UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Musical Representation of Asian Characters in the Musicals of Richard Rodgers

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in

Music

by

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The Dissertation of Carla M. Ponti is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Musical Representation of Asian Characters in the Musicals of Richard Rodgers

by

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The study of the American musical is emerging in two different research streams. The first treats the musical as an aesthetic object and applies traditional methods of structure and historical analysis. The second treats the musical as a cultural product representing the goals and interests of a particular power structure, and applies new methods of sociopolitical and cultural analysis. A small number of scholars, like

Raymond Knapp, are connecting the musical structures in the scores of Broadway musicals with their sociopolitical considerations. Even fewer scholars, like Graham Wood, are connecting specific musical structures with dramatic functions across a corpus of scores.

In this study, I will demonstrate how "orientalist" musical features in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* (Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Michener 1949), *The King and I* (Rodgers, Hammerstein, Sirmay, and Landon 1951/2005), and *Flower Drum Song* (Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Fields 1959) are used to portray Asian characters—Tonkinese, Thai, and Chinese Americans—and dramatize their actions and struggles. Orientalist musical features are those Western appropriations, inventions, and musical clichés which Western composers use to represent characters from Asian locales without having to interact with actual indigenous musics. These features, like other orientalist usages, are a way of "dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (Said 2003, 3). Some typical orientalist features include unusual modes, scales, instrumentation, and so forth. Rodgers' use of these features in characterization has consistent patterns across his corpus of works with Hammerstein and in his one Asian-themed musical with Lorenz Hart.

These features are dramatically linked to issues of cultural assimilation, especially in *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song*. The Western hegemonic project represented in *The King and I* is connected to the same types of musical features and patterns of usage as the American melting pot project represented in *Flower Drum Song*. These types of assimilation to Western ways and values are further connected to the theory of Andrea Most (2004) who regards the Broadway musical as representing

the complexities of Jewish assimilation in America. I demonstrate that the use of orientalist musical features dramatizes a particular perspective on assimilation, and that *Flower Drum Song* actually rejects the notion of total assimilation in favor of community.

CHAPTER ONE:

DEFINING AN APPROACH

Introduction

Music scholars have just begun to seriously study the American musical. Research by traditional musicologists and music theorists has blossomed in the past decade-and-a-half, after having been virtually non-existent for most of the twentieth century.[1] However, this research is emerging as the traditional and new approaches to music research are struggling with each other for relevance in the field of musicology. Traditional historical musicology and music theory typically have been applied to a narrow band of classical European and American art music works, and research techniques have included qualitative analysis and interpretation of composer's scores, as well as the writing of histories and composers' biographies using original source material. The new musicology, on the other hand, has been applied to both (Western) classical and popular forms, and its techniques have involved sociopolitical critique using the tools of critical and cultural theory.[2]

[1] As musicologist Geoffrey Block, a specialist in Broadway musicals, asserts, "In the early 1970s graduate students in historical musicology in many programs were strongly discouraged from studying American music of any kind" (Block 1997, xiv). Lawson-Peebles (1996c) points out that the study of Broadway musicals was eschewed on the grounds of "aesthetic autonomy," a concept which "demoted" the music of Broadway musicals "to a craft or...to the worse status of a production-line object" (7). This left the documentation and analysis of the musical to "aficionados" (Wood 2000, 29), some of whom were better than others and most of whom were connected to the theater or were theater critics (Block 1997, xv).

[2] The term *critical theory* refers to the sociopolitical/historical critiques found in the work of the Frankfurt school along with the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and related scholars. The term *cultural theory*, which emerges in the work of British scholars like Stuart Hall, is a socioculturally-based critique drawing from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. Both of these "schools" take an approach to music that involves its role in society, culture and politics.

Broadway music exists in the gulf between classical and popular forms. The songs from the musicals of Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, and Rodgers and Hammerstein, for example, were considered popular music in their own time, although as this music has aged, it has lost both the status and stigma of immediate, current popularity. However, Broadway music is also scored music, written by composers who were typically (though not always) classically trained and whose compositional methods drew on Western art music traditions. This dual nature of Broadway music may be partially responsible for the lack of theoretical attention in previous music scholarship. As a popular music deriving from Western Romantic (tonal) practices, Broadway music could not be considered an autonomous aesthetic object that "advanced" the Western music tradition with sonic constructions or techniques acknowledged as "original." As a deliberately constructed commercial music with specific authorship, Broadway songs did not fit the approach of (older) ethnomusicology, in which music has been typically studied as an organically-derived cultural (folk) practice whose authorship is often anonymous or attributed to the community.[3]

The advent of the new musicology, with its politically-based analysis of musical features, opened a way to examine the scores of Broadway music and interpret their features as sociopolitically meaningful. However, even the newer critical analysis of Broadway music has lagged, due in part to the lack of previous existing score analyses, as well as to the fate of timing: by the time the critical analysis of popular music emerged, the classic American musicals were no longer popular

[3] This approach has changed greatly in recent years, and ethnomusicology now regards American musicals as part of a larger study of music in American culture (Koskoff 2005).

music. As a result, much of the sociopolitical critique of the musical has come from fields outside of music, and this research has often had the first word in establishing what was important about musicals. Much of the critique of American musical theater has come out of theater and film criticism, American and political studies, women's and ethnic studies, and English departments.[4] The focus of this research has typically been on the words, the visuals, the historical and social background of a given show, and the politics of its performance, as opposed to the actual musical sounds.

Current scholarship in musical theater has emerged in two different and often completely separate research streams. The first reflects the interests of traditional musicologists and theorists, for whom the musical is regarded as an aesthetic object. The second reflects the interests of the cultural or critical theorists (most, but not all, outside of music departments), for whom the musical is a cultural product created within a particular sociopolitical context. The goals, approaches, and data chosen for analysis differ greatly in each research stream, and the results are often difficult to reconcile. Studies from traditional musicological and music theory circles tend to de-emphasize the large and heated sociopolitical issues (past and present) surrounding the creation and performance of musicals, and they typically apply traditional methodological tools of score analysis inherited from the study of opera or Western classical instrumental music. Analyses emerging from cultural and critical theorists, on the other hand, tend to minimize the analysis of "the notes on the page," focusing heavily on the historical politics behind the musicals and behind the American society

[4] For example, see Breon (1995), Donaldson (1990), Houston (2005), Jones (2003), Klein (2003), Ma (2003), McConachie (1994), Most (2000), Most (2004), and Rogin (1998), among many others.

producing them. These studies typically rely heavily on constructs and approaches derived from critical theory, which have sometimes been applied to the study of music with less comprehensiveness or precision than necessary.[5]

The current study is an attempt to bring the concerns of these two research streams together in a principled theoretical way, in which both the analysis of musical scores and the critique of the society from which these musicals emerged have equal weight. The musical score, representing the aims of the composer to dramatize character development and plot points, is considered intertwining and indivisible from the societal politics surrounding the musical. This study will take a semiotic view of the "notes on the page" and will demonstrate their referentiality, both within the musical itself and in relation to the larger sociopolitical context.

The level of analysis will not be a single song or a single show, but a corpus of work from a particular composer with a particular lyricist, from which a group of shows with similar themes can be analyzed. I will consider the works of a particular composer (with lyricist) as a single system, which can be analyzed internally for particular compositional musical practices. These practices can be viewed as a musical vocabulary, and the distribution of certain musical features from this vocabulary can be connected to certain sociopolitical perspectives, aiding in the analysis of characters and themes within the drama. With this approach, described in detail at the end of this chapter, I will show how concrete musical structures carry sociopolitical weight within and across a set of musicals, and how certain small- and large-scale musical structures

[5] According to Clayton and Zon, some of the early applications of the work of Edward Said, for example, lack historical knowledge of the real encounters between East and West, to the extent that "ignorance has been erroneously read back into the past by some historians" (Clayton and Zon 2007, 1).

can convey or reflect the political ideology of the composer or the composer/lyricist team.

In this chapter, I will outline some of the specific research being done on the American musical, in both traditional musicology and music theory approaches and in the area of critical theory. I will demonstrate the positive and negative points of the different approaches, and will also discuss what these approaches leave out. I will then provide a rationale for trying to combine these approaches, and show why information gleaned from sources based both in traditional and critical theory is crucial when teaching and performing this repertory. Finally, I will describe the approach I will be using in this study, ending with a detailed outline of the study itself.

Brief Literature Review

In this section, I will take a brief look at the general research trends in traditional music scholarship circles and in scholarship based on critical theory. I will especially focus on the research related to composer Richard Rodgers and the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, since these are the works that I will analyze in this study.

Broadway Music in Traditional Musicology

Traditional Western musicology treats music as an art object created by (genius) composers, and the scholarship produced is typically a historical canon of "great" works and biographies of the composers who created them. While traditional musicologists do acknowledge the influence of historical context and biographical

events on music, musical works themselves are not typically scoured for outside political or cultural signifiers related to politics and ideologies.[6]

The analysis of Broadway musicals has not yet reached this level of sophistication, and, in fact, much of what is being done now is an attempt to create a scholarly history of the musical from sources of varying reliability. Geoffrey Block, known for his work on the American musical, sums up these sources:

> Before the 1990s, books on Broadway musicals were almost without exception written by theater historians and critics. For the most part these journalistic accounts typically covered a large number of musicals somewhat briefly and offered a useful and entertaining mixture of facts, gossip and criticism (Block 1997, xv).

