notices, David Merrick declared, "It's a Jewish show. . . . No one will go."[93] In downplaying the Jewishness of the show, Robbins, according to Walter Kerr, was too successful: "'Fiddler on the Roof' takes place in Anatevka, a village in Russia, and I think it might be an altogether charming musical if only the people of Anatevka did not pause every now and then to give their regards to Broadway, with remembrances to Herald Square."[94] Kerr, of course, was in the critical minority. Fiddler ran for eight years, managing to comfort a hegemonic Broadway audience for the remainder of the 1960s and through the early 1970s.

At the same time, Robbins' insistence that Fiddler transcend its Jewishness implied a change in this hegemonic Broadway audience. Unlike films, which tended to appeal to as broad an audience as possible, Broadway musicals and plays had always catered to an ethnic, urban, sizeably New York audience, many of whom were Jewish. Between 1961 and Fiddler's opening in 1964, a spate of Jewish musicals opened on Broadway: Milk and Honey (1961), A Family Affair (1962), I Can Get It For You Wholesale (1962), What Makes Sammy Run (1964), and Cafe Crown (1964). These musicals all had Jewish themes. Milk and Honey focused on American Jews transplanted to an Israeli kibbutz, A Family Affair chronicled a Jewish wedding, I Can Get It For You Wholesale dealt with the Jewish garment trade, What Makes Sammy Run involved the machinations of an overly

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[93] Quoted in Lawrence, 336.

[94] Walter Kerr, "'Fiddler on the Roof,'" New York Herald Tribune, 22 September, 1964. From New York Theatre Reviews, 1964, 216. Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts.

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ambitious Jew in Hollywood, and Cafe Crown concerned the Yiddish theatre.[95] All of these musicals lost money, including Milk and Honey, which even featured a Yiddish theatre icon, Molly Picon. Similarly, established Yiddish stars who worked in the non-musical theatre were faring poorly with their vehicles. Menasha Skulnick failed in The Forty-Ninth Cousin (1960), while Gertrude Berg flopped in a comedy entitled Dear Me, The Sky is Falling In (1963). Both had long been box-office stars on Broadway. I am not questioning that a significant Jewish audience still existed on Broadway in the 1960s, but I wonder if the combination of audience demographics and increasing capitalization were changing sufficiently so that a Jewish audience could no longer guarantee the financial success of a musical.

Writers like Mark Steyn and William Goldman disagree. In fact, Goldman argues in The Season that musicals in 1969 were not only created by Jews, but also were patronized predominately by Jewish audiences. He defends his position by describing the new musicals of the 1968 season: "Of the standard-brand musical comedies, three out of ten were about Jews: Golden Rainbow, The Education of Hyman Kaplan, and I'm Solomon."[96] What he fails to mention is each of these musicals was a financial flop. He goes on to describe planned musicals about Jews: "a musical based on The Rothschilds, a

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[95] These musicals focused on characters who were openly Jewish and proud of their heritage. I have deliberately only included musicals that opened from 1961 through 1964, before Fiddler on the Roof premiered. The preponderance of Jewish musicals, as I will demonstrate, reflects on audience demographics of this period. According to Andrea Most, Fiddler on the Roof, produced in 1964, was one of the first Broadway musicals to present characters who were openly and proudly Jewish. This is incorrect. See Most, "We Know We Belong to the Land," 13.

[96] Goldman, 149.

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musical based on Our Crowd, a musical based on the radio serial The Goldbergs, something based on Everything but Money, something else about anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union . . . plus a musical version of Bruce Jay Friedman's classic Jewish mother-type novel, A Mother's Kisses."[97] The statistics seem impressive, except that only two of these musicals ever made it to Broadway. The Rothschilds (1970) and Molly (1973) both lost money. A Mother's Kisses closed during its disastrous out-of-town tryout, and, to my knowledge, the other projects never found backing. Goldman does not mention Richard Rodgers' then projected Two By Two (1970), a musical based on the Biblical story of Noah, derived from Clifford Odet's The Flowering Peach (1954), which had originally starred Yiddish comic Menasha Skulnick. Two By Two, like Fiddler, featured a high voltage star performance. Danny Kaye injected much of the Jewish humor into the Rodgers show that Robbins found repugnant in Mostel's performance in Fiddler. The result was a failure. Maybe David Merrick knew of what he was speaking when he refused to produce Fiddler because it was a Jewish show.

The failures of these musicals imply one of two possibilities. Either the New York Jewish audience was not as substantial as it had been in the past or were not of sufficient number to fill Broadway musicals whose capitalizations were soaring with inflation. Perhaps the move to suburbia or to Florida or to other parts unknown was responsible for the abdication of an aging Jewish audience and changing demographics. The other possibility is that Jews were more thoroughly assimilated into American culture by the 1960s and were no longer interested in musicals that pandered to their "otherness."

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[97] Ibid., 149-50.

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Whichever was true, Robbins' focus on tradition and insistence on dejudaizing the musical was canny and commercial. Audiences were given what Dyer would call a utopian solution to the changes in American society. Compromise between the cultural hegemony and an emerging youthful counterculture was inevitable, but tradition, in the guise of the fiddler following Tevye and his family to America, would remain. Robbins was promising that the traditional, hegemonic way of *American* life was capable not only of incorporating change, but also of surviving.

A more radical production of Fiddler was staged in 1968 for a non-elitist audience at the Harry A. Eiseman Junior High School 275 in Brownsville, Brooklyn during the original long-running engagement of Fiddler on Broadway. Richard Piro, the drama teacher at the high school, who happened to be of Italian ancestry, decided to mount Fiddler to ease tensions between African-Americans, who constituted the majority of the student body at Eiseman, and the Jewish community, who comprised the bulk of faculty and administration. Rather than soothing an elitist Broadway cultural hegemony, Piro's production was aimed at an African-American audience in an urban ghetto during a moment of great racial unrest between African-Americans and Jews. Piro encountered anti-Semitism from his students at first, who ridiculed the Jewish characters and music. He finally was able to make the students identify their own heritage with that of the denizens of Anatevka. He was not, however, successful in convincing the faculty, most of whom were Jewish, that a black Fiddler would not ridicule their traditions and heritage, and add fuel to the racial fire that was already consuming Brownsville and other urban ghettos. In fact, one of the Jewish teachers tried to stop the production by contacting

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Music Theatre International, who controlled the rights.

Piro nonetheless managed to convince the Brownsville community and school board of the importance of a "black" Fiddler. One African-American parent welcomed the idea of Black Jewface: "Ever since before I was hatched, the white man was playing Negro. They blacked their faces. They wore our clothes and were entertaining people by imitating us and making fun of the way we spoke, we walked, and we sang. And who was there to object? Nobody."[98] Another woman answered objections to the production raised by a Jewish faculty member:

> Many of the boys and girls in this school only know you because you are the teacher who comes to them. They do not know Jews as neighbors. I do. I know you as a neighbor because I grew up in the atmosphere of your people. Therefore, I see you differently. I get the impression that you're worried the children may see you differently.
>
> Neighborhoods are changing with people running from one another. . . . The average human being seldom knows other human beings. The situation here can bring awareness.[99]

The final production, although successful, provided no utopian solution to the racial and class struggles in Brownsville. Although the black Fiddler received much publicity and apparently was beautifully performed, militant African-Americans were resentful that a

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[98] Quoted in Richard Piro, Black Fiddler (New York: William Morrow, 1971), 112.

[99] Quoted in Piro, 112.

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ghetto school could demonstrate excellence and tried to stop the production through violent demonstration. Jewish teachers were still uncomfortable that their traditions and heritage were being embodied by African-American students onstage. Piro's Fiddler briefly and heroically bandaged the racial turmoil of the community. Although the production received national press coverage and was televised, within a year Piro admitted defeat and resigned from his job.

Piro's experiment was at once inspiring and heartbreaking. Attempting radical social change through musical theatre is an admirable goal and one to be encouraged; on the other hand, it was beyond the parameters of theatre to solve the racial tensions in Brownsville in the 1960s. Such experiments are enviably altruistic; they also inevitably lead to disappointment and disillusionment. For instance, the Living Theatre, in the 1960s, did not put an end to American capitalism; the company eventually was jailed for tax evasion. Even Brecht, certainly a champion of radical social change, acknowledged the value of offering audiences choices and alternatives to hegemony. Serious musicals mounted on Broadway tend to offer far more conservative solutions to social problems. They paper over unsolvable tensions by proposing utopian solutions to problems that capitalism or the hegemony itself can presumably fix. This satisfies hegemonic audiences hungry for peaceful change but averse to revolution.

A Chorus Line and the Me Generation

If Fiddler on the Roof focused on the conflict between a cultural hegemony being threatened by changes in the fabric of American life, A Chorus Line (1975) tries to

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reconcile the 1970s "me" generation with its need to compromise with the social contract. This is not an easy alliance. The need for individuality, autonomy, and alternate lifestyles by 1975 was compromised by the need to exist within a hegemonic, corporate society that celebrated mediocrity. A Chorus Line glorifies the cog in the American wheel. Its conflict is that of insider (the corporate hegemony) versus outsider (the individual).

Not since Oklahoma! has a musical so reflected the profound changes in the middle class aesthetic, because the aesthetic no longer involves Rodgers and Hammerstein's post World War II mythologization of the middle class or Fiddler's hegemonic audiences negotiating their traditions with an emerging counterculture. A Chorus Line deals with the need to compromise individual autonomy with the corporate establishment. This is a far cry from the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, where Mr. Snow can become a tycoon, Maria can marry a Captain, Anna can domesticate the King of Siam, or Nellie can earn an oceanside villa by marrying a rich Frenchman. The reward for the aspirants of A Chorus Line is Andy Warhold's fifteen minutes of fame. In fact, the gypsies recognize the brevity of their career in "What I Did For Love."

During the showstopping finale, "One," they sing of the unseen female star of the musical-within-a-musical. What they are telling us is that the charisma of the female star exists in the audience's perception, and that perception is created not by her, but by how the chorus frames her. Their goal is not to share her success; it is to assure her success by their hard work and talent. If her reward is stardom, their glory lies only in their anonymity and loss of identity; they are all the same. The message here is not an egalitarian ideal, but a demand for mediocrity. The finale is rousing, but the message is

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dark: metaphorically, the Horatio Alger myth is dead. Individuality, will, and desire no longer guarantee the success that Rodgers and Hammerstein had nostalgically mythologized. The tension in A Chorus Line is between the autonomy of the individual versus the need to be a team player; the dynamic is outsider versus insider. Assimilation of all lifestyles, gender preferences, races, and ethnicities is still possible, but at what cost?

Whereas Fiddler's characters struggle to maintain their identity in a world where their traditions were being challenged, the characters in A Chorus Line fight for assimilation into insider status by ultimately losing their identities. Cassie's number, "The Music and the Mirror," represents the striving of the most talented of these aspirants. She is too good to be in the chorus, and must fight her talent and her genius to a job which necessitates mediocrity. Fiddler espouses compromise, but suggests, through the final image of the fiddler following Tevye to America, that compromise can be achieved without loss of integrity. A Chorus Line seduces its characters into total compromise by promising them the opportunity to do what they love--to dance. In other words, they accept compromise to achieve insider status. The price, however, is painfully steep.

According to Michael Bennett, the director and choreographer, the goal was to make the audience learn and care about each of the characters vying for a job. The reward for each of the aspirants, by the finale, is anonymity and negation of self:

> You're going to get to know all these dancers as individuals and care about each one. Then, at the very end of the play, they're all going to come out in tuxedos and top hats, and you're not going to be able to tell one from another. They're going to blend. They're going to do everything you've

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> ever seen anyone in a chorus line do. It's going to be the most horrifying moment you will ever experience in a theatre. I have a vision of them forming a VF and marching with frozen smiles, like in Metropolis. If I do this right, you will never see another chorus line in a theatre. Everybody will reevaluate what it is they're watching.[100]

As the finale of A Chorus Line ends, the lights fade on a chorus that looks like high kicking Rockette *über-marionettes*. Just as Robbins de-emphasized the Jewishness of Fiddler, Bennett related his show business story to the audience's struggles with individual autonomy and corporate acceptance by employing mirrors throughout the production, so that the audience would identify with the plight of the auditioners.

Bennett, however, was too shrewd and commercial a showman to emphasize the more chilling aspects of the loss of individuality and its implications for the audience. The finale, "One," is the quintessential Broadway production number, full of glitz and glamour. Audiences watch it and tend to see this jubilant production number as a reward for the successful gypsies, rather than as a cruel debasement. According to John Fiske, "it [entertainment] sees popular culture as a site of struggle, but, while accepting the power of the forces of dominance, it focuses rather upon the popular tactics by which these forces are coped with, are evaded, or resisted."[101] Here, like Evita, the audience excorporates the text for its own purposes, but Bennett and the creators of A Chorus Line

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[100] Quoted in Ken Mandelbaum, A Chorus Line and the Musicals of Michael Bennett (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 170-71.

[101] John Fiske, Understanding Popular Culture, 8.

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encourage the audience to cheer along with the joyous finale, rather than see the dark message behind a stage full of frozen smiles.

Also excorporating the text for his own purposes, John Clum attacks A Chorus Line for presenting an unrealistic look at the Broadway musical. He first argues that Paul is the only homosexual character fighting for a job, which is untrue. He then attacks the musical for perpetuating false American values: "A Chorus Line perpetuates the ridiculous fiction that the choruses of Broadway musicals and society itself, are totally heterosexual. More dangerous, the musical offers an uncritical presentation of the American notion that personality and private life, not talent or mastery of one's craft, get one a place on America's figurative chorus line."[102] Clum's reading of the show is ensconced in his own gayness, his provincialism, and his rather dated conviction that American values have not changed since Arthur Miller's notion of American success in Death of a Salesman (1949). Unfortunately, he seems to miss the point that Bennett and his collaborators were making. A Chorus Line obliterates the American success myth and the Horatio Alger fable of success through hard work and talent. We are meant to see each aspirant for a job as an individual, who is willing to sacrifice his own autonomy for insider status and a place on the team. Bennett's underlying message is not the glitz of a high kicking chorus line or a tribute to the Rockettes, but a cruel vision of the loss of individuality. These dancers are not Willy Lomans who have the wrong dream; they have no other recourse to make their dream come true than to become team players in the corporate game. What is

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[102] John M. Clum, Acting Gay: Male Homosexuality in Modern Drama (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 301.

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heartbreaking about the show is how much they want and need to become insiders and how little they anticipate the sacrifice of integrity and artistic fulfillment a position on the "line" will entail.

A Chorus Line mirrored a real social problem in 1975. One year earlier, Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace over the Watergate cover-up. But cynicism among the young predates Watergate. In 1968, Americans saw the assassinations of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. 1968 also exposed Americans to the Columbia University student riots which ended with students occupying campus buildings, police brutality, a Dean who was shot, and Mark Rudd and the SDS informing Grayson Kirk, president of Columbia, "up against the wall, motherfucker." This was the same year that introduced violent demonstrations at the Chicago Democratic Convention, the Stonewall riots, and Woodstock.

By 1970, the most popular national bestseller was Jonathan Livingston Seagull by Richard Bach. Bach instinctively knew that the search for authenticity and individual autonomy was no longer a function of radical 1960s counterculture politics, but of self-actualization: "It [the book] described a corrupt, unworkable society that needlessly constrained its true soarers and seekers. . . . National politics, a sense of national identity and community, strove to bottle up the centrifugal forces that tore at American society, to hold together its diverse, competing elements."[103] After Watergate, the dichotomy between individuality and a corrupt establishment became even more strained and begged some healing solution. By the early 1970s, there was a vociferous counterculture that

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[103] Bruce J. Schulman, The Seventies (New York: Free Press, 2001) 79.

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rejected the establishment and valued individual identity:

> In 1970-1971, one-third of America's college-age population felt that marriage had become obsolete and that having children was not very important. The number identifying religion, patriotism, and "living a clean moral life" as "important values" plummeted. Fifty percent held no living American in high regard, and nearly half felt that America was a "sick society." In this setting, many young Americans no longer saw any reason to heed established conventions about sex, drugs, authority, clothing, living arrangements, food--the fundamental ways of living their lives.[104]

After Watergate, the cynicism was, if anything, greater. How does one reconcile one's identity with an establishment that devalues it? On the other hand, if one wishes to succeed, how can one totally reject the society that establishes the criteria for success? How much compromise is necessary?

In A Chorus Line, the solution is not as utopic as it appears. Bennett apparently had something darker in mind, with his reference to the finale being like Metropolis, but he finally opted for a more optimistic conclusion to assuage and please audiences. He had previously co-directed Follies (1971), which deals with middle-age disillusionment and the death of the American dream rather than with the disillusionment of the young. But Follies offered little hope for its middle aged, establishment characters and failed at the box-office. It ruthlessly celebrated the death of the American dream, if not the death of the American musical. Bennett was not about to make the same mistake twice.

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[104] Ibid., 16.

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Ironically, Bennett was acutely familiar with the compromise necessary to collaborate on a Broadway musical.[105] There a telling Martha Swope photograph of Bennett with Harold Prince during a Follies rehearsal in 1971. Bennett is wearing a floppy hat and hippie clothes; Prince is dressed in a conservative turtle neck and tweeds. Clearly, Bennett is trying to wed his street-kid persona with the Broadway establishment. By the time Bennett decided to create A Chorus Line, he was able to change the very process of developing a Broadway musical by rehearsing a series of workshops sponsored by a not-for-profit theatre, the Public, to prepare for a commercial, Broadway transfer by the Shuberts. Bennett, however, unlike his gypsies, was a "star" and was not about to lose his autonomy or control. Beside the finale, Bennett made another concession to a utopian resolution to guarantee popular success. During previews at the Public Theatre, Cassie was rejected for the job. Bennett felt that she would never be hired; she was too much of a threat to Zach as a chorus member. Actress Marsha Mason finally urged him to change the ending, so that Cassie would win her place on the line. She argued that audiences

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[105] Bennett apparently fought with co-director Harold Prince during the show's out-of-town tryout to lighten the book and offer audiences hope. Prince insisted on the integrity of the show's original vision and the result was a financial failure. Ken Mandelbaum writes of Bennett's frustration:

> The book was not to Michael's liking. Michael got Neil Simon to say he would come in, and he also asked George Furth to help. He went out and bought Jim Goldman [the librettist] a joke book. One night, Hal grabbed Michael and said, "Michael trust me. We are in Boston. This is not New York, and the audience is not as sophisticated. The reaction will be very different in New York.". . . At a late preview, Hal took him out to the lobby and said, "We just got our first review. It's incredible. We're a smash. Of course, she didn't like the book, but we always knew that was a problem." Michael said Hal went on talking, but he never heard another word. (Mandelbaum 74).

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were disappointed; everyone hopes for a second chance.[106]

This same aesthetic can be applied to the longest running musical in Broadway history, Cats (1982), which borrows heavily from A Chorus Line. Rather than a group of dancers auditioning for a job in a Broadway show, the Lloyd Webber musical focuses on a diverse group of cats auditioning for a second chance or second life on the Heaviside layer. Grisabella, the least likely candidate, wins. Cats offers a much more utopic solution than A Chorus Line to the perils of individuality and the loss of identity. Even though Cassie wins her position on the line, she loses her identity once she becomes a member of the chorus. Grisabella, scruffy and a social outcast, manages to be reborn without having to compromise. Her individuality is rewarded by the establishment, a solution that is commercially inspirational if unlikely, even in the fantasy world of Cats.

Les Misérables and the Depoliticization of the 1980s

Les Misérables (1987) marks a turning point in shifting social arrangements, but it is difficult to isolate in terms of changing American attitudes toward class for a variety of reasons. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, audience demographics changed by the 1980 marketing study of the League of New York Theatres, as ticket prices escalated. New audiences, mostly younger and more elitist than ever before, were drawn to Broadway musicals and were willing to pay increasingly astronomic ticket prices. By 1987, marketing strategies had changed. Nationwide ticket services like Ticketmaster, the availability of half-priced seats at TKTS on the day of the performance, massive television

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[106] Mandelbaum, 146-47.