There are some good examples of this kind of writing in Taylor (1953), Ewen (1968), Marx and Clayton (1977), Mordden (1992), and Wilk (1993), among many others, including the ubiquitous "coffee table" books of varying quality.[7] Block traces serious research on the musical to the following works, both by musicologists: Joseph Swain's *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (1990) and Stephen Banfield's *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (1994) (Block 1997, xv). Together, these two books have set the current parameters for serious research on the musical from traditional musicology.

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[6] Historically, the notion of "culture" was left to ethnomusicology, a field specifically created for the study of all non-Western music.

[7] An exception to Block's rule is Gerald Mast's *Can't Help Singin': The American Musical on Stage and Screen* (1987), which attempts a cohesive history of American musicals, from *The Black Crook* (considered the first American musical) through Sondheim. Mast was Chairman of the English department at the University of Chicago and was known for establishing the study of film as a legitimate academic discipline (Obituary of Gerald Mast 1988). However, Mast's book maintains the kind of chatty, entertaining tone that many non-scholarly books on musical theater tend to use, and as such, is a kind of hybrid.

Swain is notable because, in surveying fifteen "important" American musicals,[8] he provides actual scores of the songs and makes aesthetic judgments on the music itself. Swain's assessments are based on opera standards as represented by Joseph Kerman's *Opera as Drama*, which views the composer as the dramatist (Swain 1990, 3-4). The operatic ideal of integration of all elements of the show is a guiding principle for Swain: the composer is judged on how well the music develops characters and plot, and how well this is integrated with song lyrics, dialogue and dance. Yet, Swain's use of operatic criteria puts the musical at an immediate disadvantage:

> Yet Richard Rodgers and Sondheim cannot be equated with Verdi and Wagner just because their ideals of musical drama are similar. There is an essential difference that lies not so much in whether there is success or failure as in what is attempted. The most compelling Broadway show has a certain sense of limited scope never heard in a masterwork of European opera. It is not that the show has failed: it simply did not try to do as much (Swain 1990, 11).

A justification for the use of operatic criteria is certainly connected to the desires of Broadway composers, lyricists, and librettists themselves to create a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*[9] in the American musical (McMillin 2006, 3). Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein,[10] and Richard Rodgers[11] were all trailblazers in this area, and, not surprisingly, Swain labels *Show Boat* (Kern and Hammerstein 1927) and *Oklahoma!*

---

[8] These musicals are not unusual choices: *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!*, *My Fair Lady*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *A Chorus Line*, etc. are all considered groundbreaking shows by different sources, and they were all financially successful.

[9] *Gesamtkunstwerk*, "total art work," is a term coined by Wagner to signify how his music dramas combine all the arts (music, words, dance, etc.) to provide a unified effect.

[10] Hammerstein's grandfather, Oscar Hammerstein I, was an opera impresario who lost a fortune in the art, but at its height, Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company was competing against the Metropolitan Opera. Mast describes Oscar Hammerstein as having been driven by the Wagnerian ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* translated into American popular tastes (Mast 1987, 201).

[11] This is well documented in many places. See, for example, McMillin (2006, 1). An extended discussion of the operatic ideal and *Oklahoma!* can be found in Rishoi (2002).

(Rodgers and Hammerstein 1943) as "First Maturity" and "Second Maturity," respectively, of the integrated (operatic) musical in his book. Most histories of musical theater regard the "integrated" musical as a point of faith, tracing its development from Kern's Princess Theater shows through Rodgers and Hammerstein.[12]

Swain's work is analytical and aesthetic in focus, providing little historical background on the musicals. According to Block, Swain does not take advantage of the information available on the backgrounds of these musicals, much of which has been provided by the theater historians and critics outside of music circles (Block 1992, 71). Perhaps this is why Swain sometimes gets historical facts wrong, like identifying American author Margaret Landon[13] as a "British novelist" (Swain 1990, 259). Swain's interpretation of Broadway music is idiosyncratic, as is his thematic categorization of the musicals by topics that he finds meaningful but which do not necessarily relate logically to the history of musical theater.[14] In regarding Broadway music as worthy of study, Swain still must regard it as less worthy than classical, Western art music.

Unlike Swain, Banfield does not accept the operatic ideal for musicals in general. Instead, Banfield takes the musical on its own terms, delineating its

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[12] However, this view of the "integrated" musical has been challenged in the academic literature by Scott McMillin and, to a certain extent, by Stephen Banfield. McMillin (2006) spends his entire first chapter arguing that "the musical depends more on the differences that make the close fit interesting than on the suppression of difference in a seamless whole" (2). McMillin is a professor of English, and his book does not contain musical analysis. Perhaps being unencumbered by operatic research, McMillin is better able to perceive and allow for these differences.

[13] Landon is the author of *Anna and the King of Siam* (2000), the novel upon which *The King and I* was based.

[14] Some of Swain's topics: America's Folk Opera, Morality Play as Musical, Shakespeare as Musical, The Ethnic Musical, Myth as Musical, etc. "The Ethnic Musical" contains a hodge-podge of: Rodgers and Hammerstein's Asian musicals, *Fiorello!*, *Fidler on the Roof*, and other musicals whose main characters are "ethnic" in some way.

differences from opera, and pointing out what he considers to be an obvious superiority: a music that is more "dramatically agile... more epistemologically aware" than opera (Block 1997, 126). The rejection of a blanket operatic ideal for musical theater (and its music) allows for a questioning of the idea of "seamlessness" in the musical.[15] As a historical musicologist, Banfield focuses on the composers of musicals, like Sondheim and Jerome Kern,[16] but he allows for the presence of different "voices" in a musical, especially that of the lyricist. Banfield has actually written about the connection between the composer and lyricist in a very perceptive way, pointing out that in a songwriting collaboration, it can be difficult to assign specific authorship or creative credit (Banfield 1996). He also ponders why many Broadway song lyrics seem flat or even insipid on the written page, and yet seem far more expressive and profound when joined with the music for which they were written. In an article on Sondheim, who is both composer and lyricist, Banfield proposes that:

> ...[V]ernacular song, especially when it aspires to the quality of wit, can be based on an interplay between verbal and musical factors giving rise to a unitary perception dependent upon them both. The art of producing this unitary perception is rarely subjected to analysis and appears to have no recognized name other than the inconveniently connotative and workaday term "songwriting." I suggest that we call it *melopoetics* [sic] (Banfield 1996, 158).

This idea of unitary perception in Broadway (or other popular) songs would actually lead to a music scholarship that focuses on songwriting teams and not composers in isolation. Yet, this is not where Banfield has developed the bulk of his scholarship.[17]

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[15] Banfield points out that many operas are not strictly integrated and offers the example of Mozart's *Cosi Fan Tutte*, in which a light comic plot is paired with often deep emotional music.
[16] See Banfield (2006). He has also written a book on British composer Gerald Finzi (2000).
[17] My guess is that this has to do with a lack of a formal theoretical framework which connects linguistic and musical structures and the "unitary" structure their combination would create. Banfield is

Unlike Swain, Banfield does take advantage of original source material in *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (1994), applying a historical musicological approach, which, while commonplace in the study of classical music, had not yet been systematically applied to the American musical before his book. Banfield looks at "musical sketches, plans, and rejected drafts," among other material (Block 1996, 125), an approach that one sees taken up later by other musicologists.[18]

In trying to find a place for the study of American musical theater in traditional musicology, Swain and Banfield have taken very different approaches: Swain is looking for a way to evaluate the musical aesthetically, using operatic criteria as a guide; while Banfield is applying historical musicological methods (use of original sources, developing composers' biographies, etc.) to develop a chronicle of the music and musicians in musicals. Present in both approaches is the desire to create a canon of composers and works, which can be studied, debated, and used to inform performance.

The musicological research that has followed in the wake of Swain and Banfield has focused on the creation of canonized composers: the Yale Broadway Masters series contains biographies of Sigmund Romberg, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Jerome Kern, Leonard Bernstein, Frank Loesser, George Gershwin, Cole Porter,

---

also making a cognitive claim with "unitary perception," which may indicate a need for a theory informed by the cognitive or neurosciences.

[18] See, for example, Lovensheimer (2003), which traces the drafts of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, demonstrating changes in plot and characterization from Hammerstein's notes on James Michener's book (1984) to the final product.

Irving Berlin, and Kander and Ebb.[19] All of these, except the last, deal with composers in isolation, though Cole Porter, Frank Loesser, and Irving Berlin, like Sondheim, wrote both music and lyrics. The process of canonization is also reflected in the new anthologies of the Broadway musical that highlight shows like *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!*, and *West Side Story* in an overall history of the form.[20]

Judging by recent dissertations, the research is still finding its way. Many dissertations about musicals are still being done outside music or without the focus on musical scores. Two dissertations that deal directly with the music in musicals are Wood (2000) and Lovensheimer (2003); the former deals with chorus structure in the work of Richard Rodgers, and the latter provides a Banfield-like historical analysis of *South Pacific*. Both of these will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Two.

Broadway Music in Traditional Music Theory

Traditional music theory focuses entirely on "the notes on the page" and applies to the musical object structural analyses, based on both available theoretical tools and the time period of the musical piece. Music theorist Allen Forte stands out as a major figure in the traditional, structural examination of the American popular song, sometimes referred to as the "Tin Pan Alley" song. A Schenkerian theorist, Forte's more usual line of research has been classical Western art music. In the 1990s, however, Forte became interested in the American popular song. His first foray into this area was an article on Cole Porter, in which he applied Schenkerian analysis to Porter's music and proved Porter's songs to be, in his words, "of the highest artistic

[19] The composer/lyricist team of John Kander (composer) and Fred Ebb (lyricist) is best known for the musicals *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, as well as the song "New York, New York."

[20] For example, see Everett and Laird (2008).

caliber" (Forte 1993, 644). However, Forte did examine the lyrics as well, and at times connected the "large-scale linear features, motivic detail and idiosyncratic harmonic motions" (608) with analysis of Porter's lyrics.[21]

Forte went on to write two books (1995 and 2001) on the subject of popular American songs from the first half of the twentieth century. Forte (1995) covers the major Tin Pan Alley/Broadway composers, analyzing works that Forte says he chose for reasons of his own (3). He does provide a background as to the origins of many idiomatic features that created the American popular sound in these pieces: ragtime rhythms, the influence of the cut-time foxtrot, and the harmonies, many drawn from ragtime and jazz (6). The book is Schenkerian in approach, and, primarily, this approach acts as a litmus test of complexity, after which, a song may be deemed canonical, or of high "artistic caliber."

A more recent study by music theorist Michael Buchler[22] is more useful for understanding the Broadway song, especially in context. Though also a Schenkerian, Buchler develops an analysis of Frank Loesser's dramatic use of modulation (Buchler 2008). Buchler points out that while seemingly a "facile subject of inquiry" (35), Loesser's use of modulation actually gains importance and complexity when considered with his lyrics and the function of the songs in their dramatic contexts. Buchler covers Loesser's technique of dramatic intensification through modulation in

[21] It is interesting that the most detailed formalistic analyses of complete Broadway songs (words and lyrics) by traditional music scholars are of single composer/lyricists, like Sondheim (Banfield 1996), Porter (Forte 1993), and Loesser (Buchler 2008). Perhaps it is a desire for the "seamless," the "unified," in music scholarship, and for music unaffected by the words and thoughts of another lyricist, which might interfere with or change a composer's compositional practices.

[22] Buchler is currently Associate Professor of Music Theory at Florida State University. His home page is: http://myweb.fsu.edu/mbuchler/.

four songs occurring in two musicals: *Guys and Dolls* and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. Buchler pays special attention to Loesser's musical preparations for these modulations and cites these as preventing Loesser from sounding clichéd when he modulates for dramatic effect (59).

Of the two theoretical approaches, Buchler's is more appropriate for an examination of Broadway music in its context—the show itself. In this approach Buchler mirrors opera scholars Abbate (1989) and Platoff (1990) in connecting the music to its dramatic and theatrical purposes. Yet even Buchler feels the need to assure his readers that there is indeed musical complexity connected to the dramatic uses of Broadway music (Buchler 2008, 35, 49), although that may say more about his readers than the quality of his analysis or the music he is analyzing.

Broadway Music and Musicals in Critical Theory/Culturally-Based Approaches

As mentioned previously, critical and culturally-based approaches to the Broadway musical have primarily occurred outside of music departments. However, there are a handful of critical scholars within music, like Raymond Knapp, whose two books on the American musical (2005 and 2006) take a critical approach from a musicologist's perspective. There are several key differences between the approaches outside music scholarship and those within it. In many ways, the scholars outside music have a much more sophisticated understanding of both the musical as a form and of the musical's role in its context and society. On the other hand, scholars outside music do not always understand the subtleties of the song forms, keys, and musical gestures. Finally, some scholars outside music are quite willing to condemn musicals for their racism, sexism, and lack of political sophistication to the extent that one

might wonder if these musicals should not be shelved completely, never to be performed again. Within musicology, critical approaches are new, and someone like Knapp often has to walk a fine line between describing musicals as an American art form and explaining all of their negative sociopolitical ramifications. In this section, I will describe some of the approaches emerging both outside and inside musicology for the analysis of the musical. This will not be an exhaustive survey, but will identify key types of approaches.

The musical as an art form. We have already discussed the approach that traditional musicologists have taken to the musical as a (musical) art form, but much of the discussion of the musical as a theatrical form occurs, not surprisingly, in the work of theater scholars. There are of course a number of histories of musical theater which track changes in the musical as a dramatic form. A good recent example in this genre is Sheldon Patinkin's *"No Legs, No Jokes, No Chance:" A History of the American Musical Theater* (2008).[23] Patinkin's history is intended as a textbook and covers an exhaustive number of musicals by time period. In this almost-six-hundred-page book, Patinkin tries to cover the musical from its beginnings to its "splintering" in the 1970s (and beyond), while providing bits of sociohistorical information. He gives summaries of plots and major songs, and provides photographs and information on certain theater people (like actors and directors). *"No Legs, No Jokes, No Chance"* is primarily an overview of musicals for an undergraduate course, but it is so complete that it is a valuable reference as well. What is most important from a scholarly

[23] The title is a reference to a comment made by columnist Walter Winchell concerning *Oklahoma!* (Patinkin 2008, 18). The Winchell phrase, actually a cleaned-up version of producer Michael Todd's "no jokes, no tits, no chance," is well remembered not only for having been wrong, but for having underestimated the response of the American audience to "clean" entertainment (Fordin 1995, 199).

standpoint is the way in which Patinkin subdivides the history of musical theater. Patinkin begins with a chapter on *Oklahoma!*, thereby giving prominence to what Swain calls musical theater's "Second Maturity" (see the discussion in the **Broadway Music in Traditional Musicology** section earlier in this chapter) of the American musical:

> *Oklahoma!* was a coalescence of all the best ideas that had been developing over the preceding forty years for how to write a musical. It was the true beginning of the contemporary American musical theater...From 1943 on, the musical began to take itself seriously as an art form (Patinkin 2008, 20).

The art form that *Oklahoma!* draws on is operetta, and Patinkin discusses the musical's similarities to, and differences from, operetta (Patinkin 2008, 12). The major differences include "simple" and "unsophisticated" lyrics and Rodgers' use of "American pop idioms of the day" (12). Patinkin does not mention how hard Hammerstein labored to create the "simple, unsophisticated" sound (Fordin 1995, 187-188). Nor does he notice how historical Rodgers' song forms are: Curly's cowboy song, the two-step "Kansas City," the waltzes, and Jud's dirge ("Pore Jud is Daid") were all musical anachronisms by the 1940s.

Nonetheless, it is an article of faith in most scholarship on musicals that *Oklahoma!*, the icon of the integrated musical, is a major watershed. Following this belief, Patinkin's book leads readers from the early days of vaudeville, minstrelsy, and operetta (33-54) up to *Oklahoma!*, and then leads readers away from *Oklahoma!* and the "Golden Age of the Broadway Musical" (267) to the "Fade-Out—Fade-In" of the 1960s and "The Splintering of the Form" in the 1970s and beyond. Patinkin's history of the musical reflects the problem—in histories and on Broadway itself—of accepting

the integrated musical of Rodgers and Hammerstein as the iconic Broadway form instead of seeing it as a product of its time and of its practitioners. Patinkin tells us that "the light-hearted, tuneful, romantic and sophisticated musical comedy was dead" (519) and gives us his view of the musical at the turn of this last century:

> Pseudo-operas, and other through-composed works, plotless and substanceless [sic] shows, and heavy dramas were what constituted most new Broadway musicals. Hardly anything was funny—the unintentional legacy of Oscar Hammerstein (with Kern and with Rodgers) and of his protégé Stephen Sondheim... (Patinkin 2008, 519).

Much of Patinkin's argument here is based on composers and librettists trying to extend the integrated musical into (almost) opera; there is a sense of balance lost and of trying to make the form carry too much gravitas. Patinkin also acknowledges the lack of a general "homogeneous" audience for Broadway shows as a problem, a result of "splintering" in musical tastes (519). What Patinkin does not mention is the general "splintering" or "boutiquing" in entertainment of all kinds. The late 1970s was the beginning of cable television and home video, which provided many more entertainment choices for American audiences, and this "boutique" effect has only grown over the past thirty years.

In writing an overall history of the form, Patinkin represents a more traditional perspective on the integrated musical. The late Scott McMillin[24] represents another. Former professor of English at Cornell, McMillin historically contextualizes the idea of integration in his book, *The Musical as Drama* (2006):

> Wagner's influence in American culture ran deep in the twentieth century. The leading aesthetic theory at the time Rodgers and

[24] McMillin died in April 2006; his book on musical theater was published posthumously (Crawford 2006).

> Hammerstein were becoming popular was the new criticism, which sought an organic wholeness in works of art, including poetry, drama, music, dance, and novels. Organic wholeness meant that the work of art should grow like fruit on the vine. Radically discordant elements could be yoked together in an integrated whole by the creativity of the artist...Thus, the best books on drama at mid-century took Wagner seriously...They also regarded the musical...hardly worth study when unity of action was the important dramatic consideration. Rodgers and Hammerstein were aware they had a cultural bias to overcome (McMillin 2006, 3-5).