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advertisements, and the promotion of megaspectacles for foreign tourists also worked in favor of British imports like Les Misérables and Phantom of the Opera (1988) and contributed to their long runs. In addition to changing audience demographics, Les Misérables was an international hit, rather than a homegrown American product. It was created in Paris, then produced in London by the Royal Shakespeare Company. After a commercial move to the West End, Cameron MacIntosh moved the show to Broadway. Certainly, the shape of the musical changed drastically from its initial, unenthusiastic reception in Paris to its successful New York production. The show premiered in March of 1987, during the height of Reaganism. Les Misérables managed to survive the stock market crash in October of that year, but then so did Broadway mega-musicals of the period in general.

Based on the Victor Hugo novel set in Paris during 1832, Les Misérables chronicles the life of Jean Valjean, arrested for stealing a loaf of bread. Valjean constantly reinvents himself over the years to conform to society and even becomes mayor of his town, but despite his saintliness and good deeds, he is hounded by Javert, a policeman determined to send him back to prison. Les Misérables is episodic in structure and takes place over a considerable period of time. Valjean befriends the dying prostitute Fantine, rescues Fantine's young daughter from servitude, raises her, risks his life to help Marius, Cosette's lover, during the futile and tragic student revolution, carries the wounded Marius through the sewers of Paris, and finally dies a martyr's death after the suicide of Javert. Boublil and Schöenberg, the writers of the piece, are writing about class and the conflict between the disenfranchised "poor ones" and the government.

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The musical is very much a part of its cultural moment, when 1960s radicals like Jerry Rubin had long since given up the notion of revolution and were embracing Wall Street and networking parties. By 1987, the yippies had become yuppies. If the government was corrupt and materialistic, it was nevertheless here to stay. Revolt by that time seemed futile. Lawrence Grossberg quotes Lee Atwater: "If you want to look at a solid trend for the last fifteen or twenty years, it is that the American people are cynical and turned off about all the institutions and politics is one."[107] Certainly, cynicism about the government was nothing new in 1987, but the yuppie's aesthetic of complacent acquisition and the decentralization of government during the Reagan years had led to a resigned, apathetic, depoliticized America: "The proliferation of statements suggesting, not only that the various movements of the 1960s and 1970s are dead but that their struggles were largely ineffective, is part of a larger rhetoric of helplessness which entails that control has always to be surrendered to someone else, whether corporate technology or the new conservatism."[108] The government may not be good, but revolution is futile. The counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s realized that their rebelliousness changed nothing; if anything, it had led to a greater conservatism.

Similarly, in Les Misérables, the student revolt does nothing to change the government. The students are slaughtered behind the barricades. Marius sings "Empty Chairs and Empty Tables" to his dead comrades, who have sacrificed their lives in vain.

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[107] Lawrence Grossberg, We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 174.

[108] Ibid., 275-76.

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Even poor Eponine, who leads Valjean to Marius, is killed as is the child Gavroche. Each time Valjean reinvents himself as a respected member of the community, he is exposed as an ex-convict and must create a new life for himself. What the musical does preach is the potential for individual good despite social evil, a kind of utopian solution for the politically cynical. Altruism becomes a goal that can be potentially accomplished by the individual, particularly a saint like Valjean, rather than through the government or through society. Even the relentless policeman Javert finally realizes the value system and concept of justice he has believed in all his life is a lie and commits suicide.

Les Misérables revels in the misery of its characters, with little promise of any real solution. The outcasts and social renegades are doomed. When MacIntosh first acquired the rights to the French musical, he approached Alan Jay Lerner to adapt the lyrics and the book. Lerner was loathe to tackle the project; he wrote about people's dreams, not about their misery. In fact, the enormous appeal of the musical reminds me of Robert Brustein's assessment of Miss Saigon (1991), which he labels an example of the theatre of guilt:

> But it is a real question whether this glitzorama is an appropriate vehicle for stimulating charitable impulses--and whether people seeking a night on the town are going to respond to such exhortations with anything more practical than passing nods and sentimental sighs. I seem to remember audiences at Nicholas Nickleby, after the curtain came down on an impoverished waif in the hero's arms, gingerly wending their way past the

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homeless lying on the streets of New York.[109]

If there is an utopian solution to social problems in Les Misérables, it lies in preaching liberal homilies to the already converted, which is perhaps the root of Dyer's pessimism about musicals and class: musicals tend to reject solutions to social problems that capitalism cannot potentially supply.

In a similar vein, Brustein questions, as does Peter Brook, the real power of theatre to create social change. He stresses Chekhov's position that it is the job of the playwright to present his case to the jury (the audience), not to provide solutions. Serious musicals, like Les Misérables, are at best well-meaning, but fairly ineffectual in any real sense of healing social problems: "Theatre people have always had a soft spot for causes--rarely the cause of theatre. Smarting over recurrent charges that their work lacks social dimension, many American playwrights have begun to compensate through displays of conscience, preaching liberal sermons to already converted parishioners."[110] Here Brustein reiterates an old argument. St. Augustine questioned the potential for change in theatrical works that pandered to audiences who delighted in wallowing in their own guilt and in the sufferings of others:

> Why is it that men enjoy feeling sad at the sight of tragedy and suffering on the stage, although they would be most unhappy if they had to endure the same fate themselves? Yet they watch the plays because they hope to be made to feel sad, and the feeling of sorrow is what they enjoy. What

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[109] Brustein, Dumbocracy, 118.

[110] Ibid., 16.

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> miserable delirium this is! The more a man is subject to such suffering himself, we call it misery: when he suffers out of sympathy with others, we call it pity! But what sort of pity can we really feel for an imaginary scene on the stage? The audience is not called upon to offer help but only to feel sorrow, and the more they are pained, the more they applaud the author. Whether this human agony is based on fact or is simply imaginary, if it is acted so badly that the audience is not moved to sorrow, they leave the theatre in a disgruntled and critical mood; whereas, if they are made to feel pain, they stay to the end watching happily.[111]

Rather than incite audiences to relieve the misery of the unfortunate, theatre, for Augustine, dangerously encourages audiences to enjoy the misfortune of others.

Despite Brechtian distancing techniques employed by Trevor Nunn and John Caird, Les Misérables seems to confirm Augustine's theory. D. A. Miller agrees. He argues that the sung-through musical, by destroying the structural opposition between narrative and number, contradicts what is utopian about the musical for Richard Dyer. According to Dyer, it is often the musical numbers that provide utopian solutions to social problems raised by the libretti of musicals. The finale of A Chorus Line is an appropriate example. Michael Bennett ultimately chose the glamour and glitz of show business rather than the horror of Metropolis, which the book scenes confirm. Bennett's finale opts for the utopian solution to the problem of individual autonomy versus the corporate

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[111] St. Augustine, Confessions, translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1961), 55-56.

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establishment: escapism.

The sung-through musical, on the other hand, destroys "those continual feats of negation that made the Broadway musical uniquely, preciously utopian."[112] For Dyer, musical numbers were an attempt to deny the misery or unhappiness that preceded and sometimes survived them in the dialogue. Miller's conclusion is that the sung-through musical destroys the concept of entertainment as utopia:

> By contrast, the unbroken lugubriousness of the score of Les Mis (a show in which the few characters who don't die remain permanently guilt-tripped by those who do) conduced to so numb an acquiescence in the status quo that it was doubtful whether the same theatregoer who had just finished weeping for 'the miserable ones' even recognized them when they reappeared outside the theatre asking for spare change.[113]

Les Misérables is depoliticized in that it seems to offer no practical solutions to social problems. If it is indeed utopian, it is because it asks nothing of its audiences except empathy for the downtrodden. Somehow, by feeling sorry for all the "poor ones," patrons can leave the theatre feeling purged and guiltless. According to Brustein, buying tickets for such lugubrious, guilt inducing shows is akin to putting a small contribution in the collection plate at church. It vitiates having to deal with the homeless outside the

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[112] D.A. Miller, Place For Us [Essay on the Broadway Musical] (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 57.

[113] Ibid., 57.

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church.[114] Again, Brustein wonders, "How many people are moved to real sacrifice by theatrical exhortations?"[115] If there is a utopic solution to Les Miserables, it is Valjean's martyrdom, which predates Bush's thousand points of light. Martyrdom is an attractive idea, but hardly a compelling utopian solution to individual suffering.

Shifting social arrangements and a changing class aesthetic have affected reception for the most financially successful "serious" musicals of the century. Obviously, the veneration of community and assimilationist strategies of Oklahoma! differ from the social problems addressed by Fiddler on the Roof twenty years later, as those problems differ from the individual versus the establishment in A Chorus Line in the 1970s and the peculiar wallowing and joy elitist audiences find in the social problems demonstrated by Les Misérables in the 1980s and 1990s.

As an addendum, recently, two musicalizations of The Hunchback of Notre Dame opened in Europe. Although neither production has appeared in New York as yet, both Hunchbacks are aimed at a specific audience at a specific time; yet, the message is once again rooted in a class aesthetic. Certainly, Quasimodo is "a societal misfit locked in a world of yearning who may or may not get the girl."[116] Notre Dame de Paris (1998), the French version of the Hugo story, was created by Luc Plamondon who also created the enormously successful Starmania in Paris and by Richard Cocciante. The musical has been phenomenally successful in Paris, has generated several million selling albums, has toured

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[114] Brustein, Dumbocracy, 16.

[115] Ibid., 16.

[116] Matt Wolf, Review, Variety, 21-27 June 1999, 86.

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Belgium, France, and Canada, and returned to Paris in 2000. The Disney version, The Bellringer of Notre Dame (1999), opened in Berlin to great financial success. According to Matt Wolf in Variety, there is a textual emphasis in the Disney production on issues of tolerance and harmony that the authors and Disney "felt might strike a particular chord in Germany's new capital."[117] The two versions of Hunchback are both symptomatic of a new European nation, concerned with issues of class and social stratification. According to Wolf, Disney is carefully marketing its product along those lines: "'Our goal is to make 'Hunchback' not just a show; it's part of the new Berlin,' Stella chairman and CEO Hemjo Klein tells Variety by telephone. 'Europe as an entity has never been as vital and alive as it is now.' To that end, Klein adds, the time is ripe for a 'show about unification, about a classless society.'"[118] American musicals have reflected shifting class arrangements throughout the twentieth century. It seems now, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, that Disney is employing American writers and performers to export musicals that reflect social problems on an international level. This is a far cry from the isolationist versus interventionist conflict Oklahoma! attempted to soothe in 1943.

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[117] Matt Wolf, "Disney 'Hunchback' Rings Berlin's Bell," Variety, 21-27 June 1999, 85.

[118] Ibid., 85.

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Chapter Five: Privileging Incompleteness

> A theatre experience which lives in the present must be close to the pulse of the time, just as a great fashion designer is never blindly looking for originality but is mysteriously blending his creativity with the ever-changing surface of life.[1]
>
> --Peter Brook

In chapter one, I argued that the non-integrated, star-based musical, like opera seria, was characterized by the performer as co-creator of an incomplete text, one that was never meant to be fixed or closed. Throughout the dissertation, I've also argued that the musical is a product of its cultural moment. If that is true, then performance, as well as text, is also a function of its cultural moment. With the emergence of the integrated Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, however, historians have privileged the autonomy of the text as sacrosanct and complete. Elevated by its artistic aspirations, the integrated musical has become America's answer to Wagner's *gesamtkunstwerk*. Privileging the text, however, means privileging authorial intent, which is subject to historical relativism, just as the text is subject to performance and reception to create meaning. For instance, in the case of Oklahoma!, as I explained in chapter four, authorial intent meant casting a Yiddish burlesque clown as Ali Hakim. That casting was a function of a historical moment in time: Rodgers and Hammerstein's attempt to deal with Jewish assimilation in an anti-Semitic populist framework during World War II. The casting of a Yiddish comic as Ali Hakim, however, would only puzzle audiences in 2001.

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[1] Peter Brook, The Open Door (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995), 112.

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Roland Barthes argues that with the death of the author a plurality of readings is born. Postmodern musicologists, like Richard Taruskin, similarly question modernism's search for "authenticity," the intention of the composer. Historians of the American musical, however, privilege closed texts and definitive performances. This is counterintuitive to contemporary theatre studies and postmodern musicology. If text, performance, and reception create meaning, all three are a function of their historical moment of production; consequently, they are subject to historical subjectivity and relativism.

In this chapter, then, I argue that the text of the American musical, whether integrated or not, is innately open, by which I mean incomplete. Even where authentic texts survive, that authenticity is inextricably linked with performance and reception, which are functions of given cultural moments. The chapter begins with a theoretical discussion of textual openness, citing Barthes and the death of the author, as well as directors like Tyrone Guthrie and Peter Brook, who maintain that theatre is necessarily a product of historical subjectivity. I then relate their theories to the scepticism of postmodern musicologists like Taruskin toward the modernist concept of "authenticity" in performance practice, which privileges reproducing the intent of the composer. That assumption is as questionable as the notion of autonomous musical theatre texts and definitive productions. By acknowledging that musical theatre pieces are products of their cultural moments, including changing performance practices and reception, I then apply the notion of historical relativism to three musicals that opened the season following the Stonewall riots: Company (1970), Coco (1969), and Applause (1970). Before discussing

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how each of these musicals deals with homosexuality, gender, and identity, I will examine both the attitude toward and treatment of homosexuals in non-musical and musical theatre prior to Stonewall, and then frame these musicals in their cultural context. I have made the issue of gender and homosexuality salient because the three musicals reflect a cultural marker, the Stonewall riots. Although the texts of each of these musicals survive, they are innately incomplete, subject to performance and historical subjectivity that provides audiences answers for "reading" and decoding the provocative issues they raise in terms of gender and identity.

Privileging the Text versus Current Historiography

The idea that theatrical texts are innately open and incomplete is certainly not a new concept. Roland Barthes develops the notion of the death of the author and of authorial intent in Image, Music, and Text (1977).[2] According to Barthes, the text is a paradox and involves a plurality of readings, rather than the autonomous, authentic reading modernist critics ascribed to authorial intent before postmodernism:

> Hence, no vital "respect" is due to the Text: it can be broken (which is just what the Middle Ages did with two nevertheless authoritative texts--Holy Scripture and Aristotle); it can be read without the guarantee of its father, the restitution of the inter-text paradoxically abolishing any legacy. It is not that the Author may not "come back" in the Text, in his text, but he

[2] See Roland Barthes, Image, Music, and Text, translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

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then does so as a "guest."[3]

In terms of post-serial music, Barthes applies the same principle. The interpreter no longer tries to follow any authentic text, but, as in opera seria, becomes co-author of the score: "We know that today post-serial music has radically altered the role of the 'interpreter,' who is called on to be in some sort the co-author of the score, completing it rather than giving it 'expression.' The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration."[4] Privileging this openness on the part of the reader and performer, Barthes argues that the same is true of theatre. He cites historical relativism in challenging the idea that Racine's plays demand predictable interpretations. In championing a multiplicity of interpretations as healthy, Barthes explains that any interpretation of Racine is subjective and cannot be institutionalized, but is a function of history and the cultural moment of the interpreter.[5]

Directors like Tyrone Guthrie and Peter Brook follow the same line of reasoning. Guthrie championed a relativistic, historical approach to production. Just as Barthes dismisses the notion of a definitive production of Racine, Guthrie argues against an ideal performance of Shakespeare. Marvin Carlson summarizes Guthrie's position: "Any work of art will always be a partial perspective of that observer at that historical moment, and every performance can only be that performing group's comment on the play, their

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[3] Ibid., 161.

[4] Ibid., 163.

[5] See Roland Barthes, On Racine, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

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interpretation of an open-ended score, to which the audience will add yet another level of interpretation."[6] Brook echoes Guthrie's open-ended approach to the text: "Many years ago, it used to be claimed that one must 'perform the play as Shakespeare wrote it.' Today, the absurdity of this is more or less recognized: nobody knows what scenic form he had in mind. All that one knows is that he wrote a chain of words that have in them the possibility of giving birth to forms that are constantly renewed."[7] Since the text is a function of a given cultural moment, both in terms of performance and reception, it is logical that the text, by itself, is open-ended and incomplete.

In a similar vein, William E. Gruber maintains that performance must call the text into question.[8] Gruber cites Nahum Tate's version of King Lear, in which Cordelia was played by the promiscuous Mrs. Barry, who was greeted with laughter when she referred to her "virgin innocence." Gruber also notes that the character of Lysistrata, in its original ancient Greek incarnation, was played by a man. How, he wonders, does this affect a play about a patriarchal society and its attitudes toward women, particularly revolutionary women? Just as a musical score is a blueprint for performance, a text is open; it is subject to performance, to the stage conventions of its time, to history, and to subjectivity. Similarly, J. L. Styan insists that because of the uniqueness of each performer, it is futile to

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[6] Marvin Carlson, Theories of the Theatre (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), 445.

[7] Brook, 63.

[8] William E. Gruber, Comic Theatres: Studies in Performance and Audience Response (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 2.

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look for definitive characterization, but rather the spectrum of a character.[9] Commenting on Styan, Gruber asserts, like Barthes and Guthrie, that the theatrical text is innately incomplete, characterized by absences and gaps that are filled in by historical relativism:

> The hermeneutics of drama must not automatically presuppose a stable text, nor can the text stand as an ideal which any performance in any age must realize. As no narrative is ever independent of the occasion of its telling, so no play is ever independent of its performance. This dependence does not radically diminish the text's importance in criticism of drama. The text is still primary, but it is no longer separate from the needs of its viewers or from other contemporary forms of expression.[10]

Gruber's attack on a stable text and Barthes' insistence on the death of the author mirror the attack of postmodern musicologists on the authenticity of text. By authenticity, I refer here to musicology's concern with recreating the intentions of the composer in terms of performance.

Richard Taruskin adapts Barthes' theory of the death of the author and authorial intentionality to music, advocating an aesthetic that attributes real authenticity not to authorial intent, but to the creation of something new from an incomplete text from the past. He is opposed to the belief that re-imagining something old is better than creating something new. Rather than naively trying to replicate the impossible, authenticity, for Taruskin, would be better defined by the representation of the times and tastes of

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[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] Ibid., 5.

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contemporary performers and audiences. In attacking textual completeness and authorial intent, Taruskin goes beyond early music. Modernist musicologists, he argues, are devoted to the nineteenth century concept of *werktreue*, which posits that since Bach, it is possible to ascertain, through original manuscripts and musicological scholarship, a recreation of the composer's intentions during the original performance. According to Taruskin, if musicians believe this, how do they justify the greatness of Fürtwangler, who freely interpreted seemingly inviolable Beethoven texts, adding unnotated nuances and varying tempi?[11] Fürtwangler's embellishments were a product of his own imagination and artistic sensibility, not of historical or textual authenticity.

For Taruskin, composing concerns are different from performing concerns. Once a composer completes his composition, he relates to it as a performer, if he is one, or as a listener. Taruskin quotes Irving Berlin, who said of Fred Astaire, "I like him because he doesn't change my songs, or if he does, he changes them for the better."[12] Modernists, on the other hand, cling to the notion that Romantic music is verifiable and can be performed authentically:

> I have seen a review of a recording of Liszt's keyboard arrangements of Beethoven symphonies in which the pianist is reproached for violating the letter of the score; and even one in which an authentically Ivesian performer of the Concord Sonata (that is, one who attempted to capture

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[11] Richard Taruskin, Text and Act (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12.

[12] Quoted in Taruskin, 54.

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> something of the perpetually evolving and contingent character the composer prized as the very essence of that work) was dourly enjoined "to learn humility in the face of the text."[13]

This kind of criticism is common in theatre as well. Purists attack Peter Brook for stripping down Hamlet (2001) to two hours to find the essence of the text. Similarly, in the 1920s, George Bernard Shaw attacked John Barrymore's acclaimed portrait of Hamlet (1922-1924). The Barrymore production took many liberties with the text. After watching a performance in London, Shaw sent Barrymore a telegram admonishing him for presuming to re-write Shakespeare.[14] Despite Shaw's privileging Shakespeare's text as inviolable, Barrymore's Hamlet was regarded as the one of the great performances of his generation.