McMillin regards the integrated musical as a product of a specific theory of drama dominant at a particular point in the culture. In this sense, it is neither an apex of the form nor an icon, but one way of approaching the musical.[25]

For McMillin, the key attribute of the stage musical is not integration but separation of elements:

> When a musical is working well, I feel the crackle of difference, not the smoothness of unity, even when the numbers dovetail with the book. It takes things different from one another to be integrated in the first place, and I find that the musical depends more on differences that make the close fit interesting than on the suppression of difference in a seamless whole (McMillin 2006, 2).

McMillin discusses difference in regard to the time implied by the plot (or book) and the time implied by the musical numbers (songs, dances). Although some songs advance the plot, most songs act as elaborations on the plot or change the mode of characterization (8):

> The song inserts a lyrical moment into the cause-and-effect progress of the plot, a moment that suspends book time in favor of lyric time, time organized not by cause-and-effect (which is how book time works) but by principles of repetition (which is how numbers work)...This kind of insert is the heart of the musical, any musical. It is lyrical, it gives the pleasure that follows from rhyme, melody, and meter, and it takes

[25] McMillin (2006) later points out that the film musical differs from the stage musical in that "film musicals operate on an aesthetic system different from the stage...[the film musical] is an integrated form...and it is one of the true inheritors of the Wagner aesthetic" (178).

> effect not because it blends into the plot in the spirit of integration but because it stands apart and declares that there is another order of time in theater.... (McMillin 2006, 9).

McMillin's book is chiefly an argument for difference in the Broadway musical, and he perceptively notes that difference in repetitions within songs is as crucial as the difference between songs and book (32). *The Musical as Drama* is organized thematically, with certain in-depth examples from key musicals. Unlike many theater books, McMillin actually treats certain songs in depth, mostly in regard to rhythm, lyrics, and repetition.

Patinkin and McMillin represent two very different perspectives on the Broadway musical, and have very different preferences as a result. Patinkin prefers musicals to be "light-hearted, tuneful, romantic and sophisticated" (Patinkin 2008, 519) but McMillin prefers Sondheim's self-aware musicals that "reflect on their own conventions" (McMillin 2006, xii). McMillin also makes it clear that *Oklahoma!* "was not a revolution in the musical so much as an extension of the musical's range," as were later musicals (xi). Of course McMillin and Patinkin have two different objectives: McMillin is not writing a chronological history of the genre. However, both approach the musical as an art form and both have very strong opinions that emerge in their writing.

The musical and society. One of the growing areas of Broadway scholarship relates the musical to American society. Some of these works are specifically about the musical, such as John Bush Jones', *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (2003). Jones is a theater professor, and his book regards musicals as expressing their social milieu, including specific historical events,

such as the two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the counterculture of the 1960s. Longstanding societal issues like racism are woven throughout the book as they are both reflected and challenged in musicals. Jones' book is a mix of political and social analysis as well as discussions about the backgrounds and plots of particular musicals. It is also about "musicals *as* history...as theatrical vehicles that intended [sic] to transform, not just report, the tenor of the times" (Jones 2003, 1). The advantage of a social history like this is that it allows for a more complete understanding of a musical; the discussion of *Show Boat*, for example, does well in this regard (73-78). The disadvantage is that the social history itself can be rather thin, conventional, or not well substantiated. Jones, for example, regards the 1970s as a period of "fragmentation" with the beginnings of "nostalgia" which was carried through the 1980s (Jones, 270, 305). Jones connects the "fragmented musical"—as he calls those musicals without the traditional "linear narrative plots"—to Americans having "turn[ed] their attention from public to private" in a general distancing of a "cynical" middle class from large social concerns (270-271). This is where Jones' argument becomes problematic. While he provides some documentation attesting to social attitudes of the 1970s and 1980s in some specific communities,[26] his general view of middle-class Americans of this time is drawn from a single source, political pundit David Frum (269-270). It also does not make much sense to connect this large middle-class attitude with musicals, which, by then, were suffering from a lack of middle-class attendance. In fact, it is probably true that the less musicals

[26] Communities like hippies, the New Left, and radicals (Jones 2003, 271-272) are covered in the discussion of the musicals themselves.

engaged the American people as a whole, the less they reflected its concerns in both form and content.[27] Jones also goes on to talk about the beginning of "nostalgia" in the musical from new productions like *Grease*, to revivals of older musicals. Jones connects this to "escapism" in the American middle class (305-306). A more interesting analysis here might be the role of the New York musical as a form of "tourism," and the middle-class perception of the musical as a nostalgic form in and of itself.[28]

Nonetheless, Jones' book is a useful one for introducing musicals, especially the "classic" musicals of the early- and mid-twentieth century. However, more useful for a deeper understanding of the social history surrounding musicals are books like Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (2003). Klein is a literature professor who theorizes an orientalist discourse (following Said 2003) in post-war American society, examining artifacts of the time period like foreign policy documents, newspapers and magazines, interviews, and works of art, like novels, films, and musicals. She posits a "sentimental education" of the American public in regards to Asia (Klein 2003, 41) and an "imaginary of integration" that coexisted with the "imaginary of containment" (of the Communist threat) (23-24). Klein regards certain popular entertainment as connected with encouraging feelings of "connectedness" with Asia, in particular the musicals of

[27] Had general audiences been the cause of fragmented musicals, then more popular and pervasive forms, like television shows and movies, should have been even more affected by these attitudes, which they were not.

[28] By the 1970s and 1980s, popular venues for musicals were dinner theaters or local community productions. Then as now, many of these musicals are older "classic" musicals. The 1970s might be seen as having two separate streams for musicals: those which were more experimental, and those which were targeted to tourists.

Rodgers and Hammerstein (160, 191) and the middlebrow novels of James Michener (64, 121).[29] She connects this type of entertainment with government and government-sponsored programs like the Peace Corps (83), People to People (49-56), and international adoption of Chinese children (174-179).

The advantage of Klein's approach lies in its deep interconnections and very detailed couching of both the content and social role of musicals about Asia and racial tolerance. It is also extremely well documented and Klein makes a very strong case for a discourse about Asia specific to the Cold War. The disadvantage is that musicals are so intertwined with the politics and the backgrounds of their production that they lose a sense of autonomy as artistic entities. The loss of the artwork as object, of course, is a both a risk and goal of interdisciplinary approaches.

One scholarly work that is able to connect the musical as social artifact with the musical as art object is Andrea Most's *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (2004), which demonstrates how the Broadway musical connects with the "melting pot" experiences of American Jews, who flourished in musical theater and make up many of its great names (Most 2004, 7). Dr. Most's theories will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter Five of this dissertation, but she is important in that, like Scott McMillin,[30] Dr. Most also regards difference as a crucial element of musicals: in her case, it is the difference between the self-conscious "theatrical" characters and the plot of the musical (book). According to Dr. Most, these theatrical

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[29] Klein points out that Michener's goal in promoting racial tolerance and sympathy for Asia was not "altruistic" but was "part of his effort...to keep Asia within the U.S. sphere of influence" (Klein 2003, 135).

[30] See the discussion of McMillin and his work in the section entitled **The musical as an art form** earlier in this chapter).

characters often sing numbers that transform them (temporarily) as characters into someone quite different, a practice that she connects with an engagement or struggle with the process of assimilation that Jews were undergoing in the United States (10). Dr. Most regards the very form of the musical as a representation of the struggle against essentialism in the story of Jewish American acculturation (10). She is one of the few scholars who connects the formal, aesthetic values of the musical with a particular sociohistorical context.

John Bush Jones, Christina Klein, and Andrea Most are three examples of scholars whose research focuses on the social contexts of musicals. None of these is a musicologist—Jones comes from theater, and Klein and Most, from English departments—and any analysis of the actual music of musicals is not detailed or terribly deep, though song forms and lyrics are occasionally mentioned. However, the ability of these researchers to connect themes and forms of the Broadway musical with historical events and social attitudes gives the study of the musical a great deal more depth, aiding both in the interpretation of musicals and the interpretation of society.

The musical: race, gender, politics. Much of the critical scholarship about musicals concerns their constructions of race and gender, which often reflect ideas and beliefs that are quite unacceptable by today's standards. Because of the sensitivity of race and gender issues at the current time, these studies often are more politically charged than other research, and musicals are often judged negatively on their portrayals of minorities and women. Some work is less charged: Lawson-Peebles (1996b), for example, discusses the misogyny in Cole Porter's *Kiss Me, Kate* as part of a larger high-low culture analysis of the musical, but does so matter-of-factly without

much hand-wringing.[31] Other scholars, however, are overtly hostile to certain musicals, connecting them with destructive impulses and activities in American culture as a whole. Certain musicals, like *The King and I* and *Show Boat*, are lightning rods for this kind of analysis.

The critical research on *The King and I* focuses on sexism, racism, and American hegemony in the wake of the Cold War. Theater scholar Bruce McConachie (1994) connects *The King and I* with American activity in Southeast Asia and, ultimately, with the Vietnam War.[32] Cinema scholar Laura Donaldson (1990) asserts that *The King and I* makes its main character a colonized object of white male oppression (obvious from the "male gaze" of the camera), and art historian, Kerr Houston (2005), demonstrates how the maps used in *The King and I* (film version) promote American political hegemony. Asian American studies professor, Sheng-mei Ma (2003) starts with a Richard Rodgers anecdote about learning to play "Chopsticks" on the piano and sees this as a portent for his three musicals about stereotyped Asian characters.

The critical articles on *Show Boat* focus clearly on the current racism inherent in performing the musical outside of its sociohistorical context. Theater scholar Robin Breon (1995), for example, examines a revival of *Show Boat* in Canada, and implies

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[31] The collection from which this essay comes was edited by Lawson-Peebles (1996a) and contains a great variety of critical/culturally-based research on the musical, including an analysis of Scandinavian immigrant stereotypes (Harvey 1996) and a discussion of *Porgy and Bess* as opera and "racial document" (Horn 1996). Most of the scholars in this collection are British, with the exception of two San Diego State professors.

[32] There actually is a connection between the musical and Vietnam: Kenneth Landon, husband of the author of *Anna and the King of Siam*, worked for the State Department, having been recruited by Col. William Donovan in 1941 to be an expert on Thailand and the surrounding areas. In 1954, he began to work for the National Security Council and visited Vietnam in 1960 (Wheaton College 2008; the specific information being referenced can be found at http://archon.wheaton.edu/?p=core/search&creatorid=188).

that the racial cost of performing the musical is not worth a large-scale revival. In regard to the controversy of the Canadian revival, she writes:

> In its wake is a divided community that will not heal easily. The restoration of this particular cultural artifact has been undertaken at the expense of the dignity of the local black community. Attempts to salve the wounds through a benefit concert by the cast with proceeds slated to go to the Ontario Black History Society were rejected when the membership of the OBHS refused the money and would not support the event (Breon 1995, 103).

Breon's article raises the question concerning the performance of some musicals outside of their historical contexts. Musicals like *Show Boat*, *Porgy and Bess*, *South Pacific*, and *Flower Drum Song*, which were considered anti-racist by their creators—and which may have played some role in promoting tolerance among whites—are now (and were then) offensive to the groups being depicted. As Robin Breon makes clear, "Black people have not been historically supportive of [*Show Boat*]" (94). In the case of *Flower Drum Song*, even white reviewers of the show mentioned its stereotyping[33] and Asian American activists have found the show objectionable since the 1970s (Lewis 2006, 118-119). The question of whether certain musicals should be performed at all, and if so when, is a legitimate one, and critical studies of the musical tend to place this concern front and center.

Within musicology: Knapp and critical theory. Critical theory and musicology meet in the work of Raymond Knapp, whose book *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (2005) directly addresses both historical and social concerns as well as the music itself. Knapp asserts that musicals reflect an

[33] See Crowther (1961) and Hodgens (1962) and various reviewers quoted in Lewis (2006, 116), for example.

American national identity, which is actually quite fractured. Knapp's book is thematically based, and each chapter (after an interesting introductory chapter on Tin Pan Alley) has a title that reveals the grounding of the book in critical studies: American Mythologies, Counter Mythologies, Race and Ethnicity, Exoticism, etc. While his book covers many of the same musicals appearing in more traditional anthologies, the thematic organization (as opposed to chronological) keeps the focus on how these musicals demonstrate his view of American identity and the musical.

Knapp is notable for actually discussing "the notes on the page" in great detail, and demonstrating how they carry racial coding in the use of musical features like scales, blue notes, and song types. His discussion of "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" is very thorough, combining the analysis of musical (blues) features with depiction of race, as well as exposition characterization and foreshadowing of plot in *Show Boat* (Knapp 2005, 191-192). Knapp, then, adds a dimension missing from most socially- or critically-based studies on musicals, demonstrating the ability of the score as a carrier of sociocultural information. The analyses are not always of equal depth: Knapp spends much more time on the music of *Show Boat* than on *The King and I*, for example, but his work demonstrates what an examination of the musical score can add to the interpretation of a Broadway musical.

Pedagogy: A Rationale for a More Critical Approach to the Scores of Musicals

The previous section briefly reviewed some of the representative literature on the American musical, and demonstrated how traditional music scholarship differs from social and critical approaches in focus, goals and end-product. Traditional musicologists are concerned with "elevating" the Broadway musical to a form worthy

of study and are creating canons, anthologies, and histories along with traditional forms of musical analysis. Critical and social theorists, on the other hand, regard musicals as having political and social meaning, in both the past and the present. These critiques of musicals are regarded as illuminating both the musical and the society from which it emerged.

These approaches, if left to their own paths, could result in two entirely separate scholarships on musicals. The first would preserve the Broadway musical as tradition but gloss over or minimize the presence of social injustice or racialized, stereotypical depictions, except when it is impossible to avoid, such as in the controversial use of the Gullah dialect in *Porgy and Bess*.[34] The second would regard the musical as primarily a social text and could result in a complete rejection of many musicals as insensitive (or worse) and of their composers, lyricists, and librettists as racists. Each of these approaches has implications for music pedagogy and amateur or professional performance. Pedagogy and performance programs rely on the research of musicologists to inform teaching and performance, and with traditional European classical art music, the focus has been more on form and technique than on the politics behind the music.[35] However, with the American musical, it is impossible to avoid questions of race and gender discrimination, especially in those musicals that overtly

[34] See Graziano's "Images of African Americans: African-American Musical Theater, *Show Boat* and *Porgy and Bess*" (2008, 101). The title of this article is inaccurate and ill-informed: there was, in fact, a real African American musical theater tradition, which had some success for a time. Graziano's chapter, however, is not about this tradition, but is clearly about Kern, Hammerstein, and Gershwin, and their "images" of African Americans. Also, the part of the title before the colon is missing on the page headers starting on page 91. The headers give a mistaken impression that the chapter is about genuine African American musicals.

[35] A soprano studying the role of Cio-cio San in *Madama Butterfly* has been traditionally far more concerned with interpreting Puccini than with critiquing his depiction of Japanese women.

deal with race as a theme. Once again, *Show Boat* provides the instructional example. The following article appeared on April 26, 2010, in the *Contra Costa Times*:

> Saint Mary's College has punished a singing instructor, who is the brother of a college trustee, for his choice to use a song that uses racist terms in a voice class last month. College leaders said Monday the incident called into question Louis Lebherz's future at the school. The musician already has been forced to apologize to the class and to complete diversity training, said Beth Dobkin, the college's provost.
>
> Lebherz, an artist in residence at Saint Mary's, had been asked to teach classes this year, Dobkin said. His choice to use the original version of the show tune "Old Man River," [sic] which refers to slaves and African-Americans [sic] in derogatory terms, will affect his employment, she said (Krupnik 2010).

The article does not clarify exactly what occurred at this private, Northern California university, but it is clear from the article that an African American student was offended by a version of "Ol' Man River" which was taken from the "original score" of the musical.[36] The one readily available score is the 1927 vocal score (Kern and Hammerstein 1927), which does, in fact, include racial terms in the chorus parts behind the solo.[37] After the complaint was registered with the university administration, music instructor Louis Lebherz provided a written apology to the student, who still wants him fired, according to the article. This event occurred during a time when Saint Mary's was trying to overcome criticism for its "shoddy race relations and lack of diversity" (Krupnik 2010).

Leaving aside, for the moment, the history of the school's diversity issues, Louis Lebherz's controversial dilemma can be analyzed as the result of a traditional

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[36] The song was sung by another (white) student in the class at the request of the teacher.

[37] The chorus responds, "Colored folks work on de Mississippi, Colored folks work while de white folks play" (Kern and Hammerstein 1927, 47). However, the term *colored folks* was a replacement for the racial epithet *nigger*, and, later, *darkies* (Breon 1995, 94-95). None of the news articles on this event mention the epithet used, which indicates that the music instructor used the original term in the song.

musicological perspective, which regards songs from American musicals as classics and which values "original" scores. Lebherz would have been slightly better off had he chosen a more recently published version of the song as a stand-alone piece, but this would not have been as "authentic" as the original vocal score he used, which, unfortunately, contained the racially charged lyrics.

It is also interesting that Lebherz did not wonder if any of his students— regardless of race— might be offended by the song or at least made uncomfortable by it. It is possible that Lebherz is simply incredibly uninformed, but it is also possible that the song's (and musical's) reputation as being anti-racist could have played a part in the teacher's ignorance of the song's potential effects. The online comments surrounding this article indicate much confusion about "Ol' Man River," with some respondents castigating the perceived racism of the song, while others point out the song's history and status as a classic, and list the famous singers who have performed it over the years.[38]

The Saint Mary's incident indicates the real need for critical education about these musicals in addition to the insights of traditional musicology. Because of their emerging status as American classics, musicals and the songs written for them are becoming more serious objects of study in voice classes and vocal arts departments, especially as opportunities for classical opera careers dwindle.[39] Opera singers

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[38] One respondent replied, "Their [sic] is nothing racist about the song if taken in context of the times," while another wrote, "I bet after that song, some good ol' cross burning is in order." See http://forums.contracostatimes.com/topic/saint-marys-punishes-professor-for-choosing-racist-song. None of the comments acknowledges Paul Robeson's own early reservations about performing the song or contemporary critics' negative comments about the lyrics (Breon 1995, 94).

[39] In the past year, Baltimore Opera has gone into bankruptcy, while other opera houses, including San Diego Opera, have had to reduce the number of shows in a season.

themselves have begun to delve into this repertory, with such luminaries as Kiri Te Kanawa, Bryn Terfel, and Reneé Fleming[40] performing songs written for musicals. With both music pedagogy and classical performers paying more attention to the American musical, the question of politics in these musicals will emerge as well.