Musicologists attack Taruskin's postmodern antagonism toward the notion of *werktreue* and authenticity, just as musical theatre historians cling to the authority of a fixed text. Musicologist Roland Jackson laments the postmodern tendency to denigrate the timeless and the universal:

> [Taruskin's views are] typical of the swing towards subjectivism in current critical thought, of a movement away from the single work, from the search for objective reality, to pluralism and individuality of interpretation, away from the notion of the "timeless" work (or "timeless" performance) to a

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[13] Ibid., 13.

[14] See Michael A. Morrison, John Barrymore: Shakespearean Actor (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 250-252.

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> consideration of the personal responses of those who at various times have experienced (or will experience) the work. Implicit in the new scepticism and subjectivity are its anti-textuality (did the work exist in a single form? Did the composer have only one performance in mind?), its refunctioning (the work is simply adapted to new situations), its conceptualism (works are as we perceive them), and its historicism (history and its manifestations "exist" only in accordance with our view of them).[15]

Taruskin's response is that Jackson sounds like a musicological T S. Eliot in his modernism:

> Prof. Jackson's "timeless" is a familiar euphemism for "inviolate" or "sacred," perhaps taboo. Performance practice, on this account, is a sacrament that aims at something akin to transubstantiation. The reality it seeks is not objective but transcendent. The singleness toward which it aspires is to be found not in the untidy world we all inhabit (still less the one Bach or Mozart inhabited) but in the realm of romance. I cannot see what it has to do with scholarship.[16]

For Taruskin, tradition is an invention that is designed to suit contemporary purposes. Rather than debunking historical performances as inauthentic, he argues that reconstructing performance or reviving the past enables one to be original in today's

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[15] Roland Jackson, "Editorial: Performance Practice and Its Critics--The Debate Goes On," Performance Practice Review 4 (1991): 113.

[16] Taruskin, 21.

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musical world. This echoes Nietzsche, who wrote, "we try to give ourselves a new past from which we should have liked to descend instead of the past from which we actually descended."[17] In other words, historians write the past in terms of the present to read the present in terms of the past.

The questions Taruskin raises about authenticity and the privileging of the musical text can easily be applied to musical theatre. Jerome Savary, the most successful director of musical theatre in Paris for the past thirty years and the current head of the Opéra-Comique, agrees. Noted for his sometimes radical reinvisioning of French operettas and musicals, Savary advocates rejecting the text and seeking new, relevant productions to "restore the theatre to its true dignity."[18] Savary's ideas are not uncommon in Europe. Peter Brook's reinvention of Carmen recognized that Bizet's text was filled with the conventions of nineteenth-century opera, rather than the musical theatre of today. In staging a contemporary Carmen, Brook dispensed with many of the conventions that he felt were outmoded and interfered with the purity of the plot. According to Brook, he realized that much in Carmen seemed boring to him, including the reliance on colorful scenery, spectacle, and processions. He also questioned the necessity of a chorus of eighty invading the stage for no particular reason except to dress the stage and provide a choral framework that he felt unnecessary to the story.[19] Brook's revisionist approach no

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[17] Quoted in Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 49-50.

[18] Quoted in Carlson, 459.

[19] Brook, 65-6.

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doubt superceded even postmodern musicology in that he altered the score to strip away the fat and focus on the opera as a piece of compelling musical theatre:

> Sacrilegiously, we confessed to ourselves that the music was not consistently of the same quality. What was quite exceptional was the music which expressed the relationships between the protagonists, and we were struck by the fact that it was into these musical lines that Bizet had poured his deepest feelings and his finest sense of emotional truth. Thus we made the decision to see if we could extract from the four hours of the full score what we deliberately called the Tragedy of Carmen, referring to the concentrated interrelation of a small number of protagonists in Greek tragedy. . . . We looked for music which could be sung softly, lightly, without excess and without exhibitionism, without great virtuosity. By doing that, by moving towards intimacy, we were essentially looking for quality.[20]

Brook's extreme tampering with the Bizet score raised many a musicological eyebrow. At the same time, Brook and Savary, who has done much the same kind of tampering with operetta in France, are not alone in advocating a historically relativistic, open-ended approach to the text of musical theatre and opera. American directors, on the other hand, both in opera and in musical theatre, tend to be more reactionary and positivistic in their privileging of the text and reluctance to veer from traditional approaches.

The notion that the American musical should privilege text over performance is

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[20] Ibid., 66-7.

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puzzling. Authenticity, in terms of authorial intent, is, if anything, more tenuous in the collaborative medium of musicals than in other forms of theatre. The very process of mounting a Broadway musical precludes the ultimate authority of the text. To an extent, this is also true of non-musical theatre, which foregrounds a long history of collaborative production work where authorial intent is ignored or glossed over. Chekhov fought bitterly with Stanislavsky over interpretations of his plays; The Seagull (1896), however, was a dismal failure until Stanislavsky restaged it for the Moscow Art Theatre. Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan were famously at loggerheads over Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955). Kazan urged Williams to rewrite the final act to guarantee the play's commercial success. William Inge and Joshua Logan had similar battles over Picnic (1953). Inge finally acceded to Logan's demands to change the ending of the play, while spending the rest of his career whining about the rape of his text. Both Williams and Inge complained about their directors' disregard for authorial intent for the remainder of their careers; both writers, however, happily spent the royalties earned by their artistic compromise during production and were bitterly disappointed when Kazan and Logan were loathe to work with them again.

One must be similarly skeptical of authorial intent in terms of the texts of musicals. The original production of Pippin (1972) was certainly not faithful to the writer and composer's original text or intentions. In fact, director/choreographer Bob Fosse banned Stephen Schwartz (composer) and Roger O'Hirson (librettist) from rehearsals. Like Williams and Inge, the authors complained bitterly over Fosse's appropriation of their work for his own purposes, but, arguably, Pippin's commercial success was due to

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Fosse's production, rather than the text. It would be worth researching the influence producer Theresa Helburn and the Theatre Guild had on Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!, not to mention the contribution of director Rouben Mamoulian. Certainly Jerome Robbins and George Abbott invariably shaped and often helped rewrite and refashion the musicals they directed. Out-of-town tryouts were opportunities for collaboration between authors, director, choreographer, designers, and stars. Gower Champion turned Hello, Dolly (1964) into a hit before it came to New York by altering the script to accommodate the big production numbers at which Carol Channing excelled. Whatever the final commercial outcome, the privileging of an authentic, inviolable text is antithetic to the collaborative way in which musicals are created. Often, the scripts originally submitted by authors of integrated musicals were virtually unrecognizable by the end of the rehearsal and tryout process. One is reminded of Jewish writer Bert Shevelove's famous quip that he only wished Hitler could have authored a Broadway musical and suffered the tortures of an out-of-town tryout.

Much of the privileging of musical theatre texts stems from the policy of the Rodgers and Hammerstein office, whose published scripts included stage directions taken from performances of the original Broadway productions that became a mark of textual authenticity. When the shows were remounted for the road or internationally, Rodgers and Hammerstein often hired stage managers to duplicate the exact Broadway production, rather than adapt their text to a different company, locale, or even country, a practice that still exists today in remounting both national and international productions of Broadway successes. The Rodgers and Hammerstein office were notoriously vigilant in assigning

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the rights to their canon, both to professionals and amateurs, and often sent representatives to monitor mountings throughout the country and abroad to guarantee the authenticity of the performance. If the representatives questioned faithfulness to the authors' original intent, production rights were withdrawn. Perhaps the most notorious example of this is the Anne Bogart production of South Pacific at New York University, an experimental piece set in a mental hospital which featured multiple actors playing Nellie Forbush. Representatives of the Rodgers and Hammerstein office withdrew the rights after sending representatives to see one performance. The reason for this vigilant monitoring of productions is not difficult to fathom. Just as autonomy reverted to the composer after the demise of opera seria, the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon asserted the autonomy of the composer, lyricist, and librettist (and, depending on how Rodgers and Hammerstein were getting along with Agnes de Mille at any given moment, at times the choreographer). Integration, for which Rodgers and Hammerstein carried the banner, supposedly depended on the autonomy of the text and the faithful reproduction of the "definitive" Broadway production.

Prior to the development of the Rodgers and Hammerstein integrated canon, producers sent shows out on the road, sometimes with the original Broadway cast, sometimes with replacement stars who demanded the shows be tailored to their specific needs and talents. With the privileging of the integrated musical over the non-integrated musical, the authority reverted from performer to text. In asserting the autonomy of the text, and, by implication, the idea that the original production was the ideal, Rodgers and Hammerstein did much to change this practice by insisting on duplicate productions. One

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salient example is the London remounting of South Pacific, in which Mary Martin recreated her role as Nellie Forbush and about which Richard Rodgers and Joshua Logan have conflicting stories. Rodgers had sent stage manager Jerome Whyte to reproduce the New York production and brought Logan in at the last minute to touch it up. Logan, expecting to see a finished product, was appalled at the state of the performance: "Every move on the stage was within a millimeter of the move that was made by the New York company, and every reading was a tape recording played at the right speed. It was perfect--and at the same time perfectly awful."[21] Even worse, Logan found Martin lacking the spontaneity of her original performance. What remained was mechanical and strident. Rodgers, on the other hand, "was appalled at the staging he saw in the London rehearsals, as was Martin," since Logan attempted to inject life into the London production by slowing it down for English audiences, and by making amendments to the staging as well as to the text.[22] Indeed, when Logan directed the film version, he incorporated significant changes in the text to adapt the show to a cinematic form, much to the frustration and displeasure of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Even with the privileging of text, the conflict between text and production--and which exerts ultimate authority--remains a provocative question. According to Peter Brook, any production, no matter how celebrated, is a function of its historical, cultural

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[21] Joshua Logan, Josh: My Up and Down, In and Out Life (New York: Delacorte, 1976), 263.

[22] William G. Hyland, Richard Rodgers (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 189; also see Richard Rodgers, Musical Stages (New York: Random House, 1975) for Rodgers' comments on Logan's reinvisioning the show and tampering with the "authenticity" of the text.

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moment:

> When one puts on a play, inevitably, at the beginning, it has no form, it is just words on paper of ideas. The event is the shaping of the form [or production]. What one calls the work is the search for the right form [production]. If this work is successful, the result can eventually last for a few years, but no more. When we did our own version of Carmen, we gave it a completely new form which lasted four or five years before we felt it had reached its limit. The form no longer had the same energy: its time quite simply was up.[23]

Brook is arguing that the energy of a production ebbs as the cultural moment that inspired it inevitably passes.

The integrated musical is basically a relatively new phenomenon. It may date back to Show Boat in 1927 or the Kurt Weill musicals of the 1930s, but, in general, its popularity with the American masses begins with Oklahoma! in 1943. The form, then, is basically only sixty years old. Time, particularly for the long running musical, exacts its toll, since American culture changes rapidly. Ted Chapin, currently in charge of the Rodgers and Hammerstein organization, apparently has realized that much of this canon, if it is to survive, needs reinvisioning. Its future popularity lies in its relevance to contemporary audiences. As a result, a revisionist, multicultural production of Carousel was presented at London's National Theatre and at New York's Lincoln Center, an interracial, textually altered Cinderella starring Brandy was presented on television and

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[23] Brook, 60.

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later transferred to the stage in a national touring production, while a drastically rewritten South Pacific (2001) starring an aging Glenn Close in the unlikely role of Nellie Forbush, was broadcast on network television and championed by Rodgers' daughter, Mary, as superior to the 1950s film version. As of 2001, David Henry Hwang, author of M. Butterfly (1988), has been commissioned to rewrite Flower Drum Song (1958) to make it politically correct and commercially viable for contemporary, multicultural audiences.

Cameron MacIntosh, producer of a string of phenomenally successful British poperettas since the 1980s, vigilantly guards his properties in much the same fashion that Rodgers and Hammerstein guarded theirs for so many years. MacIntosh brags that his productions are interchangeable. According to MacIntosh, it doesn't matter if one sees Les Misérables in London, on Broadway, or in Peoria. The productions are identical, which is counterintuitive to Peter Brooks' argument that "the same play put on today in Paris, in Bucharest, or in Baghdad will obviously be very different in form. The locale, the social and political climate, the prevailing thought and culture, must all have their influence on what makes a bridge between subject and the audience, what affects people."[24] Les Misérables is an international hit, playing to a variety of cultures and social and political climates, not the least of which reside in the United States itself. Interchangeable, duplicate productions seem more like mass produced technology than theatre to me. MacIntosh's boast that his productions are all the same also denigrates the importance of the performer, since the privileging of an absolute text promotes interchangeable performance. This kind of theatrical mass production reminds me of Norma Desmond's

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[24] Ibid., 60-1.

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famous line in Sunset Boulevard, where she extols the art of silent film by declaring that the actors had faces then. Veteran musical theatre actress Helen Gallagher notes that today's performers are better trained than ever before, but they are devoid of personality onstage.[25] Valuing interchangeable actors, unless one wants to advocate an über-marionette school of musical theatre, does not make for exciting musical theatre performances. Time, however, will no doubt temper MacIntosh's vigilance, as it has tempered the policy of the Rodgers and Hammerstein office about authenticity in production and the privileging of closed texts (including stage directions). Many of MacIntosh's original productions are still running. Most involve complex, technology, such as the falling chandelier in Phantom of the Opera (1988) or the onstage helicopter of Miss Saigon (1991). How will these shows be reinvisioned for regional theatres or venues with less spectacular budgets in the future? Musicals that run fifteen years on Broadway become tourist events, rather than reflections of a dynamically changing culture. This, in itself, helps sap the vitality from the form. As of now MacIntosh's musicals are regarded as universal, but universality is mythical, and, consequently, has a pitifully short life. Text and performance are products of given cultural moments; when those moments change, what seems closed magically opens.

The privileging of the closed text is inextricably linked with the idea of definitive performance. If popular culture is a product of its given cultural moment, how can one subscribe to the idea of a definitive performance, since that very notion is dependent on historical relativism? The French director, Michel Saint-Denis, a nephew of the text-

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[25] Personal Interview. 3 June 2001.

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centered Copeau and lifelong admirer of Stanislavsky's productions of Chekhov, nevertheless argues against ideal, definitive productions, since the text is subject to performance and both are products of historical relativism. Marvin Carlson summarizes Saint-Denis' belief in historical subjectivity in terms of text and performance:

> The reality of each country is made up of "its historical personality, which is constantly being modified." No artist can avoid reflecting his own country and his own time, and works from other periods and other countries must "be brought to life in contemporary terms." This does not mean that the historical style of a script is to be ignored, only that one cannot and should not attempt to recreate that precise style with modern actors for a modern audience.[26]

The challenge, for Saint-Denis, is to meld contemporary performance style with the flavor of the original to create something new and relevant. One must take the historical style of a piece into consideration, but reconstruction is impossible with modern acting styles and different audiences. For instance, Thomas Betterton's approach to playing Restoration comedy would differ markedly from that of any actor in 2001. The twentieth century itself has seen radical changes in acting training, with the advent of film, television, and the privileging of a more naturalistic style of acting. The celebrated performances of John Barrymore, along with those of Katherine Cornell and Lunt and Fontanne, theatrical icons of the early to mid-twentieth century, might well seem stilted and stagey to audiences in 2001.

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[26] Quoted in Carlson, Theories of the Theatre, 444-45.

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The same is true of musical theatre. Both Arthur Laurents and Stephen Sondheim question whether Merman's presentational performance of Mama Rose in Gypsy (1959) would be palatable to contemporary audiences. Sondheim unkindly likened Merman to "a talking dog."[27] Similarly, Laurents maintains acting was not her long suit: "Acting hadn't made Ethel Merman Ethel Merman . . . To help the acting, I wrote stage directions for her speeches: 'slower,' 'softer,' 'louder, 'faster,' 'starting flat, then building.' An actress would have broken pencils furiously crossing them out; Ethel quoted them if any of her line readings were questioned."[28] One can only speculate how today's younger audiences would respond to her performances. The saddest aspect of live performance is that it is so ephemeral. Once the performance is over, the memory lies only with those fortunate enough to have been audience members. On the other hand, perhaps this is fortuitous. New generations, used to different acting styles and theatrical conventions, would undoubtedly respond less enthusiastically. I have shown my musical theatre students a videotape of Kiss Me, Kate (1948) which was televised in the mid-1950s and which featured Alfred Drake and Patricia Morrison, the stars of the original production. The students much preferred the performances of Marin Mazzie and Bryan Stokes Mitchell, the stars of the 1999 revival, who, in my opinion, work a lot harder with significantly less result and belabor their laughs. I was raised, however, on different musical theatre conventions and an older style of musical theatre performance. My students were raised

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[27] Quoted in Arthur Laurents, Original Story by Arthur Laurents (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 378.

[28] Ibid., 378.

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on MTV and a different performance aesthetic. Which is preferable? It depends on the conventions one is used to.

The idea of the "definitive," closed performance also is a result of the marketing of original Broadway cast recordings beginning in the 1940s. When these "authentic" cast albums first emerged, "definitive" performances were recorded for posterity and any other recording was denigrated as inauthentic. With the passage of time and the popularity of revivals on Broadway, however, other "definitive" performances of these same musicals have been recorded. Again, the post Rodgers and Hammerstein musical is only sixty years old. "Definitive" is a function of age in a form as relatively new as the integrated musical. Which is the definitive recording of Follies? One can choose from the original Broadway cast, the London production, the concert version at Lincoln Center, the Paper Mill Playhouse revival, or the 2001 Broadway revival. The text and score of each of these productions was altered. Those who saw the original production of Follies, for example, claim it was definitive. Those who did not see it probably may never see a definitive performance because nothing can live up to its legend. This would be true of Richard Burbage or Thomas Betterton if any survivors existed who had seen these legendary actors. Definitive performances are subject to historical relativism and survive far better in the imagination, I suspect, than they would on the contemporary stage.

To underscore my point that there can be no definitive production of a musical apart from a given cultural moment and that, consequently, the texts of musicals are in themselves necessarily incomplete, many musicals written before the women's movement must be altered in revival today, either through script or through performance. Rather than

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closed, the texts become incomplete, because the characters must be played to conform to changing societal conventions and audience tastes. The comic soubrette, for example, a longstanding line of business in musical theatre, is difficult to recreate thirty years after the women's movement. Many were originally written as bimbos, which would alienate contemporary audiences whose attitudes toward women have changed drastically since these roles were first written.

For instance, Kiss Me, Kate (1948) features the Lois Lane/Bianca character. Lois is an ambitious performer, in love with her hoofer boyfriend, Bill Calhoun, but not averse to accepting gifts in exchange for sexual favors from other men, including the producer of the show in which she and her boyfriend are currently appearing. As originally written and as played by Lisa Kirk, Lois was dizzy and dumb, which somehow excused her behavior and caused audiences in 1948 to laugh at her antics, particularly her showstopping "Always True To You In My Fashion" number, in which she celebrates her mental fidelity to her boyfriend while enumerating her list of sexual and financial conquests. The part is difficult to play in 2001, to say the least. What are contemporary audiences to make of an ambitious bimbo who sells her sexual favors? Is she so dizzy she truly is not aware of what she's doing? Do we close our eyes when she obviously cheats on her boyfriend? Characters in musicals, generally, must be likeable. How does a performer approach Lois so that she is not a dirty joke in a post-women's liberation environment? One choice is to emphasize her genuine love for the irresponsible Bill Calhoun, who is obviously incapable of taking care of her or providing her with future security. Although a bit of a stretch, this approach might justify Lois' doing whatever she can to build a nest egg so she and Bill can

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share a future together. In the 1999 revival, Amy Spanger did little to soften the character's edges. Rather than establishing love for her boyfriend, her relationship with Bill was obviously "hot" and based purely on sex. Lois, in effect, became a glorified prostitute, who enjoyed sleeping with her boyfriend for sexual pleasure and sleeping with her producer to advance her career. This choice might have worked for a performer with the dissident, sexually revolutionary spirit and charisma of a Madonna. It did not work for Spanger, who, along with director Michael Blakemore, failed to address the problems posed by performing an archetypal 1940s bimbo in 2001. Usually, the gangsters and Lois walk off with the show. In this case, everyone was nominated for a Tony award but Spanger.