To allow musicals to remain unexamined politically is to do a disservice to students of the musical, especially those who intend to perform or teach singing. However, to reduce some musicals to mere vehicles of racist or sexist ideologies does not serve the musical well *as* music.[41] In the end, musicologists may have to move towards Raymond Knapp's synthesis of musical features and politics to get a better understanding of the musical and to better assess the appropriateness of certain musicals for performance in our current century. It may simply be that some musicals, like *Show Boat*, have a "shelf life" and should no longer be performed in their entirety. It is also possible that some version of the pre-performance talk, which is currently done for opera, may be appropriate for musicals which could be problematic otherwise. In any case, one cannot simply study shows, scores and lyrics and avoid political critique without inviting misunderstanding; the couching of musicals in their sociopolitical contexts will be crucial as time goes on.

The Study

I have gone into great detail about approaches to the American musical and the sociopolitical issues present in the study of the musical precisely because my own

[40] The audio recordings by Fleming and Terfel (2003), Te Kanawa (2009), Te Kanawa (1990) and Terfel (1996) demonstrate this trend.

[41] Perhaps it is the fear of such political reductionism that keeps traditional music scholars of the American musical circumscribed in their traditional approaches, dealing with political and racial issues gingerly when they do deal with them, which is typically when they are required to by the subject matter of the musical itself.

topic concerns the depiction of Asian and Asian American characters in the scores of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*. This kind of study requires both a musical and political analysis. It is my goal to demonstrate how a researcher can go from the smallest musical features to a large-scale political interpretation in a step-by-step fashion. It is also my goal to show how certain features can operate within and across musicals as a semiotic code—in this case depicting race or cultural background, and revealing crucial elements of character development connected to these features.

In this approach, I take my cue from Raymond Knapp in connecting musical features to racial and ethnic characteristics. I also follow Michael Buchler in examining rhetorical and dramatic functions of musical features. One thing I find particularly important is independent verification that the musical features I identify as having certain semiotic functions do indeed have them. Wood (2000) examines many songs in the musicals of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart and discovers two different chorus patterns, to which Rodgers assigns different dramatic functions consistently throughout the Rodgers and Hart corpus. I find Wood's kind of quantitative approach especially valuable; I strongly believe in looking across musicals for a composer's semiotic patterns. Besides providing a solid foundation for assessing the functions of musical features, looking for regularities across a corpus can help avoid personal, idiosyncratic interpretations that would end up being of limited value.

Outline of This Study

Now that I have given some information on the influences behind the current study, I will give the outline for the rest of the chapters. The structure of the study will proceed as follows.

In Chapter Two, I will review the available research on the compositional style of Richard Rodgers. This will establish a baseline from which to compare differences in the scores of the "exotic" (or Asian-themed) musicals. For example, if Rodgers has a tendency toward a certain kind of descending movement of a particular interval size, I will assume that this is part of his general compositional style and not an indicator of race or culture in the music of Asian characters.

In Chapter Three, I will demonstrate how Rodgers can be defined as an "orientalist" composer, using his own descriptions of his composition process and comparing those to generally accepted views of what Orientalism in composition means. I will then cull from the musical scores of *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song* those musical features which appear in the music of Asian characters but do not appear anywhere else in the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus. These will be compared to some of the common orientalist features mentioned in the literature. Only then will these features be defined as unmistakable musical signifiers of Orientalism for Rodgers as a composer.

In Chapter Four, I will use these musical features to describe Rodgers' characterizations of Asian persons in the three musicals being studied. I will demonstrate how the presence or absence of orientalist musical features can indicate personalities of certain characters and dramatize certain internal and external cultural

conflicts these characters experience. I will also indicate how the overall depiction of Asian characters, reflected in the distribution of musical features, connects to larger political issues (like Western hegemony or assimilation) within the musical.

In Chapter Five, I will take the analysis a step further and demonstrate how Andrea Most's theory of musicals and their relationship to the concerns of Jewish Americans about assimilation can be connected to the orientalist musical features. This will lead to some surprising interpretations, especially of *Flower Drum Song*. I will also be able to use the presence or absence of orientalist musical features to challenge the views of one researcher whose sociopolitical analysis did not include musical scores. This will demonstrate the value of looking at scores when interpreting both characters and sociopolitical issues in the American musical.

In Chapter Six, I will review my study of Rodgers and his Asian-themed musicals. I will also highlight areas that I did not include in this study (such as performance practice and rhythms), and discuss possible areas for further research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed in some detail the state of research on the American musical both within traditional musicology and the new musicology, as well as outside of music scholarship in fields like theater, cinema, English, and American studies. I have pointed out that approaches that combine score analysis with political critique are extremely important, especially in cases like the musical *Show Boat*, in which racial motivations and interpretations can be easily misunderstood due to the age of the musical and the obsolescence of its depictions of African Americans. An understanding of the musical in context is necessary for music teachers as well as

scholars. Finally, I have outlined my own study, which involves the three Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals which depict Asian or Asian American characters. I have acknowledged the importance of the approaches of Knapp, Buchler, and Wood for my analysis.

CHAPTER TWO:

RODGERS' COMPOSITIONAL STYLE: SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Before judging which of Rodgers' structures are specific to Asian characters, it is important to discover which structures are specific to Rodgers' style of composition as a whole. This is an important step, because it is possible for certain features, identified in other musical studies as "orientalist," to actually be "Rodgers-ist." For example, the repeated note motif is said to be "typical of oriental music" (Wilder 1990, 180), but a structural analysis of a large sample of Rodgers' songs composed with both Lorenz Hart and Oscar Hammerstein finds "repeated tones are clearly one of Rodgers' characteristic devices" (Kaye 1969, 61). In order to make the clearest identifications possible of those features that can be described as specifically referring to Asian characters, this study will start by getting a clearer picture of Richard Rodgers' overall compositional style.

In this chapter, I will examine the literature on Richard Rodgers' compositional methods and style using the available research. Though structural studies are scant and are mostly focused on Rodgers and Hart songs, certain compositional regularities will emerge. I will augment these studies with the more recent musicological work by Rodgers specialist Geoffrey Block (1997 and 2003), who identifies connections between certain musical structures and dramatic meanings in the Rodgers' scores. Block's approach is more semiotic, and it highlights the difficulties in assigning meaning to musical structures in a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical without taking into account the reappearance of these structures across shows,

and even across creative partnerships. Finally, I will approach the question of how Rodgers' compositional style changed when he started working with Hammerstein and I will offer some suggestions as to why that should be the case. At the end of the chapter, I will collect the information on specific features and compile it into a chart, which can be used as a resource for further investigation into the Rodgers' scores.

Available Studies on the Music of Richard Rodgers

Unfortunately, Richard Rodgers did not write much about his own compositional practices, and musicologist Geoffrey Block bemoans the "lack of technical specificity" in the comments that Rodgers did make (Block 2003, 39). Also unfortunately, scholarly studies of Rodgers as a composer are scarce, with only a few structural analyses of his music available. The major studies are those of Milton Kaye (1969), Alec Wilder (1990), Alan Forte (1995), and Graham Wood (2000).[42] In addition, the recent work of musicologist Geoffrey Block (1997 and 2003) discusses certain regularities in Rodgers' style and specifically deals with the relation of musical structures to the characters and plots of his musicals. Kaye, Wilder, and Forte examine Rodgers' songs in isolation and focus on structural elements of melody, harmony, motif, and so forth. Block and Wood take a more semiotic approach in which certain musical features symbolize or communicate certain elements of character, plot, or other dramatic elements in the show for which the songs were composed. None of these researchers provides a truly comprehensive understanding of Rodgers' style, but taken as a whole, this small corpus provides a good starting point.

[42] These are the few sources available that actually focus on compositional style or "the notes on the page," and, with the exception of Kaye, these sources focus primarily (or almost entirely) on the Rodgers and Hart corpus.

Milton Kaye's 1969 dissertation is the earliest of these studies, and it benefits from a personal interview with Richard Rodgers as well as input from a panel of Broadway luminaries, including lyricist Dorothy Fields and Broadway arranger Robert Russell Bennett, among others, all of whom worked with Rodgers. Kaye had the panel, with Rodgers, select fifty songs, twenty-five composed with Rodgers' first writing partner, lyricist Lorenz Hart, and twenty-five composed with Oscar Hammerstein II, for analysis by Kaye. These fifty were agreed by the panel to be "the most important" Rodgers pieces,[43] and Kaye examines them for melody, rhythm, harmony, and larger phrase, motivic, and song structure. The methodology is largely self-created[44] and, as Wood notes, the study is "partial and subjective" (Wood 2000, 8). Yet Kaye's remains the only one of the available studies to closely examine the structure of Rodgers' songs composed with Hammerstein, especially for Asian characters in these musicals. Wilder, Forte, and to a great extent Graham Wood, focus far more on the music of Rodgers and Hart: Wilder personally and artistically prefers the Rodgers songs with Hart; Forte is mostly concerned with popular song structure (as opposed to the Broadway musical); and Wood tries to tie Rodgers' style with Hart to Rodgers' work in *Oklahoma!*.

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[43] These fifty pieces include six pieces sung by Asian characters in Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals.