Wonderful Town (1953) poses similar problems. The musical focuses on Ruth and Eileen, two sisters trying to make their fame and fortune in New York during the 1930s. Ruth is an aspiring writer, whose intelligence frightens away potential suitors. Eileen, an aspiring actress, is a blond-haired, blue-eyed mantrap. She manages to charm free dinners and groceries from male admirers by flirting with them, but is morally indignant if one comes on to her sexually. This was acceptable and cute in 1953, when Edie Adams played Eileen in the original production. Eileen's willingness to use men and her dependent nature can be painfully coy and cloying in 2001. I did not see the Encores revival (2000), which featured Laura Benanti as Eileen, but my guess is she played the role with a great deal of sincerity and charm, rather than with the wide-eyed, self-consciously cute narcissism that was hailed in 1953 on Broadway and in 1957 in the televised version featuring Jacquelyn McKeever. A recording in 1999 featured Audra MacDonald, an

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African-American, as the blond, blue-eyed man killer. Miss MacDonald has many talents, but they do not include being blond, blue eyed, and sexually coy. This was obviously a very different Eileen: honest, forthright, and assertive, yet sweet and a bit naive. The performance provided an acceptable enough contrast with Karen Mason's self-deprecating, wizened Ruth. MacDonald's casting is but one of a variety of acting or directing choices available to make Eileen viable. My point is one of historical relativism. What was regarded as a closed text in 1953 was necessarily incomplete and opened in a different historical time frame and cultural context.

Similarly, how do we take Ado Annie in 2001? Oklahoma! is a product of a considerably more innocent sexual period. Do we pretend that Annie is just innocently kissing lots of boys or is she sexually promiscuous? If she is sexually promiscuous, how does that open the character of Will Parker? How does a contemporary actress approach Hedy LaRue in How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (1961)? In essence, Hedy is a dirty joke--the whore without a heart of gold. How does one make her sympathetic? Rosemary, in the same show, is a stereotype of the prefeminist woman, who longs to live in New Rochelle and play mah jong with her girlfriends while she happily keeps her husband's dinner warm as he climbs onward and upward. The Matthew Broderick revival in the mid-1990s opened the text by commenting on the cartoonish quality of the women and by deleting potentially offensive material, like the song "Cinderella, Darling." Neal Simon's Little Me (1962) chronicles the misadventures of Belle Poitrine, who sleeps her way to Hollywood celebrity. The musical has been revived twice, both times unsuccessfully. It is difficult to glorify a bimbo whose career consists of

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sexually preying on men in any kind of contemporary cultural context. I would prefer not to call these musicals dated, any more than Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and its 1950s attitude toward homosexuality is dated. These works are eminently produceable, but they must be made relevant to a different cultural moment if audiences are to accept them. Far from being closed, they are innately incomplete, which should illustrate that any text is a function of a given moment of time. It must be reinvented, rethought, and sometimes rewritten to conform to a different cultural moment and a new audience.

Enigmatic Characters and the Incomplete Text

In discussing the non-integrated, star-based musical in chapter two, I noted that both the star comics and female performers played with notions of gender, ethnicity, and race in fashioning fluid star personae. As the integrated musical gradually shifts authority from performer to writer, often the text itself features at least one leading character who is written as especially "open," by which I mean enigmatic or incomplete. In the integrated musical, incompleteness or ambiguity of character is a logical transference of the ambiguity of star personae in the non-integrated musical. This is not just a function of gender performativity, but, as in the non-integrated musical, includes issues of ethnicity, class, and race. In a form noted for stereotyped lines of business (the comic soubrette, male dancing lead, romantic hero), it is ironic that many of the most memorable characters and relationships in the integrated musical are deliberately left "open."

Writing of dramatic characterization, Eric Bentley observes that often the greatest characters are "open," by which he means incomplete:

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> The great characters--Hamlet, Phaedra, Faust, Don Juan--have something enigmatic about them. . . . A mysterious character is one with an open definition--not completely open, or there will be no character at all, and the mystery will dwindle to a muddle, but open as, say, a circle is open when most of the circumference has been drawn. Hamlet might be called an accepted instance of such a character, for, if not, what have all those critics been doing, with their perpetual redefining of him? They have been closing the circle which Shakespeare left open.[29]

The openness or mystery often stems from several causes: the audience has incomplete information about a character, the character behaves in ways that are inconsistent and puzzling, the motivations behind a character's actions are either incomplete or omitted. Inconsistency and incompleteness serve to open the character.[30] Sometimes, the circle is solved in production choices; sometimes it is left open. For example, the reasons for Iago's extreme villainy are puzzling. Is he inherently evil? Is he in love with Desdemona and jealous of Othello? Is he in love with Othello and jealous of Desdemona? This was Sir Laurence Olivier's motivation when he played Iago opposite Ralph Richardson's Othello. Shakespeare never tells us. Is Gertrude oversexed and rather silly? Was she unfaithful to Hamlet's father while the former king was still alive? Is she aware that Claudius has murdered her husband? Does she know the poison is meant for Hamlet

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[29] Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (New York: Atheneum, 1964), 68-9.

[30] See Manfred Pfister, The Theory and Analysis of Drama (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 181.

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when she drinks it? Again, through omission, Shakespeare enriches the character.

Often, the most memorable characters in integrated musicals are similarly open and mysterious. Julie, in Show Boat, appears in three scenes and sings two songs; yet, she is arguably the most memorable character in the musical because Hammerstein shrouds her in mystery. During the first act, Julie is presented as a mulatta married to Steve, a white man, who is her protector and with whom she is very much in love. Midway through the act, she is banished from the show boat because she has tried to pass as "white." The next time she appears is halfway through the second act. At this point, she has become an alcoholic, is working in a Chicago nightclub, and is without a mate. In the first act, she sings "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," a "black" song she defiantly sings about her husband. In the second act, she sings "Bill," a number she rehearses at the nightclub, which again she presumably sings about Steve. Hammerstein, however, omits the history of her marriage. Did Steve walk out on her? Did she leave him? Did he die? Why did she become an alcoholic? Is there a hint that she is promiscuous now that she is alone? What happens to her after she leaves the club to give Magnolia her break? Julie is as fluid a character as any of the female stars or male star comics that played with identity in the non-integrated musical. Racially, she is neither black nor white, and plays with both of these identities in "Can't Help Lovin' That Man." The first chorus is sung as the "white" Julie advising Magnolia to be careful about love. The second chorus is a defiant proclamation that she is not ashamed of her "black" heritage. Julie is memorable for her complexity, but that complexity stems from the character's openness and incompleteness.

Laurey is similarly enigmatic in Oklahoma!. She is obviously attracted to Curly. Is

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she sexually attracted to Jud, against her better judgement? Does Jud's preoccupation with sex disgust her, titillate her, or both? Is she attracted to Jud *because* he disgusts her? How does her lack of a father leave her prey to Jud? How does the ballet reveal her sexual fantasies? What are these fantasies? Is she dreaming dirty dreams of being one of Jud's postcard girls and being forced to submit against her will? Does Curly's cockiness attract her, repel her, or both? Do her reservations about Curly involve his inability to provide her with the fancy lace tablecloths and other expensive items the peddler brings back from Kansas City? Laurey is ambiguous and open. Hammerstein's omissions make her the most interesting character in the text. The production (or performance) will either close the open circle of Laurey's character or leave it for audiences to decode. The same can be said of Julie Jordan and Billy Bigelow in Carousel. Is this a musical about the victim of a wife beater? Why does Julie remain with Billy? The libretto tells the audience about Julie's strength, but, at the same time, implies her masochism. If there are answers to these questions, they appear in production, not in the text itself.

Alan Jay Lerner, ostensibly a heterosexual lyricist and librettist, specialized in sexually ambiguous yet provocative love triangles in his texts written during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. In Brigadoon (1947), Tommy and Jeff, best friends, wander through the Scottish highlands and discover a town that awakes for one day every hundred years Tommy falls in love with Fiona, but leaves her to return to New York with Jeff, knowing she will disappear, along with Brigadoon, for another hundred years. At the final curtain, however, he is drawn back to the Scottish highlands, where magically he is reunited with Fiona. How significant is the homosocial bonding between Tommy and Jeff? Is Jeff the

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obstacle that keeps Tommy from staying with Fiona? Lerner's script obliquely fails to spell any of this out. In My Fair Lady (1956), Eliza Doolittle shares a house with Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering, two self confirmed old bachelors who not only declare "they are likely to remain so," but also wonder why a woman can't be more like a man. What is the precise nature of Higgins' and Pickering's relationship? How will Eliza fit in after the final curtain? Lerner tacks on a romantic closing scene, in which Eliza returns to Higgins with the strains of "I Could Have Danced All Night" playing in the background, but the audience is left wondering if she will enjoy fetching and carrying for Higgins and Pickering after the music stops playing. The musical is more interesting for the provocative, unanswered questions it raises than for its "happy ending."

In Camelot (1960), Arthur and Lancelot love Guinevere, as well as each other. In T. H. White's Once and Future King, Lerner's source material, Lancelot is physically ugly. In the original Broadway production, Lancelot was played by Robert Goulet, the archetypal eight by ten glossy of his day. Lerner's glamorization of Lancelot turns the love triangle into a classic, closeted homosexual fantasy: one man symbolically sleeping with his attractive male friend by seducing the friend's wife. Perhaps the most startling version of this gender-fluid fantasy occurs in the film version of Paint Your Wagon, which portrays a ménage a trois between two male gold prospectors, played by Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin, who are both married to the same woman, played by Jean Seberg. Since the musical is set in the West during the Gold Rush, where the abundance of men and scarcity of women preclude traditional middle class family values, Lerner is raising provocative questions about gender roles and their relationship to societal conditioning.

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Each of these Lerner texts is open and enigmatic; each involves relationships that raise more questions than they answer. But Lerner is deliberately vague about the sex life of these people, which is what makes the musicals so intriguing, particularly for their time. Perhaps the characters are no more aware of their sexual proclivities and yearnings than the members of the audience, or, indeed, than their creator. At the same time, the ambiguity of these relationships plays into American anxiety about gender and identity, much as the star performers of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s played with gender, class, race, and ethnicity. The texts are open to interpretation, as are the characters. Lerner's most successful musicals were written in an era of post-war family values and few alternative lifestyles besides the nuclear family. Homosexuality and bisexuality have become part of mainstream mass culture, at least if one reads Anne Rice's vampire novels or watches Will and Grace on television. It would be interesting to remount these productions and explore the homosocial or bisexual implications of these relationships. Eliza can still end up with Higgins, Tommy can still return to Fiona, and Guinivere can still enter the convent, but there is a rich, ambiguous subtext to be mined on route to the final curtain.

In the rest of this chapter, I will apply the notion of historical relativism to three musicals that opened a year after the Stonewall riots: Company (1970), Coco (1969), and Applause (1970). Each of these integrated musicals dealt with issues of gender and identity; each also reflected its cultural moment. Before discussing the musicals, I will contextualize them in terms of the treatment of homosexuality in musicals and non-musical theatre of the period. I will then show how the texts of these three musicals are

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inextricable from performance and reception. I have made the issue of homosexuality salient here because the three musicals are so obviously products of a cultural marker, the Stonewall riots. The point is to frame the musical within a clear cultural moment and then explore the collaboration between text, performance, reception, and historical relativism to "read" the provocative issues these musicals raise in terms of identity

The Rise of the Double Entendre

Before examining the immediate effects of the Stonewall riots (1969) on musical theatre, it's important to examine the connection between homosexuals and musical theatre (and non-musical theatre, for that matter) prior to Stonewall. Much has been written about the relationship between musical theatre and a gay sensibility, including John Clum's Something for the Boys.[31] Gay men arguably have a strong affinity for musicals, at least from the 1930s through the 1960s, and that affinity was marked by a shift in American attitudes toward gays during the 1930s that became increasingly more repressive until the mid to late 1960s. Although Clum posits the idea of a gay sensibility, Gore Vidal dismisses the notion, arguing that there are no homosexual or heterosexual persons, only acts.[32] The notion of a gay sensibility essentializes the homosexual.

Edmund White is equally skeptical about the notion of a gay sensibility. In States of Desire, he frames the term in the context of historical relativism: "What we can discuss

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[31] See John M. Clum, Something for the Boys: Musical Theatre and Gay Culture (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

[32] Quoted in Charles Kaiser, The Gay Metropolis: 1940-1996 (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 96.

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is the gay taste of a given period. A taste cultivated (even by some heterosexuals). What we can detect is a resemblance among many gay works of art made at a particular moment--a resemblance partially intended and partially drawn without design from a shared experience of anger or alienation or secret, molten camaraderie."[33] If one is to use White's definition that gay sensibility is the taste of a given period, what did the theatre, and more particularly, the musical theatre, offer from the 1930s through the 1960s that gays embraced so enthusiastically? Certainly, as I mentioned in chapter two, the musical theatre stars of this era, through their playful and antic appropriation of a multiplicity of identities in their performances, helped allay gay anxiety about America's attitude toward gender and role playing. Central to this playfulness about gender was the use of the double entendre, which was particularly noticeable in the musicals of Cole Porter, Lorenz Hart, and Noel Coward and the performances of Beatrice Lillie and Mae West.[34]

The double entendre was a product of this repressive era toward homosexuals, which was characterized by anti-gay legislation and regulations. These homophobic laws imply that gays were not always closeted. As George Chauncey points out, "If homosexuality had always been so invisible and homosexuals had always been confined to the closet, why were such rules even enacted?"[35] Obviously, this was not the case.

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[33] Edmund White, States of Desire: Travels in Gay America (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), 259.

[34] Lillie had a large homosexual following for her outrageous double entendres, most famously for her deadpan rendition of "There Are Fairies At the Bottom of Our Garden." West copied her comic persona from Bert Savoy, a female impersonator, in the 1920s.

[35] George Chauncey, Gay New York (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 355.

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Chauncey describes the active homosexual presence on the streets and clubs of New York City in the 1910s and 1920s. One Broadway theatre was named after Julian Eltinge, a female impersonator and major star of his day. Although Greenwich Village and Harlem were centers of New York gay life, during the 1920s and early 1930s, gay entertainers and mixed clubs thrived in the Times Square area until Repeal.

Many of the prohibition nightclubs were owned by racketeers, and featured "pansy acts," a craze during the early 1930s. "Pansies," a slang term for flamboyantly effeminate men, came into popular use from 1920-1933, roughly the Prohibition years. Many of these stereotypically effeminate performers began their careers in Greenwich Village or in Harlem. During Prohibition, they brought their acts to midtown venues. The pansy craze, according to Chauncey, was actually a function of the cultural upheaval caused by Prohibition:

> By criminalizing much of New York City's nightlife, Prohibition gave control of that nightlife to men and women from the "lower classes" who introduced middle-class audiences to "coarse" forms of entertainment previously restricted to working-class neighborhoods. Fairies were a part of the culture of those neighborhoods, and they moved with the gangsters to Times Square and other centers of middle-class nightlife. By driving middle class men and women to break the law if they wanted to socialize where they could have a drink and bringing them in contact with "low-life" figures, Prohibition encouraged them to transgress other social boundaries as well. By impinging on middle-class as well as working-class life,

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> Prohibition led many middle-class New Yorkers to question the moral agenda of the social-purity forces for the first time.[36]

Racketeers fought over control of these mid-town speakeasies. On January 25, 1931, gunfire erupted at the Club Abbey, a notorious "pansy" venue where Jean Malin was host and entertainer. The club's owner, Dutch Schultz, went into hiding, but the shootout marked the beginning of a war between rival gangs to control the mid-town liquor trade.[37] With Repeal, the gay men and women, so visible during the Prohibition era, were suddenly perceived as dangerous rather than amusing, as a backlash gained momentum to exclude them from public life and visibility. Curfews were enforced, and clubs that catered to a mixed clientele were instructed that homosexuals were not to be served. By the time LaGuardia was elected mayor in 1933, he forbade the appearance of drag queens from 14th Street to 72st Street in Manhattan. By 1933, state regulations also prohibited gay men and women from gathering in licensed public establishments. Gay and lesbian bars still existed, but they were generally Mafia owned, catered to a working class clientele, and were subject to police harassment and payoffs. Gay men and women who were more well-to-do often frequented straight nightspots, where they were tolerated as long as they were discreet.

Just as the 1920s were characterized by a visible homosexual presence in the streets of New York, musical revues during the decade often featured homosexual innuendo, most notably in Frank Fay's monologues and routines in Artists and Models

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[36] Ibid., 327.

[37] Ibid., 331.

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(1923 and 1924) and in The Ritz Revue (1924), which reportedly had so many references to homosexuality that critic Percy Hammond suspected Krafft-Ebing was one of the lyricists.[38] One sketch was entitled "The Four Horse-Women," a reference to lesbianism, and another involved "fairy tales" that Hammond thought needed decoding for many innocents in the audience. Gay themes were embraced by non-musical theatre as well. Mae West's Sex (1926), The Virgin Man (1927), and most notoriously The Captive (1926), a play about a married woman drawn to a lesbian lover, were all raided by the police and forced to close. The following year, West's production of The Drag, which culminated in an onstage drag ball, was raided in Bayonne, New Jersey. The explicit sexuality of these theatrical productions produced the Wales Padlock Act, which allowed the New York district attorney to padlock for a year any theatre that presented salacious material. Salacious material included any theatrical presentation that presented gay characters or discussed gay issues.[39]

The padlock laws did not eliminate homosexual themes, but producers and theatre owners were careful to make them considerably more oblique than they had appeared in the 1920s. In fact, the Shuberts capitalized on the Padlock Act immediately after the 1927 raids by presenting Texas Guinan in Padlocks of 1927, a revue whose title was obviously meant to titillate audiences. In 1933, both Mordaunt Hall's The Green Bay Tree and Noel Coward's Design for Living dealt with male homosexuality, but the productions were "tasteful," and the homosexuality was never explicitly mentioned. In 1934, Lillian

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[38] Percy Hammond, "Review," Tribune, 18 September 1924.

[39] Chauncey, 313.

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Hellman's The Children's Hour dealt with a child's lies about an "unnatural relationship" between two women. Critics, concerned with censorship, tended to ignore or downplay the homosexual themes of these plays in their reviews, although this stance sometimes met with opposition. After the opening of The Green Bay Tree, one critic allegedly remarked, "My brothers of the First Night Garden, remembering the bad luck of 'The Captive,' are prone to pretend that Mr. Shairp's play . . . has nothing to do with the way of a man with a man. Well, if it has nothing to do with that, it has nothing to do with anything."[40] Reviewing The Children's Hour, Burns Mantle sidestepped the issue of lesbianism by arguing, "The true theme is the curse of scandalmongering . . . the kind of vicious lying that may easily wreck the lives of innocent persons."[41] Theatre still dealt with homosexuality, but gingerly.

As Chauncey observes, by the early 1930s, a concerted effort was in effect to make gays disappear from visibility in New York. Any licensed bar that served a homosexual, whether male or female, was subject to closure; any theatre that explicitly presented gay characters was subject to being padlocked; and, with the Hays code in Hollywood and the rise of the Catholic Legion of Decency, any film dealing with gay issues forfeited distribution.[42] By the mid-1930s, the pansy craze had turned into homophobia. It was common in burlesque shows for straight comics to ape the pansy acts

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[40] Quoted in Kaier Curtin, We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians: The Emergence of Lesbians and Gay Men on the American Stage (Boston: Alyson, 1987), 154-89.

[41] Gerald Bordman, American Theatre: A Chronicle of Comedy and Drama, 1930-1969 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 107-08.

[42] Chauncey, 356.

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that were so popular in Manhattan a few years earlier. Straight men donned drag and stereotypical swishy mannerisms; homosexual situations--men kissing and goosing each other--were exploited to elicit laughter. Anti-gay audiences roared at these antics, which amounted to the gay equivalent of blackface.

Even more disturbing, during the late 1930s gay men, like the Jews of the middle ages, were linked by the press to a series of crimes involving the ritual murder of young boys. Homosexuals were no longer a spectacle of fun, but a dangerous social threat.[43] The demonization of homosexuals continued through World War II and McCarthyism. It is ironic that America was fighting its own anti-Semitism and homophobia at the same time GI's were sent abroad to fight fascism and the persecution of these same two minorities. In the fall of 1959, Coronet magazine enumerated the homosexual menace: "Once a man assumes the role of homosexual, he often throws off all moral restraints. Some male sex deviants do not stop with infecting their often innocent partners; they descend through perversions to other forms of depravity, such as drug addiction, burglary, sadism, and even murder."[44] Under the circumstances, it made sense for homosexuals to

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[43] For more on these allegedly gay sex crimes against young boys in the late 1930s and 1940s, see Estelle Freedman, "'Uncontrolled Desires': The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920-1960," Passion and Power: Sexuality in History, edited by Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 199-225; John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," Passion and Power: Sexuality in History, 226-40; Allan Berube, Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: Free Press, 1990); George Chauncey, "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic," True Stories from the American Past, edited by William Graebner (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 160-78.

[44] Ralph H. Major, Jr., "New Moral Menace to Our Youth," Coronet, 28 September 1950, 104.

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keep a low profile, which often included double lives and marriage, as well as incidents of police entrapment and blackmail.

The closeting of homosexuals from the early 1930s led to coding and the use of the double entendre if gays were to coexist in public spaces with heterosexuals. The anti-gay laws and regulations turned the double entendre into a strategy to help enable gay men lead double lives and resist the condemnation of straight culture:

> By giving common words a second meaning that would be readily recognized only by other gay men, gay argot allowed gay men to communicate with one another in hostile surroundings, without drawing attention from others. Indeed, double entendre made the double life possible. It allowed men to construct a gay world in the midst of but invisible to the straight world--to identify themselves as gay to other gay men and to communicate as one gay man to another in settings where outsiders identified them only as workers, sight-seers, or something else.[45]

Gay men appropriated standard terms and words and twisted them into gay meanings. For example, the word "gay" itself referred to female prostitutes before it referred to men, just as "trick" and "trade" were words denoting the customers of prostitutes. "Cruising" alluded to a streetwalker's search for clients, while "coming out" was associated with debutantes.[46]

Gay men could frequent straight bars; they just had to be discreet. During World

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[45] Chauncey, 226.

[46] Ibid., 286.

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War II, the Astor Bar in Times Square was a notorious gay pick-up spot. The huge bar was oval. One side was straight, while the other was gay. Often a stranger would sit unknowingly on the wrong side of the bar, so conversation had to be discreet and coded. "She" invariably referred to a man, possibly a boyfriend, even if "she" bought her suits at Brooks Brothers. Coded conversations could be quite humorous: "'I adore seafood. Gorge myself, whenever the fleet's in. But I can't abide fish,' [a gay man] might say, and any gay man would instantly know that the speaker was turned on by sailors and turned off by women, while the puzzled Mr. and Mrs. Reader's Digest, listening in, would assume this was a discussion about food preferences."[47] Coding then became a humorous strategy in which gay men could communicate their sexual preferences in public spaces.

Since so many musicals were written, directed, choreographed, designed, and performed by gays, it was not surprising that the musical often offered both a plethora of double entendres during this period of gay repression as well as a soothing balm to gay anxieties about identity. Perhaps the most blatant coded references to homosexuality occur in Jubilee (1936), a musical with a Cole Porter score and a Moss Hart book, in which a royal family decides to abnegate their responsibilities and spend a day as commoners. While the queen, originally played by deadpan, middle-aged comedienne Mary Boland, instructs her new friends to call her "Butch," she develops a letch for a narcissistic movie actor/bodybuilder, a character fashioned after Johnny Weismuller. Another character is suspiciously reminiscent of an effete Noel Coward. During a masquerade ball, a character modeled after the lesbian society hostess Elsa Maxwell tries

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[47] Ibid., 286.

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to determine the identity of her guests: "Are you a king? / Are you a queen? / Well, you certainly can swing your swing."[48] The lyrics presumably refer to the sexual proclivities of most of the characters at the party.

If the double entendres became too noticeable and verged on the indiscreet, critics occasionally became uncomfortable. Lorenz Hart, another gay writer, provoked New York Post critic Richard Watts with the book and lyrics to By Jupiter (1942), a musical about a tribe of Amazons who rule their country while their milksop husbands skulk in the background. According to Watts, "what seems to me infinitely wearying [and] infinitely annoying is the attempted humor that is supposed to spring from homosexuality and kindred forms of degeneracy."[49] Several critics were similarly offended by Cole Porter's Out of This World (1950), a musicalization of Jean Giradoux's Amphitryon 38. Instead of scantily clad chorus girls, the show was marked by nearly nude, muscular chorus boys, perhaps an inspiration for Jack Cole's notorious gym scene in the film version of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes in the early 1950s, where Jane Russell sings "Is There Anyone Here for Love?" to a chorus of uninterested bodybuilders.

During this period of gay closeting, homosexual men not only responded to the undoubtedly deliberate double entendres of the Cole Porter, Noel Coward, and Rodgers and Hart musicals, but also, as I explained in chapter two, to the strong female stars, who

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[48] See Cole Porter and Moss Hart, Jubilee. Unpublished manuscript, 1936. Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, New York City.

[49] Quoted in Kaiser 16. Ironically, during the 1960s, Watts was sympathetic to homosexual playwrights and was one of the greatest supporters of Albee and Williams when both were suffering critical brickbats from others.

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crossed lines of gender and ethnicity and invariably succeeded in snatching the man of their choice through will and desire. Many of these musicals were non-integrated and open, in that they relied on the performer as co-creator of the text.

Later, integrated musicals became open or incomplete in different ways. For instance, West Side Story (1957) was created by an all-gay production team: Leonard Bernstein (music), Stephen Sondheim (lyrics), Arthur Laurents (book), and Jerome Robbins (direction and choreography). All four were also Jews. According to Ethan Mordden, the gay overtones of West Side Story are unmistakable. He claims that Riff and Tony are obviously lovers, just as Romeo and Mercutio are obviously lovers in Romeo and Juliet.[50] I would disagree on both counts. At the same time, West Side Story has exerted an enormous appeal to homosexuals:

> To many gay adults coming of age in the sixties, the romance, violence, danger, and mystery so audible on the original cast album, all felt like integral parts of the gay life they had embraced. The lyrics of "Somewhere," in particular, seemed to speak directly to the gay experience before the age of liberation. In 1996, it was one of the songs chosen for the first mass gay wedding of two hundred couples in San Francisco, presided over by the city's mayor, Willie Brown.[51]

Here is a case where authorial intent is irrelevant; the text is wide open. It is logical in a

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[50] See Ethan Mordden, Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical of the 1950s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[51] Kaiser, 93.

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work of popular culture that various groups will choose to read a performance, the product of a given historical moment, as containing a secret message for them. For Tony and Maria to be really together, everything in their past must die, including those they love, like Bernardo and Riff. That is the fantasy of the "Somewhere" ballet. Whether one chooses to read West Side Story as a musical about bigotry between Polish-Americans and Puerto Ricans, or Whites and African-Americans, or straights and gays, "Somewhere" is a new place, where the prejudices of the American past magically disappear. This is certainly relevant to the era of the closeted gay, but the text is incomplete and subject to coding by other groups as well. As Roland Barthes argues, the text is open to a plurality of readings.

The 1960s: Homosexuality and Its Treatment in American Theatre

Before discussing how the texts of three post-Stonewall, integrated musicals that dealt with homosexuality can be regarded as incomplete or open, it's important to frame these musicals in terms of the cultural moment that led to Stonewall and gay activism. It's also important to frame the three musicals in terms of the American theatre of the 1960s, both mainstream and experimental, and how that theatre dealt with gay characters and issues.

As both Sally Banes and Martin Duberman argue, the 1960s set the stage for what finally erupted into the Stonewall riots.[52] Tired of anti-gay attitudes, laws, and

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[52] See Sally Banes, Greenwich Village 1963 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993); Martin Duberman, Stonewall (New York: Plume, 1994).

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regulations, a growing artistic community in Greenwich Village advocated sexual dissidence. As Alan Sinfield observes, "By 1966, Time was complaining that homosexual ethics and esthetics are staging a vengeful, counterattack on what deviates call the 'straight' world."[53] Many who eventually turned the Stonewall Riots into a revolution and founded the Gay Liberation Front had their roots in other activist causes during the 1960s, including the civil rights movement:

> When these young gay and lesbian radicals now flocked to join the Gay Liberation Front, they brought with them a rich set of insights from their prior involvements: from the black civil rights movement came an awareness of the inequities of American life; from the women's movement, consciousness of sexism and the profoundly important idea that the personal is the political, that one's experience *mattered*; from the antiwar struggle, the revelation that the government operated as a bulwark of conformity and privilege; from the countercultural revolution, the injunction to reject all received authority, to "do it now, to be what you want to be." They had learned much in making everybody else's revolution; now they would apply that learning to making their own.[54]

Militant gays, unlike the earlier Mattachine Society, were no longer willing to concede that homosexuality was an illness or psychological disease. The strategies they were

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[53] Alan Sinfield, Out on Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 297.

[54] Duberman, 221.

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prepared to use to gain equality were the strategies they had learned from their participation in the civil rights movement, the defense of the Black Panthers, and the anti-war movement.

In a 1967 article, Time argued that homosexuals wanted to subvert straight society: "Even in ordinary conversation, most homosexuals will sooner or later attack the things that normal men take seriously."[55] Rather than feeling ashamed of their sexual feelings and sexual habits, gay men were beginning to wonder what exactly caused such antipathy among straight culture. For Michel Foucault, it was the gay lifestyle, not the gay sex act that threatened institutionalized straight society:

> I think what most bothers most of those who are not gay about gayness is the gay "lifestyle," not the sex acts themselves. . . But I was talking about the common fear that gays will develop relationships that are intense and satisfying even though they do not at all conform to the ideas of relationship held by others. It is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforseen kinds of relationships that many people cannot tolerate . . . and it is possible that changes in established routines will occur on a much broader scale as gays learn to express their feelings for one another in more various ways and develop new life-styles not resembling those that have been institutionalized.[56]

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[55] Quoted in Kaiser 168.

[56] Michel Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality," Michel Foucault: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), 301.

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Echoing Foucault, Arthur Laurents denigrates the attempt of gay men to ape heterosexual lifestyles: "Nothing could be more stupid. I mean that one is sort of the husband and the other is sort of the wife and they have to have fidelity and all this kind of nonsense--instead of seeing how lucky you are if you're two men and have this freedom."[57] Rejecting the need for double entendres and coding, gay activists, both politically and artistically, were positing that homosexuality was an alternative lifestyle, no better or worse than straight culture.

This reevaluation of the politics of the closet was mirrored theatrically in the Caffè Cino, the primary source of new gay plays in Greenwich Village between 1964 and 1967. Proprietor Joe Cino produced new plays by Doric Wilson, William Hoffman, Tom Eyen, Jean-Claude Van Italie, Paul Foster, and H.M. Koutoukas, as well as sponsored directors like Marshall Mason, Tom O'Horgan, Neil Flanagan, Ron Link, and actors like Bernadette Peters, who originated Ruby in Bob Dahdah's campy Dames at Sea (1966) at the Cino before its off-Broadway transfer in 1968. To Arthur Bell, Village Voice columnist and gay activist, the Cino "exemplified the freedom that was to come. . . . The Cino group made me want to assert my own gayness to the world."[58] Cino was a remarkable man; he was also haunted by his own demons. After his lover, an electrician, was killed, he committed suicide. Friends tried to sustain the theatre on Cornelia Street, but the doors closed in 1997. Before then, a remarkable body of work emerged that did much to change the image of the homosexual as he was represented in the New York theatre of the 1960s.

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[57] Quoted in Kaiser, 6.

[58] Quoted in Duberman, 61.

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The Haunted Host (1964), a play by Robert Patrick produced at the Cino, chronicled the relationship between Jay, a gay writer, and his roommate, Frank, a straight man who has studied psychiatry only to learn that "people and homosexuals should try to understand one another."[59] The play is significant in that it is a comic representation of a gay character which is not patronizing. It is the straight man, the so-called intellectual, who is the object of ridicule. In Robert Heide's Moon (1967), three couples land on the moon. The two straight couples are edgy, violent, and distressed. Only Christopher, a gay man who paints and bakes bread with his lover, is calm and productive. Lanford Wilson's Madness of Lady Bright (1965) focuses on a forty year old screaming queen. He may lack pride and be stereotypical of a 1950s queen, but he is astute enough to recognize himself as the creature of a passing era.

Perhaps the most explicit portrayal of homosexuality of the period was Mart Crowley's The Boys in the Band (1968), which opened off-Broadway and was a significant commercial success that was later filmed. Although time has not been kind to Crowley's play, it was something of a milestone in the pre-Stonewall era in that the characters are not villains, do not actively pursue a heterosexual cure, and reject suicide as a solution to their homosexuality. What they do long for is freedom from the self-hatred that society has foisted on them. The play focuses on a group of gay men gathered together in host Michael's apartment to celebrate the birthday party of Harold, an unattractive, bitchy, but wise queen. During the course of the evening, the partygoers play truth games, in which they reveal attitudes and feelings about homosexuality that have

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[59] Quoted in Sinfield, 298.

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haunted them. As Harold leaves the party, he turns on Michael in a particularly acerbic speech:

> You're a sad and pathetic man. You're a homosexual and you don't want to be. But there is nothing you can do to change it--not all your prayers to your God, not all the analysis you can buy in all the years you've got left to live. You may very well one day be able to know a heterosexual life if you want it desperately enough--if you pursue it with the fervor with which you annihilate--but you will always be homosexual as well. Always, Michael. Always. Until the day you die.[80]

Although this speech is obviously hostile, Harold is actually conveying a message against self-hatred. He suggests that Michael, a devout Catholic, will not find solace for his sexual orientation in either religion or psychiatry, two institutions that homosexuals of the time turned to in their struggle for self-acceptance that failed them miserably.

In fact, both religion and psychiatry were complicit in gay self-hatred. Unlike Freud, who neither encouraged nor discouraged homosexuality, American psychiatry branded homosexuality as an illness that was curable. Lawrence Kubie, perhaps the most noted psychiatrist dealing with homosexuality in 1960s America, built his practice around famous artists and wealthy clients, including Moss Hart and Tennessee Williams. Rather than allowing his patients to value themselves for their own identities, he urged them to find a heterosexual cure. Kubie, in fact, was instrumental in urging Williams to leave his long-time lover Frank Merlo, who basically had kept Williams together for years. After

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[80] Quoted in Kaiser, 189.

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abandoning Merlo, Williams failed to find a satisfying heterosexual life, turned increasingly to alcohol and drugs, and finally returned to Merlo, who, in the meantime, had become fatally ill.[61] Although gay men thirty years later watch the film and bemoan the self-hatred and unhappiness of the characters in Crowley's play, the message was positive at the time. Harold's speech maintains that gayness is incontrovertible and must be accepted. The problem, according to Crowley, is learning how to accept one's sexual orientation in a hostile society. If nothing else, the play is a benchmark for how far gay liberation has traveled in thirty years.

While The Boys in the Band broke new ground off-Broadway, gay writers, directors, and actors, many of whom had also worked at the Cino, formed an artistic community at Ellen Stewart's LaMama E.T.C. A seamstress and later a fashion designer by trade, Stewart wanted to find a venue which would celebrate the work of the playwright. Her brother, a gay playwright, had died and she wanted to provide an opportunity for other talented writers to express themselves. Although musicals were not exactly staples of the off-off Broadway movement at the time, they assaulted mainstream theatre, society, and culture in much the same way as non-musical experimental theatre. The off-off Broadway movement was a community, in which writers, composers, actors, and directors transgressively set out to ridicule the restraints of mainstream theatre and institutionalized culture.

Tom Eyen's Caution: A Love Story, which opened LaMama's East 4th street theatre in 1968 and for which I composed the score, simultaneously retold the courtship of

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[61] See Kaiser, 57-8.

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a sexually ambivalent Duke and Duchess of Windsor, while nude onstage gypsies extolled the techniques of the Kama Sutra and acted as a Greek chorus. Deliberately incorporating mainstream show business and musical theatre clichés, Eyen used intertextuality and pastiche to comment on the sexual and political trends of the day, which was typical of many of the writers involved with LaMama and, earlier, the Cino. Lines like "Years from now, when you remember this, be kind," "Conductor, Belle Reve," and "Very smart, Anita, very smart" were tossed in nonsensically, but were immediately identifiable to gay and/or theatre savvy audiences of the period.[62] Eyen's intertextuality also extended to off-Broadway and experimental productions of the time. The gypsies were intent on finding an "author," whom they mispronounced as "Arthur," and whom they tried to summon throughout the performance--an allusion to Pirandello's Six Characters In Search of an Author as well as a comment on the auteur directorial projects currently in vogue with the Living Theatre and the Performance Group.[63]

In Caution, a black drag queen played Kate Smith in a number called "When the Moon Comes Over Fire Island," a parody of Smith's signature tune, "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain," that was staged on a ladder rather than on a large staircase, but was choreographed and musically arranged to look and sound like Pearl Bailey's current Broadway version of Hello, Dolly. One of the gypsies enacted the Archbishop of Canterbury, who flung his clerical robes about as he defiantly announced, "I Feel Gay

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[62] Eyen appropriated these lines from plays gays of the period were familiar with: Tea and Sympathy, A Streetcar Named Desire, and West Side Story.

[63] A critically acclaimed off-Broadway revival of the Pirandello play was produced at the Martinique Theatre in 1963 and ran for 528 performances.

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Today," much like Maria's "I Feel Pretty" in West Side Story. Another gypsy, dressed like Maria in The Sound of Music and surrounded by other gypsies dressed like little children, sang about the decimation of a Vietnamese village in "P-E-A-C-E," a spelling song that parodied "Do-Re-Mi." The Living Theatre's Paradise Now and Tom O'Horgan's Hair also were parodied in a nude scene, in which the disrobed gypsies wandered through the audience intoning, "I am not allowed to smoke marijuana," "I cannot travel without a passport," and "I am not allowed to listen to original Broadway cast recordings." What Eyen and so many others of the LaMama writers tried to achieve was a lethal parody of a Broadway theatre that pretended homosexuality was nonexistent, while its creators clearly were writing, directing, and performing in a way that gay men could easily decode. That "Author" or "Arthur" ultimately dies in a rowboat was more than a comical allusion to the death of the author and the plurality of readings available to homosexuals in decoding theatre. Eyen was also mourning the inability of the mainstream Broadway author to write and express himself honestly.[64]

Eyen and others in the off-off Broadway movement had much to overcome. From 1963, publications like the New York Times and Time, and mainstream critics like Robert Brustein and authors like Philip Roth outed closeted gay writers on Broadway, who, in their opinion, were not qualified to write about heterosexual relationships or marriage. In 1963, Howard Taubman, then the chief drama critic for the New York Times, wrote a

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[64] Ironically, Eyen wanted the kind of mainstream success he ridiculed, and eventually collaborated with Michael Bennett on Dream Girls (1981) as librettist and lyricist. Also see Tom Eyen and Bruce Kirle, Kama Sutra. Ten Plays by Tom Eyen (New York: Samuel French, 1971), 201-71.

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primer on "Helpful Hints on How to Scan the Intimations and Symbols of Homosexuality in Our Theatre."[65] The Taubman article ostensibly focused on William Inge's Natural Affection (1963), an unsuccessful play about a sensitive young man with an Oedipal complex and a slatternly mother. If Taubman seemed to be beating a dead horse, his real target was more clearly Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf (1962), a success that galled him: "If only we could believe that people on the stage are what they are supposed to be."[66] According to Taubman, Albee was writing about four homosexuals, not two heterosexual married couples who couldn't possibly behave with the self-loathing and acerbity with which Albee depicted them. Similarly, Richard Schechner attacked Albee in a homophobic piece in the Tulane Drama Review: "I'm tired of morbidity and sexual perversity which are there only to titillate an impotent and homosexual theatre and audience. I'm tired of Albee."[67] Ironically, Albee has refused to allow the play to be performed by an all-male cast.

Similar vitriolic attacks continued throughout the 1960s. Most outed Albee, Tennessee Williams, Inge, and James Baldwin for writing closeted homosexual plays masquerading as mainstream drama. Addressing Tiny Alice (1964) in a particularly nasty piece in the New York Review of Books entitled "The Play That Dare Not Speak Its

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[65] Howard Taubman, "Modern Primer: Helpful Hints To Tell Appearances from Truth," New York Times (28 April 1963), 2:1.