[44] Kaye focuses on small-scale structures at the measure, phrase, motif, and song level to show that Rodgers composed differently with Hart than he did with Hammerstein. The study is very data-heavy with only eighty pages of actual explanatory prose; the rest of the nearly five hundred pages is data from the *process analysis* (Kaye's term) of the fifty Rodgers' songs he analyzed. This makes the study interesting as a source of data about specific songs, but lacking in overall explanation for why the differences exist between Rodgers' compositional style with Hart and with Hammerstein. Kaye credits the difference in styles primarily to the difference in lyricists and Rodgers' working methods with them (Kaye 1969, 70).

Broadway composer Alec Wilder devotes a chapter of his book to the compositions of Richard Rodgers, but makes no secret of his unapologetic preference for the songs of Rodgers and Hart, describing Rodgers' work with Hammerstein as having something "missing," or as requiring the author to "change into formal garb before I listen" (Wilder 1990, 221). He finds *South Pacific*'s (1949) "Some Enchanted Evening" to be "pale and pompous and bland" (221). As a result, Wilder does not analyze much of Rodgers and Hammerstein at all.[45] He is, however, a very useful source for certain elements of Rodgers' compositional style and its evolution, especially during his early days with lyricist Lorenz Hart.

Allen Forte, a Schenkerian music theorist, turned his attention to Tin Pan Alley songs in the 1990s, and his analysis of Rodgers is included in his book on popular song (Forte 1995). Forte's song data is considerably narrowed by his choice of subject matter (love ballads) and his selection process based "upon my own predilections" (Forte 1995, 3). In the end, Forte does a close reading of six Rodgers and Hart love ballads. Like Wilder, Forte will be of use regarding certain of Rodgers' compositional elements, but of no use regarding the Rodgers and Hammerstein work specifically.

Graham Wood's dissertation (2000) is the latest of the strictly structural analyses of Rodgers' work and while most of the dissertation covers Rodgers' compositions with Lorenz Hart, Wood extends the discussion into Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* and shows how chorus structures in Rodgers and Hart also manifest themselves in the songs of *Oklahoma!*. Wood examines over three hundred

[45] Wilder devotes fifty-four out of fifty-nine pages to Rodgers and Hart songs, leaving only five pages for the critique of a handful of Rodgers and Hammerstein songs.

songs composed by Richard Rodgers with both lyricists and specifically demonstrates how two different chorus structures, the parallel period and the lyric binary, act as semiotic indicators of the relationships between different characters at different points in the musical. Wood is especially valuable for looking at larger-scale (above the phrase level) structures, and for examining interconnections among Rodgers' composition, plot, and characterization both within a musical and across musicals. In tying Rodgers' compositional style to the drama for which he was writing, Wood follows the approach of musicologist Geoffrey Block.

Geoffrey Block is one of a new group of historical musicologists studying American musical theater seriously: documenting its history, compiling biographies of its major composers, and providing limited analyses and critiques of classic songs. Over the past fifteen years, Block has become the foremost scholar of Richard Rodgers, with two books specifically about the composer, and a third on musical theater composers including Rodgers.[46] Although these works primarily document historical and biographical information, Block gives his own analysis of Rodgers' typical compositional habits. Block also analyzes certain musical features as semiotic objects, connecting them to lyrics, drama, and characterization, and demonstrating how certain motives and musical gestures show interconnections among characters in the musical. Block's strength is that he approaches Rodgers' music as that of a musical dramatist and opens up a way to analyze it in its theatrical and dramatic context. A weakness, however, is that some of Block's connections present only one of several

[46] *Enchanted Evenings* (1997) covers a selected number of composers; *The Richard Rodgers' Reader* (2002) and *Richard Rodgers: Yale Broadway Masters* (2003) are specific to the composer.

possible interpretations, and Block has not developed a principled way to choose among these possible interpretations. It is precisely because of the problem with multiple interpretations—whether they are theatrical interpretations or postcolonial interpretations—that it is important to discover Rodgers' stylistic regularities across shows, lyricists, and years. Fortunately, Block has included some of Rodgers' stylistic regularities, and this helps add to a basic understanding of Rodgers' compositional habits.

Tin Pan Alley Song Forms

Before examining Rodgers as an individual composer, it is important to understand the context of theatrical song writing that existed around him. In this section, I will take a brief look at Broadway song as a form as well as its connection with Tin Pan Alley song forms.

When Rodgers began his career (and his first artistic partnership with Lorenz Hart), Broadway songs both drew from and, in fact, were popular song repertory. Gerald Mast, in his early scholarly history of American musicals, describes American popular song as having "created the musical dialect of the American musical" (Mast 1987, 26) and Tin Pan Alley — the originally derogatory name given to the popular music industry of the early twentieth century — as having standardized the popular song.

The structure of Tin Pan Alley songs, which came from the verse-chorus format of the nineteenth-century parlor song (McMillin 2006, 27), was fairly fixed by

the time Rodgers started his professional career.[47] Each song typically starts with an instrumental *introduction* (Wood 2000, 75). According to Wood, musical introductions are not always consistent and may shift with the source—sheet music, vocal scores, recordings, etc.—in which they appear. The musical purpose of the introduction is to establish the tonal center of the song and they usually end on a half cadence and sometimes, a fermata (75), devices which separate the instrumental introduction from the sung verse to follow. Wood mentions that Rodgers' musical introductions "commonly foreshadow melodic elements that open the verse" and can also refer to the chorus as well (77). These foreshadowing elements create a sense of familiarity, according to Wood.

The instrumental introduction is followed by the *verse*, "a sung introductory part...often sixteen bars in length" (Forte 1995, 37), although Mast mentions that there was no fixed verse length, and that the number of bars could vary from as few as eight to as many as sixty-four (Mast 1987, 26). Wood notes that Rodgers' verses up to and including *Oklahoma!*, his first musical with Oscar Hammerstein II, "are predominantly sixteen measures long" (Wood 2000, 107). The purpose of the verse is expository, to give the background story for the lyric of the refrain, the more tightly constructed musical form following the verse. A singer delivers the verse as something between speech and song, somewhat akin to recitative in opera, but not as loosely constructed (Block 2003, 23). This structure is especially functional in Broadway

[47] Rodgers notes that the songs he was writing with Lorenz Hart early on "were in the traditional form of song construction at the time;" he then goes on to describe the Tin Pan Alley structure (Rodgers 2002, 79).

musicals, negotiating the space between realistic conversation and the not-so-realistic burst into song.

The verse leads into the *refrain*, the music and lyrics of which "provide the means for the identification of the song" (Kaye 1969, 5). The refrain typically contains the song title in its lyrics as well as the major musical motives (5). The length of refrains increased from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, but by the time of Rodgers' early compositions, the thirty-two bar refrain was standard. These thirty-two bars are typically divided into four eight-bar sections. The first two sections, often (but not always) identical, form a sixteen-bar parallel period called the *chorus*. Contrasting musical (and lyrical) material occurs in the third eight-bar section, called the *release* or *bridge*. The final eight-bar section is a return to the chorus, either identically or with slight variation. The complete form of this kind of refrain is usually identified as AABA or, in the case of variation in the A-sections, $AA^{/}BA^{//}$ (for example). Graham Wood, in his detailed analysis of Richard Rodgers' choruses, calls this form the *lyric binary chorus* based on similarities to "lyric forms" of the ottocento opera (Wood 2000, 122). Wood finds in his research that Rodgers most often used this kind of chorus for the open expression of young love in some of his early shows with Lorenz Hart.

A second kind of thirty-two-bar refrain also coexisted in Rodgers' early work, providing an alternate organization, ABAC. Mast describes this form as being further subdivided into four-bar phrases of $AA^{/}BB^{/}AA^{/}CA$ (or $CA^{/}$) (Mast 1987, 23). The main refrain (A) is repeated twice, the second time with some variation. The B-section is a "musical development" section, repeated with variation. The third section is a

repetition of the initial theme, and the fourth section begins with new material but then ends with the initial theme or a variation of it (28). Graham Wood calls this form the *parallel period chorus,* based on its antecedent-consequent phrase structure (Wood 2000, 109). The first sixteen bars make up the antecedent, which ends on a half cadence; the second sixteen bars make up the consequent and ends in a perfect authentic cadence. In his study, Wood finds that these kinds of choruses were associated with more reserved or distant expressions of love in the work of Rodgers and Hart.[48] In Rodgers' later work, the use of the parallel period chorus decreased and the lyric binary chorus assumed primacy (Wood 2000, 123).

These standardized popular music templates had further features, in particular rhythmic ones. Kaye mentions that "most popular and show songs are written in 4/4, alla breve or 3/4 meter" (Kaye 1969, 15), and that the meter, once established, does not change. Further, most popular ballads were composed in "cut time," a two-beat metrical pattern norm, which Forte credits to the foxtrot, indicating that many of these songs were intended for dancing (Forte 1995, 21). Kaye finds that most of the Rodgers and Hart songs he examined were in either 4/4 or cut time (Kaye 1969, 35).