[66] Ibid., 2:1.

[67] Richard Schechner, "Who's Afraid of Edward Albee?," Reprinted in Edward Albee: A Collection of Critical Essays, edited by C.W.E. Bisgsby (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 64.

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Name." Roth dismissed the Albee play as a homosexual fantasy. His conclusion seemed to attack not only Albee, but Williams and Baldwin as well: "How long before a play is produced on Broadway in which the homosexual hero is presented as a homosexual, and not disguised as an angst-ridden priest, or an angry Negro, or an aging actress; or worst of all, Everyman?"[68] Reviewing Albee's Malcolm (1965), Robert Brustein sarcastically labeled the play Albee's most homosexual work. Echoing his previous attack on Inge, Brustein challenged the ability of a gay playwright to understand heterosexual relationships: "As Albee gets closer and closer to his true subjects--the malevolence of women, the psychological impact of Mom, the evolution of the invert--he tends to get more abstract and incoherent until he is finally reduced, as here, to a nervous plucking at broken strings."[69] Ironically, this is antithetic to the stand he would take thirty years later in his debate with August Wilson when Brustein passionately defended the ability of white directors to understand African-American plays.

In 1966, Stanley Kauffman, Taubman's successor as chief drama critic of the New York Times, wrote a notorious piece attacking closeted homosexual writers and their dissident agenda against a culture that victimizes them: "The marital quarrels are usually homosexual quarrels with one of the pair in costume [presumably, the female character is a man in drag] and the incontrovertibly female figures are drawn less in truth than in envy or

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[68] Quoted in Mel Gussow, Edward Albee: A Singular Journey (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 220.

[69] Ibid., 249.

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fear."[70] Kauffman seems to be arguing that gay playwrights deliberately distort marriage and femininity as a vindictive gesture toward a homophobic culture that discriminates against them. In essence, Kaufman's criticism implied that only a heterosexual man having sex with a woman could possibly create a realistic female character. As Charles Kaiser points out, Kauffman's argument is naive and framed by a heterosexual denigration of women: "This argument grew out of a quintessentially fifties attitude: the idea that a woman's only value to a man was as a sex object, or as the mother of his children."[71] Certainly, Kauffman ignores the female characters of Tennessee Williams, probably among the most complex ever written by an American dramatist.

Perhaps most vitriolic of these 1960s attack against closeted homosexual playwrights on Broadway was William Goldman's chapter entitled "Homosexuals" in The Season. Reviewing Williams' The Seven Descents of Myrtle (1968), Goldman urges his readers not to place much stock in what the playwright has to say about sex or heterosexual relationships: "As far as Broadway is concerned, the three leading experts on heterosexual married life during the past twenty years have been Williams, Albee, and Inge, all of them--at least to my knowledge--bachelors, and I wonder if their knowledge of and attitude toward the subject might not be a little limited."[72] Goldman argues that society has forced these closeted playwrights to address material not crucial to their

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[70] Quoted in John M. Clum, Acting Gay (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 180.

[71] Kaiser, 165.

[72] Goldman, 237.

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psyches, which, in turn, forces them to create distorted images of heterosexuality:

> [The problems of being closeted] might make a playwright, if he is a homosexual and forced to write about heterosexuals (otherwise someone might suspect), become a bit nasty, since the heterosexuals are the ones who loathe him, harass him, who won't let him be. So he treats heterosexuals viciously. The married couples hate each other; the woman, with whom the homosexual tends to identify, is either a gentle dreamer destroyed by an insensitive man, or a destroyer herself. And the man is either a stupid stud, hot for a quick roll in the hay, or a weak, contemptible failure.[73]

Goldman, like Brustein, is Jewish. Does that mean he can only write about Jewish subjects? Like Kauffman, he not only ignores the great women's roles created by Tennessee Williams, but the great romantic films written and/or directed by homosexuals in Hollywood. George Cukor, noted as a woman's director, was responsible for many of Hollywood's greatest love stories. Indeed, he coached Vivian Leigh throughout the shooting of Gone With the Wind. In the 1970s, Arthur Laurents, who wrote the screenplay for The Way We Were, one of the most successful romantic films of the decade, was stunned by a comment from director Sydney Pollack, who casually mentioned that Laurents was a topic of wonder in Hollywood circles since he had written the best love story in years and was a homosexual. Laurents was allegedly at a loss for words: "What do you say to a man like that? Do you attack him? Do you attempt to educate

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[73] Ibid., 239.

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him? Or do you just say to yourself: What an asshole!"[74]

In essence, the mainstream Broadway playwright of the 1960s was in a no-win situation. Since the 1930s, homosexuals were supposed to be invisible not only onstage but on the streets and in the bars of New York. McCarthyism only exacerbated the situation. Blackmail was not uncommon. Unless they named names while testifying for the House Un-American Activities Committee during the 1950s, gay artists like Jerome Robbins allegedly were threatened with being outed either by the government or by columnists like Ed Sullivan or Walter Winchell.[75] By the 1960s, with homosexuality more visible, gay playwrights who wrote mainstream works about heterosexual relationships were attacked for dishonesty; later, when they were either outed or outed themselves, their works were trivialized since the writers' homosexuality somehow diminished the importance and "authenticity" of their characters and themes.

From the 1960s to his death, Williams was accused of fashioning his aging female characters as gay self-portraits--a reductive critical analysis of a character like Blanche DuBois. When a gay playwright did tackle a homosexual subject, he was often attacked by the gay community if not the mainstream press. Inge wrote a character in Where's Daddy (1966) named "Pinky" Pinkerton, who encourages Tom, a street hustler whom he has raised and bedded, to return to the woman he has recently married and left. What the closeted Inge had to say about homosexuality, unfortunately, was that, in effect, it was a

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[74] Laurents, 270.

[75] Greg Lawrence, Dance with Demons: The Life of Jerome Robbins (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001), 155-171.

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case of arrested development. Since heterosexuality is the prized way of life, Pinkerton becomes the spokesman for heterosexual family values. Even Mart Crowley's Boys in the Band, which deals explicitly with homosexuality, was brutally attacked by gay activists as self-pitying in its depiction of gay self-hatred and victimization.

Stonewall, Homosexuality, and the Broadway Musical

If gay characters and themes were closeted in the non-musical Broadway play, how were they handled in the Broadway musical? Certainly, since the days of Madame Lucy in Irene and Russell Paxton, the Danny Kaye character in Lady in the Dark, musicals offered the occasional screaming queen. Gay audiences, however, were used to the coding and double entendres in the lyrics and jokes of Broadway musicals of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. They were also drawn to the indomitable female divas of these musicals, with whom they could identify.[76] As I pointed out earlier, musicals tended to be coded and appropriated by homosexuals. Part of their transgressiveness was in coding gender anxiety partly through the use of the double entendre. This was intrinsic to the form before the cultural changes brought on by the sexual revolution and Stonewall in 1969. As mentioned earlier, the off-Broadway and off-off Broadway theatre at the close of the 1960s contributed to the zeitgeist of social and sexual rebellion. Less than a week before Stonewall, Oh, Calcutta! opened at the Eden off-Broadway and began a 1314

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[76] For more on the identification of gay men and female stars, see chapter two. Also see D.A. Miller, Place For Us [Essay on the Broadway Musical] (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1998); John M. Clum, Something for the Boys, 133-197.

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performance run before transferring to Broadway's Belasco Theatre. Prior to that, Hair (1968) featured a gay character and celebrated bisexuality. It also originated off-Broadway at Joseph Papp's Public Theatre and moved uptown for a commercial run at the Biltmore for an impressive 1742 performance run. Despite these exceptions, the mainstream Broadway play and musical was still relatively closeted.

On June 22, 1969, a group of gay men rebelled against police harassment at a bar called the Stonewall on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, and the gay liberation movement was born. According to Martin Duberman, harassment and police entrapment were commonplace in the Mafia-owned gay bars of the 1960s. Why then did a fairly routine raid on the Stonewall in 1969 create such rebellion and dissidence? No one is quite sure exactly why the police met vigilant resistance on what should have been a routine raid; however, years of harassment, entrapment, forced invisibility, and exploitation struck a note not only in those in the bar during the raid, but in gay men all over the city.[77] Throughout the 1960s, gay consciousness had been progressively raised, first by fairly conservative organizations like the Mattachine Society, and later by more

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[77] Duberman mentions the connection between Judy Garland's funeral and the Stonewall riots. Garland, probably the ultimate gay icon, had died the previous week in London. Her body was on view at Campbell's Funeral Home on Madison Avenue and 81st Street for forty-eight hours prior to the Stonewall raid. 20,000 mourners had paid tribute. I remember, because I was one of those in line. Many of the mourners were gay and had brought portable record players and tapes to play her songs while they patiently waited to enter the funeral home. At the time, I was working at LaMama, and later that night, I happened to be in the Village on my way to the Sheridan Square subway station, when I stumbled upon the riot outside the Stonewall. Many of those who were most dissident and resistant were drag queens, who looked like the police had picked the wrong night to harass them. For more on the connection between the Stonewall riots and Garland's funeral see Duberman, 190-91.

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radical activists who employed strategies learned from the New Left. Certainly, the Stonewall riots received national publicity and marked the beginning of a new American awareness, if not respect, toward the homosexual.

Surprisingly, the commercial Broadway musical, usually a barometer of the cultural hegemony rather than a harbinger of revolutionary artistic or social undercurrents, reflected this zeitgeist of sexual rebellion in the season following Stonewall. Of the fifteen musicals mounted on Broadway between October 1969 and May 1970, only three were financially successful: Company, Coco, and Applause.[78] All three dealt, at least indirectly, with gay, bisexual, or sexually ambiguous leading characters. All three also featured explicitly gay, if minor, male characters, whose relationship with the central character helps illuminate their enigmatic sexuality.[79] Although integrated, the musicals are open and incomplete, in that the principal gay characters are enigmatic and sexually ambiguous, either through text, performance or both. They are markers of a definite cultural turning point, the year after Stonewall, and an obvious attempt to negotiate the closeted attitude of mainstream musical theatre with a compelling gender and sexual revolution impossible

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[78] The fifteen musicals are Jimmy (23 October 1969), Buck White (2 December 1969), La Strada (14 December 1969), Coco (18 December 1969), Gantry (4 February 1970), Georgy (26 February 1970), Purlie (15 March 1970), Blood Red Roses (22 March 1970), Minnie's Boys (26 March 1970), Look to the Lillies (29 March 1970), Applause (30 March 1970), Cry for Us All (8 April 1970), The Boy Friend (18 April 1970), Park (22 April 1970), and Company (26 April 1970). Only one of the fifteen, The Boy Friend, was a revival. Although Oh, Calcutta! was financially successful, it preceded the Stonewall riot, as did Hair. Both shows also opened off-Broadway before transferring to regular Broadway runs.

[79] Peter, one of the husbands in Company, openly propositions Bobby, but the sexual proposition was cut during the show's out-of-town tryout. Furth restored the proposition for the Sam Mendes revival in London (1996).

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for audiences to ignore. They are products of their given cultural moment. Although that cultural moment has passed, they raise provocative questions about gender and identity that help define their moment in time. Subsequent productions will undoubtedly give them new readings that will be equally revealing about a new, different cultural moment.

Company

Company, a concept musical with a score by Stephen Sondheim and a book by George Furth, had a cast of fourteen: Bobby, the leading man, five married couples who were his best friends, and his three girlfriends. Bobby is a thirty-five-year-old New York City bachelor, equally terrified of emotional commitment and of bachelorhood and its attendant loneliness. Plotless, the musical is a series of scenes that reveal the tensions and difficulties in the marriages of the five couples through Bobby's eyes, as well as the difficulties he has cementing an emotional commitment to each of his three girlfriends. The first couple, Sarah and Harry are neurotics. Sarah is constantly dieting, while Harry has a drinking problem. Bobby witnesses their hostility when they start to quarrel and Sarah practices her newly learned karate techniques on her husband. Couple two, Peter and Susan, are getting a divorce so they can once more live amicably together. Jenny and David, the third couple, are worried about approaching middle age and try to sustain their youth by smoking marijuana. Couple four, Amy and Paul, have lived together for years and are about to marry, much to Amy's terror. The final couple, Joanne and Larry, are perhaps the most cynical and frightening. Joanne is rich and dominates her husband. She also propositions Robert, who turns her down.

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The wild card here is Bobby, who is a watcher, rather than a participant. Even in his relationships with his three girlfriends, he is emotionally noncommital. At the end of the show, Bobby is forced to make a choice about his future, based on his observations of his friends' relationships. Will he choose to remain free and a bachelor or commit to some sort of relationship, difficult and trying as it may be? During the out-of-town tryout, according to Foster Hirsch, three different solutions were offered. The first, expressed in a song called "Marry Me A Little," expressed Robert's decision to embark on a safe marriage, one in which both partners would retain their independence. Unsatisfied with this compromise, producer/director Harold Prince asked Sondheim for a second solution. Replacing "Marry Me A Little" with "Happily Ever After," Robert's choice seemed to be "the manifesto of a misanthrope."[80] The song confirmed Bobby's decision to escape marriage and remain single. According to Prince, the song was terrifying: "It was the most unhappy song ever written, and we didn't know how devastating it would be until we saw it in front of an audience. . . . If I heard that song I wouldn't get married for anything in the whole world."[81] Ultimately, "Happily Ever After" was replaced by "Being Alive," which argued that the only possibility for any sort of happiness is love and emotional commitment, even if that love is claustrophobic and frightening. This decision to commit emotionally is quite a leap, particularly after the previous, horrific examples of the five battling couples and Joanne's growlingly acerbic "Ladies Who Lunch," which

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[80] See Foster Hirsch, Harold Prince and the American Musical Theatre (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 87.

[81] Quoted in Craig Zadan, Sondheim and Company (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 124.

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immediately preceded it.

Apparently, Sondheim was never pleased with the resolution, and Prince didn't feel it was honest either; however, audiences expected a happy ending and happy endings involve marriage and commitment (although there is no one visible onstage to whom Robert can commit).[82] In the final scene, which follows "Being Alive," Bobby fails to show up for the birthday party his friends throw him annually. The play ends with Bobby alone and smiling. Will he choose marriage? Is he rejecting the heterosexual world of his married friends? Is he embracing commitment to a gay relationship or lifestyle? After seeing the show, George Abbott allegedly asked Prince if the musical was pro-marriage or anti-marriage. Prince's reply was non-committal.[83] The text is open; the character of Bobby, enigmatic and mysterious.

From the outset, critics have argued whether Bobby is bisexual or a coded gay character. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, "coming out," as John Clum asserts, "meant cutting ties with one's straight friends," which would explain Bobby's refusal to attend his party.[84] True, Bobby has three girlfriends with whom he has sexual relations, but they refer to him as a tease and emotionally vacuous, implying that his lack of interest or commitment is perhaps a sign of his homosexuality in the song "You Could Drive A Person Crazy." Furth's original script had a conversation between Peter, the newly divorced husband, and Bobby which made the latter's bisexuality explicit:

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[82] See Hirsch, 87.

[83] Ibid., 87.

[84] Clum, Something for the Boys, 222.

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Peter: Robert, did you ever have a homosexual experience?

Robert: I beg your pardon?

Peter: Oh, I don't mean as a kid. I mean, since you've been an adult.

Have you ever?

Robert: Well, yes, actually, yes, I have.[85]

Peter then propositions Robert. What is unusual here is that both Peter and Robert contradict the stereotype of the sissie or screaming queen associated with homosexuals in musicals up to that point. Both perform conventional, perceived notions of masculinity. According to the stage directions, Robert takes a long time to respond. Is he seriously considering Peter's proposition? Is he reluctant to reject his friend or afraid to accept an attractive offer? Is he afraid of an emotional as well as sexual connection with a friend, or is he weaseling out of an uncomfortable confrontation? The text is incomplete and open, since Robert ultimately treats the proposition as a good-natured joke. Unfortunately, this exchange was cut before Company opened in New York. It was reinstated by Furth for the London revival (1996) directed by Sam Mendes. By that time, it was difficult not to at least acknowledge the possibility of Bobby's bisexuality. In 1970, this possibility, even after Stonewall, was a lot more threatening to Broadway audiences, particularly since neither Bobby nor Peter conformed to stereotyped, swishy images of the performance of gay identity.

Nonetheless, William Goldman, a fan of the original production, maintained that

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[85] George Furth and Stephen Sondheim, Company (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1996), 42.

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Company was about a homosexual, but the authors did not have the courage to deal with the subject openly: "I remember seeing Company five times and I loved it, and I had a huge fucking problem, which is that the main character is gay, but they don't talk about it."[86] Goldman is reiterating his own criticism of closeted Broadway playwriting, as well as the criticisms of Taubman, Kauffman, Brustein, and Roth throughout the 1960s. Sondheim and Furth's predicament was similar to that of Williams, Albee, and Inge. If the hero of Company were homosexual, how much appeal could the musical generate for a mainstream Broadway audience? A certain amount of gay coding had been standard since the 1930s in musicals, but if the authors acknowledged a gay hero, their musical would have limited popular appeal. If, on the other hand, Bobby was left sexually ambiguous, Sondheim and Furth were subject to the same criticisms that had plagued Williams, Inge, and Albee throughout the decade. The issue of authorial intent complicates matters even more. What *was* the authorial intent? What did Furth and Sondheim intend? There is no conclusive answer.

In the thirty years since the musical opened, gay critics tend to see Bobby as a closeted homosexual. D.A. Miller, for one, is annoyed at the sexual openness of the character:

> This Bobby bubi is a Bobby bubba nonetheless. It is not just the characters in Company who all think so, in interview after interview, the show's creators continue to put their authority behind the same presumption,

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[86] Quoted in Meryle Secrest, Stephen Sondheim: A Life (New York: Knopf, 1998), 371.

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> repudiating the possibility of gay representation with an emphasis that couldn't be firmer if they were organizing a St. Patrick's Day Parade. We, then, end up falling into the same furious incomprehension as Bobby's other girlfriends: we could understand a person if a person was a fag, but if he was not, he must be as crazy as he makes us.[87]

On the other hand, straight critics passionately defend Bobby's heterosexuality According to Joanne Gordon, "Critics who dwell on Robert's possible homosexuality are clearly uncomfortable with the show's anti-romantic, unsentimental depiction of marriage."[88] The mixed reaction about Bobby is, after all, not significantly different from the mixed reaction given the plays of Tennessee Williams, William Inge, and Edward Albee during this same period. Furth and Sondheim were both homosexuals; Prince, heterosexual. Sondheim wanted to retain "Happily Ever After," the song which would resolve Bobby's dilemma by keeping him a bachelor. According to biographer Meryle Secrest, this very much mirrored Sondheim's own feelings of sexual ambivalence in his younger days:

> Sondheim said, "I was never easy with being a homosexual, which complicated things." He agreed that social attitudes of the day toward what was considered deviant, if not criminal, behavior, made things very difficult. "I don't think I knew more than maybe four homosexuals in the

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[87] Miller, 125.

[88] Joanne Gordon, Art Isn't Easy: The Theatre of Stephen Sondheim (New York: DaCapo Press, 1992), 55.

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> fifties and sixties who were openly so. I'm guessing four. I'm actually thinking of one couple who were quite effeminate, so there was very little to conceal. I knew a lot of homosexuals who did not want it to be known. Everybody knew the theatre was full of homosexuals, but nobody admitted to being so."[89]

However one chooses to read Bobby, the original production was a financial and critical success, although perhaps for the wrong reasons. It raised a complex issue after Stonewall about gay identity and coming out for the Broadway establishment that turned it into something of a cult show. Indeed, Variety's pre-Broadway review predicted its audience appeal: "It's evident that . . . George Furth hates femmes and makes them all out to be conniving, cunning, cantankerous . . . As it stands now [Company is] for ladies' matinees, homos, and misogynists."[90]

If the text is open, efforts were made to attempt to close it through casting in the original production. Anthony Perkins was originally slated to star in Company, but left to direct the off-Broadway production of Bruce Jay Friedman's Scuba Duba. It's conceivable that Perkins' appeal as a film star and ingratiating charm would have made the character less of a cipher and more subject to a heterosexual reading. He was replaced by Dean Jones, a Disney film star, who reportedly was terrified of the homosexual implications of the character and its long-range effect on his film career as star of family

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[89] Secrest, 180.

[90] Quoted in Kevin Kelly, One Singular Sensation (New York and London: Doubleday, 1990), 69.

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comedies. Reviewing Jones' performance, Martin Gottfried commented, Dean Jones "can seem sexless and must watch it or the show's theme (and honesty) will be confused by hints of homosexuality."[91] Jones, a straight actor, walked away from his contract after five weeks and was replaced by Larry Kert, who played the role through the remainder of the Broadway engagement and in London. Although Kert was gay, his performance had a great deal of sex appeal and could easily be read as interpreting Bobby as straight. Ironically, Perkins and Kert, both gay men, were perceived as de-emphasizing Bobby's homosexuality, while Jones, a straight actor with a wholesome Disney image, was perceived as lending more of a gay subtext to the character. The irony of this underscores the implicit playfulness and performativity of identity that has characterized the American musical since the double doubling of minstrelsy in the nineteenth century.

Here is a case where the main character of an integrated musical is deliberately left open and incomplete. Whether Bobby is straight or gay is (or isn't) answered in performance. The original production, with Perkins deserting the ship, Dean Jones terrified of playing a "sexless" gay man, and Larry Kert somehow bridging the gap, was certainly not definitive--it begged the question. Company may have opened after Stonewall, but it was not ready to confront homosexuality openly in 1969. The text was altered, both literally and in performance, in Sam Mendes' London revival (1996), in which Bobby was played by the charismatic black actor Adrian Lester. The script was still open or incomplete, but Lester was apparently able to fill in the gaps and absences of the cipher-like hero and create a character who held some sexual fascination for the audience.

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[91] Quoted in Clum, Something for the Boys, 224.

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Lester's race also added another dimension to the character. According to Alan Sinfield, homosexuality on the mainstream Broadway stage was usually divorced from race and ethnicity until the 1960s, mainly because non-white actors had limited opportunities to perform and because both blacks and whites found interracial sex too hot to handle.[92] After the 1980s, however, Sinfield argues that playwrights have increasingly explored the sexually dissident of various ethnicities and races. Sinfield speculates that this may be an inheritance of the militant gays after the Stonewall riots, who learned their political strategies fighting for racial civil rights and other non-gay issues of the New Left. At any rate, it seems to me that a contemporary production of Company, thirty years after the original staging, must confront Bobby's sexual ambiguity, rather than push it under the table. The character can still remain enigmatic and incomplete, but it is not enough in 2001 to leave him a sexless cipher.

Coco

Like Bobby, the central character in Coco, book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner and music by André Previn, is incomplete and sexually enigmatic. Coco chronicles the 1953 comeback of French couturier Coco Chanel, who walked away from her salon in 1939 during the height of her success. As the curtain rises, Chanel decides that her designs are timeless and she wants to return to work. Her attorneys, afraid her fashions are hopelessly outmoded, hire Sebastian Baye, a gay designer whose lover is the leading fashion critic in Paris, to supervise the new collection. Chanel rejects his designs, prepares the collection

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[92] Sinfield, 292.

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herself, and is devastated when the showing is calamitous. Four buyers from New York, however, offer to mass-market her designs for Ohrbach's, Bloomingdale's, Best, and Saks, and she is once more at the top of the fashion heap.

Lerner's script and lyrics seem like a reaction against the militant males of Stonewall, but a valentine to the burgeoning women's movement and to feminism, years before feminism was embraced by mainstream American society. Fashioned as a vehicle for the iconoclastic Katherine Hepburn, the musical celebrates the autonomy of women, both sexually, materially, and culturally. The heart of the show deals with Chanel's ambivalence about the conflict between her fierce need for independence and her need for a fulfilling personal relationship. She develops an attachment to Noelle, one of her young models, with whom she has much in common. Both were orphaned before they were ten years old. Both came to Paris and immediately found male lovers who refused to marry them. Noelle is currently living with Georges, a reporter, who wants her to abandon her modeling career and devote her life to being his mistress. Coco advises Noelle to forge a career and life independent from Georges. She argues that a woman needs independence from a man, not equality. Equality, she affirms, is, in most cases, a step down.

Heeding Chanel's advice, Noelle informs Georges she intends to continue modeling. He puts her out, and she appears on Chanel's doorstep, suitcase in hand. The older woman takes her in, but is afraid to become too emotionally involved with her protegée. Noelle insinuates herself into Chanel's life, soothes her when it looks as if her new collection has been disastrous, and encourages her to persevere. As the relationship between the two women grows, Noelle asks Coco why she never married. Coco explains

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that her father, whom she adored, abandoned her. She resolved never to depend on anyone again. Chanel, in turn, recognizes a young woman like herself, who must eventually decide between independence and normalcy, which involves a home, a husband, and children. Deciding to mold Noelle in her own image, Chanel buys a new home which she intends to share with the young model, but Noelle returns to Georges. Coco finally realizes she will remain as she has always been, "Always Mademoiselle," and plans to design a dress for Noelle's wedding as the curtain falls.

The real life Chanel was a bisexual. Although the character of Coco in the musical is shrouded in sexual ambivalence, the plot implies a love triangle between the aging Coco, her young model Noelle, and Noelle's lover, Georges. Almost immediately after meeting her, Coco urges Noelle to leave Georges and move in with her. Chanel predicts that Georges will conquer his aversion to marriage as soon as he recognizes Noelle's independence, but she nevertheless encourages Noelle to end the relationship and cherish her freedom. This eventually comes to pass:

> *Noelle:* It all happened just as you said, didn't it Coco? I became independent and he came around.
>
> *Coco:* It's a shame we're all so predictable. But everything about love is a shame, isn't it? Men and women deserve something better than each other.[93]

Perhaps Chanel is being more than epigrammatic here; if men and women deserve

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[93] Alan Jay Lerner, Coco, typescript, (2. 3. 27), File RM6795, Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts, New York City.

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something better than each other, Chanel seems to be espousing a homosexual, rather than heterosexual relationship. Early in act two, Chanel is despondent that her collection has been ridiculed by the Parisian fashion press. Noelle, who has grown to love the older woman, berates Coco for her fierce independence, claiming her own rights in their relationship:

> *Noelle*: Coco, may I have dinner with you tonight?
>
> *Coco*: Noelle, if you don't mind. . .
>
> *Noelle*: Yes, I do mind. I refuse to go on being locked out like this without any explanation.
>
> *Coco*: Locked out? What on earth are you talking about?
>
> *Noelle*: I know you don't believe in leaning on anyone, Coco, but I care too much. You have no right to be unhappy without me.[94]

These are strong words for a girl who is being kept by an older woman, particularly an older woman based on a real life bisexual. Toward the end of the act, Noelle informs Chanel she is returning to Georges and rejects not only the new home Coco has bought to share with her young protogée, but the older woman's dreams for Noelle's future:

> *Coco*. What do you want me to say, Noelle? I understand. . . ? Well, I can't. And I do understand. It's you who understand nothing. *You need love and so you think you need him.* And why not? *It's the only love you've ever known.* Standing on your small hill of years, it is the only life you can see. But look out from Mt. Everest

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[94] Lerner, 2. 2. 11.

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and I can see a future for you that you couldn't dream of with opium.

Noelle: I know you can, Coco. But I want my own future. *I don't want to be made into someone no man can satisfy.*

Coco: If my dreams are too big for you to carry, pick some up at the Flea market. Get out of here.[95]

Even without the italics, which are mine rather than Lerner's, the dialogue is filled with homosexual undertones. Noelle has had other lovers before George, so what does Coco mean when she declares that Georges is the only love Noelle has ever known? Is she proposing a lesbian relationship? Noelle rejects not only Coco's offer of love, but Coco's belief in the value of independence and personal autonomy when she denigrates Chanel by refusing to be a woman that "no man can satisfy." Noelle goes from Coco's protection back to Georges'.

The ending, like most "happy" endings in musicals, is too neat and almost Euripidean, given the provocative issues the musical raises. Happily ever after, in terms of the musical, suggests an end to discourse. As Rick Altman observes, "The comic equivalent of apocalypse, marriage represents a timeless, formless state in American mythology, precisely so that it will not be open to question."[96] Here, the romantic joining together of Noelle and Georges validates the heterosexual community and the sexual

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[95] Ibid., 2. 3. 28.

[96] Rich Altman, "The American Film Musical: Paradigmatic Structure and Mediatory Function," Genre: The Musical, edited by Rich Altman (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, 197.

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status quo. Noelle marries Georges, basically settling for a life as a housewife, while Coco, whom the audience has admired all evening, is left alone, seemingly punished for her insistence on personal autonomy and independence. No doubt this is the happy ending that seemed inevitable to please a 1969 audience. At the same time, there is something triumphant about the androgynous Katherine Hepburn as Chanel once again ruling the world of fashion. Who could find an appropriate consort for such an overpowering personality?

Apart from the ending, Lerner underscores his admiration for Chanel's feminism and independence by creating two villains, both male. Georges is a male chauvinist, attractive, but selfish. He denies Noelle the possibility of a career or independent life of her own. The other villain is Sebastian Baye, the gay designer who is at odds with Coco about her new fashion collection. Baye is stereotypically, cartoonishly homosexual, as well as villainous. Observing Baye's behavior in the salon, one model inquires of another, "Is he homosexual?" The second replies, "It's gone beyond that."[97] This type of screaming queen was not new to the Broadway musical. As Walter Kerr noted in his New York Times review, the humor springs from stereotyping of gender, not from character: "Much of the comedy is bad fag comedy hung about the neck of a homosexual designer, the villain of the piece; at one point René Auberjonois squeals and snatches his hand away because he has inadvertently let it rest on the breast of a tailor's dummy."[98] Kerr's

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[97] Lerner, 1. 5. 42.

[98] Steven Suskin, More Opening Nights on Broadway: A Critical Quotebook of the Musical Theatre: 1965-1981 (New York: Schirmer, 1977), 179.

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criticism points to the silliness and artificiality of the humorous gesture. A fitter or designer would certainly have to be used to touching female bodies. This is the same kind of criticism leveled against the stock "sissy" character and stereotyped gender jokes that Richard Watts attacked in By Jupiter, and that the critics jumped on as early as 1924 with the Ritz Review. The difference here is that the homosexual is not just an over-the-top figure of fun, but a bona fide villain, out to destroy the heroine.

Many of Lerner's jokes center around Baye's effeminacy. Coco calls him a "wretched little UFO,"[99] while Baye himself insists, "there's no bitch like a man."[100] Lyricist Lerner gives Baye the comic showstopper of the evening, a song entitled "Fiasco," in which Baye, having been fired by Chanel, celebrates the failure of her comeback collection. By the end of the number, the lyrics make it clear that Baye is skipping and mincing across the stage, as he gloats over Chanel's downfall: "And while she's slipping and slipping / I'm skipping and skipping / For this faded, degraded, and jaded / Old maid is mine."[101] There is certainly nothing enigmatic or open about the text here. In fact, in the original production, Auberjonois played the character's bitchiness and effeminacy to the hilt. The number won Auberjonois a Tony Award as best supporting actor in a musical. It is ironic that Auberjonois was honored by the Broadway community for a performance that essentialized the post-Stonewall homosexual male. It is disturbing that journalists like William Goldman and Mark Steyn, who imply that the Broadway

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[99] Lerner, 1. 6. 54.

[100] Ibid., 1. 5. 43

[101] Ibid., 2. 1. 4.

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musical theatre community is something of a gay coven, ignore Auberjonois' acclaim for this particular role at this particular cultural moment.[102]

The Baye character is counter-intuitive to a post-Stonewall cultural moment and bears some examination. It is not surprising that Lerner would create an explicitly gay male character in a post-Stonewall musical about the fashion industry. Lerner, however, reverts to an older stereotype with Baye but updates and exacerbates it. Before Coco, characters of varying degrees of effeminacy were common in musicals, but they were usually not explicitly identified as homosexual. In fact, they often were married or about to be wed by the final curtain. Madame Lucy in Irene (1919) is a dress designer with effeminate mannerisms who sings about the girls going simply wild over him. At the conclusion of the show, he marries Irene's mother. Reno Sweeney, in Anything Goes

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[102] Both Mark Steyn and William Goldman write of a Broadway musical theatre community that seems almost mystical in its gayness. In a chapter entitled "The Fags," Steyn constructs his version of the demographics of who mounts Broadway musicals: "There are no statistics for these things, but, on the basis of my own unscientific research, I would say that, of the longest-running shows of the 1940s, some two-thirds had a homosexual contribution in the writing/staging/producing department. By the 1960s, the proportion of long-runners with a major homosexual contribution was up to about 90 per cent." See Mark Steyn, Broadway Babies Say Goodnight (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997), 198. If Steyn admits there are no statistics to support his claims, where did he get these figures?

Thirty years ago, William Goldman wrote, "Most of the major musicals of the sixties have been directed by homosexuals, the songs from most of the hits of the sixties have been written by homosexuals, the dances created by homosexuals, the clothing designed by homosexuals. In musicals, particularly, the homosexual contribution is tremendous: of the ten longest-running musicals of the decade, two, at the most, were accomplished without homosexual contributions in the writer-producer-director echelons." See Goldman, 238. It is both astounding and worrisome to me that these two ostensibly straight journalists are so au courant with who goes to bed with whom. Moreover, if Steyn and Goldman are right, how did René Auberjonois win a Tony Award from a gay Broadway musical comedy clique for a performance that essentialized and demonized the gay male the year after Stonewall?

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(1934), is prepared to marry the effeminate Sir Evelyn Oakley by the final curtain. The effeminate stereotype appears frequently in film musicals as well, particularly with character actors like Edward Everett Horton, and Erik Rhodes in the Astaire/Rogers films. They are playing unmistakably gay characters, but the gayness is inevitably papered over by a romantic entanglement with a woman or by marriage.

The salient exception is the Russell Paxton character in Lady in the Dark, which, like Coco, was a musical about high fashion. Paxton, like Sebastian Baye, is a dress designer. Playwright Moss Hart described Paxton as flighty and biting, "mildly effeminate in a rather charming fashion."[103] Hart insisted on casting Danny Kaye in the original production, and, by all accounts, Kaye's performance was over the top, stereotypically, mincingly gay.[104] Paxton was the creation of Moss Hart, whose biographer, Steven Bach, acknowledges Hart's conflicted sexuality. According to Bach, Hart spent years with psychiatrist Lawrence Kubie trying to cure his homosexual urges.[105] Perhaps Hart's fondness for Kaye resulted in giving the comedian license to perform outrageously. Perhaps Hart's own conflicted sexuality and dogged attempts to live a respectable, married life led him to make the Paxton character a ridiculous cartoon.[106] Unfortunately,

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[103] Steven Bach, Dazzler: The Life and Times of Moss Hart (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 224.

[104] Ibid., 224-25.

[105] Ibid., 213-216.

[106] According to Ethan Mordden, Lady in the Dark was a coded show, in which Hart's psychiatrist at the time, Gregory Zilboorg, encouraged him to write Liza Elliott as a metaphor for Hart's own coming out. Apparently, Hart went through analysis with Zilboorg before he ultimately switched his allegiance to Lawrence Kubie. The two

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it's all speculation. Lerner's personal reasons for creating an explicitly gay figure of ridicule and villainy are equally grounds for speculation, particularly during this cultural moment.

What does seem clear, however, is that Lerner's creation of Sebastian Baye, a year after Stonewall, seems to be a backlash against gay liberation, at least in terms of the gay male. Undoubtedly, the Stonewall riots enabled Lerner to make the effeminate stereotype more explicitly gay than had been possible before, but unfortunately the explicitness was reductive and essentialist. Actually, there is a certain logic to Lerner's reaction against gay male liberation. Throughout the 1960s, the New York press challenged closeted gay playwrights for being incapable of writing believable heterosexual relationships. As I mentioned earlier, the implication of much of this criticism seemed to be that gay men, resentful of their marginalization by the heterosexual hegemony, ridiculed and demonized women through their female characters. Lerner, ostensibly a much married, straight man, does the opposite. He demonizes, ridicules, and essentializes the gay male. If there is a point to this homophobic, gay cartoon, Lerner makes it through Chanel's comment about Baye's designs: "Do you know why fashion is so atrocious these days? Because men are

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psychiatrists differed in their philosophies and treatment. Whereas Kubie tried to "cure" Hart of his homosexuality, Mordden claims that Zilboorg encouraged Hart to confront his sexuality: "If that [Lady in the Dark] isn't a gay coming-out parable, Cole Porter wrote Show Boat with Herbert Fields. The 'lady executive' is clearly a likeness of a gay man, capable and creative but alternate, not like most of us. . . . The Hollywood beauty [the male movie star in the play] as icon, the unnervingly masculine challenger who is at the same time an erotic figure. . . this is more gay imagery. And note that Hart intended his play for Katherine Cornell, a real-life lesbian wedded to a gay man, Guthrie McClintic." See Ethan Mordden, Beautiful Mornin' (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61. Unfortunately, Mordden's speculations, like so much that has been written about musical theatre, are just that--speculations, not verifiable history.

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making fun of women, that's why. And that's what he's doing."[107] If a straight man can appreciate a woman's beauty, Coco seems to imply, a gay male will jealously undercut her and make her look foolish. Lerner has Coco verbalize the criticisms leveled by Taubman, Kauffman, Roth, and Goldman throughout the 1960s about the female characters created by closeted, allegedly misogynist homosexual playwrights like Albee, Inge, and Williams. If homosexuals are making fun of women, as Coco suggests, Lerner is making fun of the gay male. What is ironic is Lerner's glorification of feminism and, to an extent, Coco's bisexuality or lesbianism, which is implied by the text. In that sense, Coco does reflect a post-Stonewall sensibility, at least in terms of the Chanel character. Lerner can react in contradistinction to what he dislikes about Stonewall, while venerating what he respects about the women's movement. Ultimately, he leaves the character of Coco open, incomplete, and mysterious by essentializing her comic, male, homosexual opponent.

Coco is as enigmatic and open in its implied sexual love triangle as Company is in its sexually ambiguous hero. Unfortunately, the original production of the Lerner musical closed the text. Directed by Michael Benthal with musical numbers and fashion sequences staged by Michael Bennett, the production catered to Katherine Hepburn's huge following and safely emphasized Coco's maternal feelings for Noelle rather than the potential sexual attraction between the two women. Hepburn's star turn, however, involved her own non-maternal star baggage. She brought the androgynous quality long associated with her from early films like Sylvia Scarlett in the 1930s, as well as her own reputation as a loner, an iconoclast, and a feminist. Her portrayal of Chanel seemed more

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[107] Ibid., 1. 6. 54.

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a cartoon of Hepburn than a characterization of the bisexual couturier.[108] Basically playing herself, she failed to convey any great sense of maternal feeling toward Noelle. The potential sexual attraction between the two women was ignored. As a result, little was at stake when Noelle leaves Coco at the end of the play to return to Georges. After Hepburn left the cast, she was replaced by Danielle Darrieux, who injected a sexuality and warmth that did much to enliven the relationship with Noelle. Without Hepburn, however, the box office died. The show bears revival today, thirty years after the feminist movement. It raises issues of female autonomy that are embedded in parts of our culture today, but that were far more dissident and transgressive in 1969.

Applause

Perhaps Applause, with score by Charles Strouse and Lee Adams and book by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, is the musical most directly influenced by the Stonewall Riots. Its text is less enigmatic than that of Company and Coco and manages to literalize identity in a form that traditionally venerates the coded and sexually enigmatic and ambiguous. The musical is based on the 1950 film All About Eve, which in turn is based on a short story by Mary Orr, supposedly about a real life incident in which either Elizabeth Berger or Tallulah Bankhead, depending on which version one believes, was

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[108] Allegedly Chanel was delighted to learn that Hepburn had been chosen to play her in the musical. She later was bitterly disappointed when she found out it was the wrong Hepburn--Katherine, rather than Audrey.

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sabotaged by an understudy.[109]

In the musicalization, Eve Harrington, star-struck as well as seemingly mousy and self-effacing, manages to insinuate herself through flattery and fawning adulation into the life of her idol, an aging musical theatre icon named Margo Channing. She soon moves in with Margo and becomes her indispensable gal Friday. Eventually, she also becomes Margo's understudy. Increasingly suspicious of Eve's motives, Margo begins to turn on her protegée, but friends and colleagues dismiss her misgivings as the paranoia of a insecure, middle-aged star. Margo's suspicions are ultimately confirmed. Eve betrays Margo by conspiring to cause her to miss a performance, goes on in her place after alerting the press that she will be performing in Margo's stead, and wins rave reviews. Eve manages to seduce both Margo's producer and the writer of Margo's vehicles. She also unsuccessfully tries to seduce Bill Sampson, Margo's director and lover. Eventually, Eve talks herself into replacing Margo as the lead in a new musical, while Margo, convinced that there must be something greater than the back-biting world of show business, marries Bill and settles for a life of relative normalcy outside the theatre.

In translating the film to the musical stage, Comden and Green make several significant alterations. In both film and musical, Eve uses men to claw her way to the top of her profession. According to Vito Russo, however, two scenes in the film suggest that her real attraction is toward women:

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[109] The Bankhead version is interesting in this context. In this version of the origins of the Orr story, Bankhead, while starring in Little Foxes (1939) on Broadway, was sabotaged by her understudy, Lizabeth Scott, who later became a film star and something of a lesbian icon. Bankhead's sexuality, as a matter of fact, was notoriously eclectic. She described herself as a try-sexual.

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> According to Ken Geist in his biography of Joe Mankiewicz [who wrote and directed All About Eve], the character of Eve Harrington, as played by Anne Baxter, was conceived as a lesbian, a predilection only subtly suggested in a scene with Eve's boardinghouse roommate and again at the end of the film when she impulsively invites an adoring young fan to spend the night with her. She is, of course, being taken in by a creature very much like herself.[110]

Russo observes that Eve's vulnerability to Phoebe, the conniving high school girl in the film's final scene, is the product of Eve's lesbianism. "Eve does not have the kind of generosity that led Margo Channing to take a waif like her under her wing. To ask Phoebe to spend the night rather than take the subway home to Brooklyn could have only one motive, and it spells the beginning of the end for Eve Harrington."[111] Although both the boarding house scene and the final scene with Phoebe are relatively subtle, necessarily so for a film produced in 1950, Eve is arguably lesbian, or, at the very least, bisexual. She doesn't care whom she sleeps with as long as she reaches her goal. The boarding house scene and the final scene do, however, show a rare vulnerability and honesty in the character. Eve is clearly more at ease with her roommate and with Phoebe than with the men she ruthlessly seduces.

In musicalizing the property, Comden and Green cut both scenes involving the

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[110] Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 94.

[111] Ibid., 101.

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roommate and Phoebe, thus eliminating any mystery or ambiguity about Eve's sexuality. This is in direct contrast to Joseph Mankiewicz' vision of Eve in the film:

> Whether in the theatre, or at *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, or I.B.M., Eve is essentially the girl unceasingly, relentlessly on the make. Not necessarily for men; as a matter of fact, only rarely. A particular man, perhaps, or series of men--or women--may be the means to an important end, but almost never the ultimate goal. The goal--toward which Eve is fanatically and forever at full charge--is no less than all of whatever there is to be had.[112]

Since Eve is the villainess of the piece, it is not surprising that Comden and Green skirt the issue of Eve's bisexuality in a musical that opened almost a year after the Stonewall riots. In 1950, Eve's lesbianism would have been consistent in the eyes of the general public with her ruthlessness and amorality. In line with pieces from Time and Coronet which I cited earlier in this chapter, homosexuality was regarded as not merely a question of sexual preference, but a mental disorder that could easily lead to psychosis. The pre-Stonewall press depicted the homosexual as attempting to subvert all that straight society held dear, which led Foucault to theorize that it was the homosexual lifestyle and its implications rather than the homosexual act itself that rocked the status quo.

By 1970, with the increasing visibility of homosexuals after Stonewall and the rise of gay activism, it was necessary to take a different approach. This is apparent in the liner

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[112] Joseph L. Mankiewicz, "All About the Women in 'All About Eve,'" New York Magazine, 16 October 1972, 38.

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notes to the original cast album, in which Comden and Green summarize the plot: "It is a tale of treachery, the humble underling, subtly boring from within to unseat and usurp the figure of power on the throne, told in terms of the witty, glamorous theatre star and the mousy, adoring girl from the sticks who ingratiates herself into the star's private world, and then systematically attempts to take over her career, her lover, and her life."[113] Comden and Green's description of the "humble underling, subtly boring from within to unseat and usurp the figure of power on the throne" sounds potentially like the articles in Time and Coronet that accused the homosexual of deliberately undermining the mainstream society that victimized him or her.[114] With Stonewall fresh in the public consciousness, not to mention the considerable critical brickbats aimed at Lerner's villainous Sebastian Baye, who was, after all, a minor character, it would be reactionary and counterproductive to create a lesbian villainess. Baye was an over-the-top stereotypical joke of effeminacy, who fails in his attempted villainy; he was not nearly as threatening to Coco as the handsome, heterosexual Georges, who eventually wins Noelle away from her. Eve, on the other hand, was a predatory monster. Linking her villainy to her sexuality would feed into the almost pathological stereotypes gay activists, particularly since Stonewall, had done so much to discredit. In the final analysis, the show highlighted a comforting message to straight audiences in 1970. By the final curtain, despite her

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[113] Applause, book by Betty Comden and Adolph Green, music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Lee Adams. "Liner Notes." Original Broadway Cast Recording, 1971. ABC records, ABD-OCS-11.

[114] See 1966 Time article, which complained that "homosexual ethics and esthetics are staging a vengeful, counterattack on what deviates call the 'straight' world." Quoted in Sinfield 297.

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glamorous lifestyle and exposure to a world of gay bars, amusing companions, and fast living, Margo Channing, in the guise of Lauren Bacall, chooses to take the commuter train home to a husband and white picket fence rather than remain in the amoral world of show business. She bequeaths that legacy to the likes of Eve Harrington. Ironically, the gay gypsies want no part of Eve; her success will depend on her ruthless, sexual manipulation of the straight men of the musical theatre. What Comden and Green fail to tell the audience is that Eve's pickings might be lean.

Stonewall had established homosexuality not only as a presence that would not disappear from major urban centers like New York City, but also had endowed homosexuality and its increasing visibility with glamor. Comden and Green cleverly capitalized on the publicity from Stonewall by including explicitly homosexual minor characters and a scene that takes place in a gay bar. Audiences were titillated during the title number, in which three male dancers, satirizing Oh, Calcutta!, exposed their bare backsides to the audience. Gay bars were in the news after Stonewall, but were certainly out of the realm of experience of straight musical theatre audiences. Hair, a year earlier, had enabled Broadway audiences to taste the dissidence and controversiality of the counterculture within a safe setting, the Biltmore Theatre, filled with graffiti and deliberately made to look run-down and seedy, like the show's East Village setting. By featuring male nudity within a flashy production number in a gay bar, Applause similarly allowed audiences to be voyeurs of an alternate gay lifestyle from the safety of their seats at the Palace Theatre.

In musicalizing All About Eve, Comden and Green close Eve's sexuality, but open

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the Margo Channing character. The musical is all about Lauren Bacall as Margo, not all about Eve. Basically a suspicious, bitchy character, Margo is made loveable through her sympathetic relationship with Duane, her gay hairdresser. Her relationship with Bill Sampson is not only volatile but also often lugubrious. She is never as happy with her lover, her straight producer, or her straight writer and his wife as she is with Duane and with the adoring gay men who worship her when she accompanies Duane to a gay bar. If Margo's heterosexuality is secured by the script, she becomes an icon for gay men in the musical. Director/choreographer Ron Field describes the importance of making the audience cheer for Bacall and for her character:

> In the case of Lauren Bacall in the disco scene, I had wanted the audience to fall in love with Lauren Bacall at the beginning of the show because from then on her character had to be bitchy and suspicious. I knew I only had about fifteen minutes for the audience to fall in love with who she was. I thought, How can I get that to happen? In the script her hairdresser, who was gay, takes her to a village disco and I had fifteen boys throw Bacall around. She looked wonderful.[115]

Margo's best friend is gay. Unlike Sebastian Baye in Coco, he is not out to destroy the heroine, but to support her and be helpful. Margo's acceptance of Duane's homosexuality, her embracing of the alternate lifestyle of the gypsies in her cast and in the world of the New York theatre are endearing characteristics, a bit shocking for 1970, but

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[115] Svetlana McLee Grody and Dorothy Daniels Lister, Conversations with Choreographers (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1996), 82.

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nonetheless endearing. Given the post-Stonewall cultural moment of the original production, villainous Eve is distrusted, perhaps hated by Duane and the other gypsies, many of them gay, while Margo, the heroine, is supported and supportive of her gay following. Comden and Green create audience empathy for Margo by capitalizing on her relationship with Duane and the gypsies; at the same time, the writers demonize Eve by alienating her from Duane and his gay friends. Unlike Lerner, the authors obviously concluded that it was preferable to have a predatory straight villain than a predatory bisexual in 1970. Their choice was astute. Of the three musicals I've discussed in this chapter, Applause was by far the most popular and financially successful. The show managed to negotiate a careful balancing act. It capitalized on a built-in gay audience from the film, a gay cult classic, while simultaneously appealing to the values of a mainstream, straight audience--and titillating them at the same time.

Comden and Green break musical theatre tradition by creating Duane, an overtly gay character who is not an over-the-top screaming queen, a figure of ridicule, or a villain. In the film, loveable, tough Thelma Ritter played Margo's loyal, wise-cracking maid with the heart of gold, who, incidentally, is the first to recognize Eve's treachery. Comden and Green turned the Thelma Ritter character into Duane. As originally played by Lee Roy Reams, Duane was rather nondescript. True, he is a hairdresser, a stereotypical profession for a gay man, but he is primarily of interest in his openness about his sexual identity and in his loyalty to Margo.

Duane's sexuality is established early in the script:

Margo: Well, I deserve a good time tonight! Duane, how'd you like to

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escort two lonely ladies out on the town?

Duane: I've got a date.

Margo: Bring him along![116]

This is a laugh line, of course, but, in 1970, it also brought a degree of shock mixed with recognition that gays *were* making themselves known and emerging from the closet. Margo's open acceptance of Duane's sexuality was fresh and topical for 1970 Broadway audiences.

Unlike Sebastian Baye, Duane is loving, trustworthy, and proud of his sexuality When told that Margo's new show has received rave critical notices, he hugs her and jokingly remarks, "Good! Now I can buy that fun fur I've been laughing at! I'll put water on for your Sanka."[117] Although the character is explicitly gay, Comden and Green create no laughs at his expense, as Lerner does with Sebastian Baye. Instead, Duane functions as a tool to keep the plot moving. He is the first to warn Margo of Eve's usurpation and treachery:

Duane: I saw her at Joe Allen's last night. She was table-for-twoing it with everybody's favorite producer.

Margo: You don't like her, do you? (Duane rolls his eyes heavenward in disgust.) But Duane, she marvelous! She only thinks of me.

Duane: Let's say she thinks only about you. Studying you. The way you

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[116] Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Applause. Great Musicals of the American Theatre, volume two, edited by Stanley Richards (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Books, 1977), 473.

[117] Comden and Green, 477.

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walk, the way you talk, the way you dress. . .[118]

This dialogue is taken verbatim from Thelma Ritter's dialogue in the film. How can one make the post-Stonewall homosexual more loveable and less threatening than cloning him as Thelma Ritter?

What Comden and Green have done is literalize identity in Applause. Unlike the texts of Company and Coco, which are enigmatic about their central characters, the text of Applause literalizes the sexuality of Eve and Duane. The wild card, however, is Margo, and this is where the text is incomplete. True, Margo is heterosexual, and the plot tells us that she ultimately retires from the glories of the American musical theatre to marry Bill Sampson and live happily in the country. But where the text is incomplete is the necessity for an over-the-top, old fashioned, larger than life diva to play Margo. If the text closes the sexuality of the characters, it reverts back to the kind of performer as co-creator so popular in the pre-Rodgers and Hammerstein non-integrated musical. Applause is a show that depends on a star performer. Writing of Broadway divas, John Clum accurately assesses Bacall's contribution to the original production:

> In this year after Stonewall, the creators of Applause acknowledged the relationship between diva and gay men. . . It was a Grand Musical Debut for a camp figure, forties film siren Lauren Bacall. Bacall, another Broadway baritone, can't carry a tune, and her voice sounds lower than that of her leading man, Len Cariou. She can't really dance. She is a Presence, which means most of the musical work goes to the supporting

[118] Ibid., 490.

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> cast. Bacall begins a number, but the ensemble quickly takes over. Her one ballad, "Hurry Back," is a dull, two-note affair for a singer with two notes. But Bacall is a celebrity, a star at a time in which there is a dire shortage of musical stars. And she represents those two essential aspects of the Broadway diva. She is a figure of nostalgia and she is a survivor in a show about survival.[119]

Bacall can get away with staying up all night and dancing with gypsies at a gay bar, while managing to reassure straight audiences that ultimately marriage to a good man and a house with a white picket fence is better than being a celebrity. Like the vaudeville and burlesque stars of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, and like the great female musical theatre stars of the 1950s and 1960s, she was able to control her audiences by negotiating their differences and appealing to a wide variety of spectators and readings. Bacall is enigmatic and mysterious. That is the baggage she brings with her onstage. One remembers her famous line about whistling to Bogart: just put your lips together and blow. One also remembers her campy portrayal of Amy in the film Young Man With A Horn (1950), in which she played a confused artist who couldn't decide if she preferred men or women while she was married to Kirk Douglas. The intertextuality she brings from these film performances are part of her star persona. If the Comden/Green text defines Margo as heterosexual, Bacall transcends categories and boundaries in an older tradition of musical comedy. As Clive Barnes described her in the New York Post, "Miss Bacall is probably going to be the Marlene Dietrich of the 1980s--she has that same enchantingly cool

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[119] Clum, Something for the Boys, 180.

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asexual sexuality."[120] Significantly, when the show was revived in the mid-1990s, it starred Stephanie Powers and died a quick death on the road. Although not open in the sense of the texts of Company or Coco, Applause is an incomplete text without a powerhouse, over-the-top star performance.

One can criticize Company and Coco for copping out in performance, for refusing to deal with the issues of sexual identity raised in their texts. But the explicit is not always as interesting as the ambiguous, or as lifelike. Rigid sexual identity in the musical theatre, unlike that of the non-musical theatre, precludes those sparkling double entendres that made Lorenz Hart, Cole Porter, and Noel Coward masters of the form. It also negates the kind of fluidity of identity and suggestive sexual playfulness intrinsic to a tradition that includes writers like Moss Hart and Cole Porter, who used double entendres to play with coded messages about sexuality and gender, and performers like Jolson, Cantor, Merman, Mary Martin and Carol Channing, whose identity was playful, unstable, and characterized by fluidity and ambiguity of gender and ethnicity. In terms of text, which is dependent on performance and reception, all three musicals are incomplete and open. It will be exciting to see how new generations choose to deal with their ambiguities.

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[120] Steven Suskin, More Opening Nights on Broadway: A Critical Quotebook of the Musical Theatre, 1965-1981 (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 61.

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Conclusion

In arguing that the text is innately open, incomplete, and inextricably linked with performance, reception, and historical relativism, I've focused the last chapter on musicals from a specific cultural moment that deal with issues of gender. I could just as easily have picked integrated musicals that deal with problems of class stratification, like My Fair Lady (1956), or integrated musicals that deal with issues of race and ethnicity, like West Side Story (1957), and frame them in their given cultural moments. My point here is that gender, class, ethnicity, and race are all part of the incompleteness and messiness of American identity, which the musical has typically addressed, from the doubling and double doubling of minstrelsy to the era of the non-integrated musical, where stars playfully performed a variety of fluid, ever-changing identities, to the integrated musical, which deliberately tackles social problems in a popular culture framework. Musicals, both integrated and non-integrated, are markers of shifting notions of American identity throughout the twentieth century.

What has characterized the musical is its melding of text, performance, and reception to create meaning within specified historical contexts. As times change, musicals of the past will be subject to historical relativism and will need to be reimagined for different cultural moments. Although one begins to see this happening with Broadway revivals, the concept is difficult to fathom in terms of a form that is relatively so young and still tied to the notion of definitive productions. The integrated musical, after all, is approximately half a century old. A generation exists that remembers the original

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production of Oklahoma!. Writing about musicals and putting them in perspective is akin to evaluating the significance of the Shakespearean canon for a generation that remembered Richard Burbage's Hamlet.

Musicals, whether integrated or non-integrated, are also characterized by their acknowledgment of the complexity of American identity and their playfulness towards this complexity. As a popular art form, even the most serious musicals often offer happy endings. These happy endings inevitably suggest that there are no insuperable class barriers in America, and that all ethnicities, races, and genders can triumph and transcend perceived notions of identity through will and desire. These happy endings are deceptive, however, just as happy endings are deceptive in Euripides' plays and Shakespeare's comedies. According to William Dean Howells, "What the American public always wants is a tragedy with a happy ending."[1] Musicals are consistent with this theory. Just as the deus ex machina at the end of a play by Euripides only highlights the disturbing and seemingly insolvable problems raised during the course of the drama, musicals are far more interesting for the provocative issues they raise in terms of American identity than for the happy endings they tack on for the final curtain. Like most works of art, musicals thrive on ambiguity, incompleteness, and openness. Their lifeline depends on wedding text with performance, reception, and historical subjectivity. By privileging only the text in such a collaborative form, historians destroy what makes musical theatre alive and vital: its complex relation to its historical moment of performance.

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[1] Quoted in Edith Wharton, A Backward Glance (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), 147.

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Appendix

Texts, Videotapes, Kinescopes

Since the dissertation mentions over a hundred years worth of musicals, if I cited each text separately, the bibliography would be a book in itself. The following libraries contain the libretti, scores, kinescopes, videotapes, films, or recordings of most of the musicals covered. In cases where I go into particular detail about a musical, I include the text, kinescope, videotape, film, or recording in the bibliography. I have included interviews in the bibliography as well. Many kinescopes of musicals that were produced on television are available by title at the Museum of Television and Radio in New York and in Chicago. During the 1950s and 1960s, particularly, televised versions of Broadway musicals were frequently produced on series like the Hallmark Hall of Fame, Producers' Showcase, Max Liebman Presents, and the Colgate Comedy Hour. Frequently, shows are truncated, but they nevertheless offer the opportunity to see many stars at mid-century, some of whom perform their signature roles. Videotaped Broadway and off-Broadway shows can be seen by appointment at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Vintage films of Broadway musicals from the 1920s and 1930s can be seen by appointment at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and at the Library of Congress in Washington.

Libraries

Columbia University: Butler Library
Joseph Urban Collection

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Library of Congress
- Film Archives
- Leonard Bernstein Collection
- Bob-Fosse-Gwen Verdon Collection
- Victor Herbert Collection
- Rodgers and Hammerstein Collection

Museum of Modern Art
- Film Division

Museum of the City of New York
- Theatre Collection

Museum of Television and Radio, New York and Chicago

New York Public Library of Performing Arts at Lincoln Center
- Billy Rose Theatre Collection

New York Public Library: 42 Street Research Branch
- Manuscript and Newspaper Division

Shubert Archive

Harold Washington Library: Chicago

Recordings

Original cast recordings are a significant source of information about musicals. It is beyond the parameters of this dissertation to list all available cast recordings, and against the interests of scholarship to list a selection of my favorites. The following are discographies of musical comedies, operettas, revues, and integrated musicals that should prove helpful, although, to my knowledge, the most recent discography stops at 1996 and none are absolutely complete.

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For recordings of early performances of musical comedy and operetta, see Music of the New York Stage (Pearl CD GEMM CDS9050-2; 9053-8; 9056-8; 9059-61. This is a twelve CD collection and includes recordings of performers like Weber and Fields, Bert Williams, Lillian Russell, Nora Bayes, George S. Cohan, as well as performances by members of the original Broadway casts of early musicals by Cohan, Victor Herbert, Irving Berlin, and Jerome Kern

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