The harmonic pattern was also fairly standardized. As mentioned above, the first sixteen measures of the thirty-two bar refrain of the parallel period chorus had to end in a half cadence; the lyric binary chorus required a half cadence after the first eight bars and after the third set of eight bars, resulting in a cadence pattern of alternating half and perfect authentic cadences (Wood 2000, 122). In addition, Forte

[48] See Wood (2000), Chapter 3 for full discussion.

and Kaye both point out that much of the harmony of the popular song is taken from traditional tonal music.[49]

Although basic meters and tonal (diatonic) harmony were constraints, other factors contributed to give Tin Pan Alley songs a modernity and freshness. Features from African American musical forms like ragtime, blues, and jazz appeared with great frequency. Forte mentions the influence of popular "blue notes" (♭3, ♭5, ♭6, and ♭7), ragtime rhythmic figures, the Charleston (dance) figure and other syncopations on the popular ballad.[50] Kaye mentions the presence of two jazz rhythm influences on some Rodgers and Hart songs he examines: syncopations, and "groups of tones with recurring dotted eighth and sixteenth note values" (Kaye 1969, 35). In addition to African American styles, Forte mentions other popular harmonies that were part of the Tin Pan Alley vocabulary: the triad with the added sixth (caused by the assimilation of what Forte calls "decorative notes"); chords borrowed from the parallel minor (mode borrowing) without preparation; unusual chords produced by compression or suspension, usually the result of rhythmic issues; the half-diminished seventh chord used for expressive moments; and harmonies which Forte calls "ornamental," meaning they do not lead anywhere harmonically, acting mostly as embellishment.[51]

In essence, then, the Tin Pan Alley song was a fairly restrictive form, created to be popular and easily remembered. Nonetheless, creative composers in this tradition

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[49] See Forte (1995, 7) and Kaye (1969, 31). The overall song structure relied on diatonic harmonic relations, although songs contained chromatic and/or jazz harmonies.
[50] For discussion, see Forte (1995, 6-23).
[51] Forte (1995, 7-13). Forte mentions a specific case of ornamental harmonies, "the 'parallel' progression, successions of chords of the same type in which all the voices move in parallel motion."

produced a great amount of variety in these limited formats. Mast compares the popular song forms to types of sonnets, which are also restrictive, but which offer the opportunity for "subtle surprise" (Mast 1987, 29). During the 1920s and 1930s, this Tin Pan Alley popular song was also the Broadway song, and the Broadway song was designed to be popular, to be heard on radio, to be danced to, and to be played on the piano by amateurs via sheet music. As a popular form, its lyrics were also subject to certain requirements. Lyricists wrote in the vernacular, using contemporary everyday language. Forte describes the song lyric as "sincere, earnest, and straightforward" though he adds it may sometimes be ironic and is often very witty (Forte 1995, 28). The lyric is not, however, intellectual, despite the craft that goes into creating the "sonic surface" (as Forte calls it) of assonances, alliterations, and other "pleasing memorable sounds" (29). Anything too erudite or obscure would render the song inaccessible to the popular listener.[52] This straightforward lyric — heartfelt, sincere, and unpretentious — differentiates musical theater from operetta (and other European imports which appeared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), and is preserved in the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein.[53]

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[52] However, while the expression of the lyric might be unintellectual, the lyric itself could contain intellectual references like opera composers, classical authors, and the like, especially when written by Lorenz Hart, who freely mixed vernacular and slang with Verdi and Shakespeare characters.

[53] The idea of the American vernacular as being sincere or authentic expression on stage predates musical theater. Anna Cora Mowatt's 1845 play *Fashion* (Richards 1997, 304-367) draws specific distinctions between the affected language of the new wealthy class in New York and the sincere, straightforward speech of an American from outside the urban center. The playwright satirizes actual trends among the wealthy New Yorkers, and the affected language is peppered with French terms for everyday objects and with Europhilia in general. Mowatt's heroes reject the pretentious European ways and speech in favor of an "authentic" Americanism. We later see this same theme recur in the musicals of George M. Cohan, who also paints Europeans (especially the British) as deceptive and not to be emulated by an authentic American. This image of deceptive Brits is most obvious in *Little Johnny Jones* (1904) (Knapp 2005, 107-108). Cohan crucially used the vernacular in his songs.

Eventually, of course, Tin Pan Alley forms could get too restrictive, especially if a song appeared in a musical and had to take more time to depict a character. Composers like Rodgers would modify or extend the form, usually: by the addition of "limbs" (additional measures) to one section or another; by the creation of hybrid forms; or by the creation of "macro choruses" (Wood 2000, 150-161). Both Kaye and Wood acknowledge the presence of some irregular forms in the Rodgers repertory, and Kaye points out that the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs represent a move away from the Tin Pan Alley popular song form (Kaye 1969, 59). Kaye points out the presence of asymmetry, unusual forms like the rondo, and the elimination of the verse as some of the variations that take place when Rodgers began working with Hammerstein (59). Kaye credits these differences mostly to the change in the lyricists (72-76). Wood, on the other hand, credits this difference to a divergence of popular music and songs written for musical theater which began during the early 1940s when radio stations, refusing to pay licensing fees to the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) for ten months, began to play non-ASCAP material, including music by black and country musicians (Wood 2000, 5). Though the ASCAP ban was short-lived, Wood sees this incident as pivotal in changing popular tastes, especially in regard to song form; the thirty-two bar Tin Pan Alley song gave way to a verse-chorus pattern strophic song, which actually preceded it historically.[54] The verse-chorus pattern became the staple of rock-and-roll music, which supplanted the composed popular songs of Tin Pan Alley in the late 1950s.

[54] It is clear from other sources (see Block (1997) and Wood (2000)) that Rodgers began experimenting with song forms before the 1940s, especially because of theatrical needs and his (and Hart's) desire for more integration in their musicals.

Some Regularities of Rodgers' Style

It is clear that Richard Rodgers' compositional practices were circumscribed by the popular music practices of Tin Pan Alley, especially in his early work with Lorenz Hart. They were also greatly influenced by the needs of the theater. But even within these early restrictions, certain individual patterns emerged. After mentioning more prosaic elements of Rodgers' compositions—their reliance on diatonic harmony and traditional tonal key relationships; and the tendency of eight-bar sections to begin on a major triad and, melodically, on a pitch from that triad—Kaye (1969) highlights some interesting features of Rodgers' music:

- A preference for major mode, with not many songs in minor keys
- A penchant for repeated pitches, which are "used mainly as rhythmic propellants" (61)[55]
- The use of unexpected chromatic melody notes for the purpose of surprise (71)[56]
- The use of motives beginning on downbeats or anacrusis

Composer Alec Wilder (1990) mentions some additional compositional attributes of Rodgers' songs:

- A flair for unusual releases (175)
- A characteristic melodic pattern of returning to a single pitch while moving other pitches down or up (194)[57]
- A characteristic melodic pattern of descending fourths or thirds (194)
- A penchant for adding the unexpected interval (174)

Wilder also mentions Rodgers' great ability in step-wise writing and his mastery of the waltz and the ballad forms (194).

It is Geoffrey Block, however, who gives us the most information about Rodgers as an individual composer, starting with his musical education. Much of this

[55] Wilder also mentions the rhythmic power of these repeated notes (1990, 170).
[56] Kaye quotes Deems Taylor (1953, 230) who calls this chromatic note—like the flatted seventh scale degree in the mostly diatonic "Oh What a Beautiful Mornin'"—the "Rodgers' Patented Wrong Note."
[57] The Rodgers and Hart melody "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" is a good example of this pattern.

background on Rodgers' education is available from multiple sources, but Block adds valuable tidbits, including the coursework Rodgers took and the influence of specific instructors.

Rodgers learned the piano at home from his mother, an amateur pianist. It was not until his adult years — long after he had become a well-known composer — that Rodgers actually took formal lessons, and these were not terribly successful (Block 1997, 86). Rodgers began writing songs at a young age, and in his late teens, he enrolled at Columbia College (later University) for the sole purpose of writing music for the Varsity Shows on campus.[58] Rodgers eventually left Columbia without a degree and enrolled, in his twenties, at the Institute of Musical Art (renamed the Julliard School in 1946) specifically "to learn the discipline of musical composition" (Dorothy Rodgers in *Letters to Dorothy: 1926-1937,* as quoted in Block 2002, 31).[59] There, Rodgers studied harmony and theory with noted theorist and author Percy Goetschius (Block 1997, 86). It is to Goetschius that Block credits Rodgers' penchant for "surprise" notes at the end of phrases (109). Rodgers himself explains the disdain Goetschius had for the practice of ending phrases with a tonic chord and how he (Rodgers) as a student diligently avoided such endings:

> Whenever Goetschius talked about ending a phrase with a straight-out tonic chord…he would call it a "pig," his term for anything that was too easy or obvious. Once I heard the scorn in Goetschius' voice, I knew that I'd avoid the "pig" as if my life depended on it (Rodgers 2002, 45).

[58] Rodgers' older brother Mortimer was attending Columbia along with Oscar Hammerstein and Lorenz Hart, both of whom Rodgers met there.

[59] Rodgers stayed at the Institute for three semesters and studied tonal harmony, ear training, and composition (Rodgers 2002, 45).

Block claims that this is how surprises in general, or what Deems Taylor sometimes calls the "Rodgers' Patented Wrong Note," became "a prominent, even ubiquitous, feature of Rodgers' melodies" (Block 2003, 32).

Both Block (2003) and Wilder (1990) point out Rodgers' "proclivity for stepwise and scalar melodies" (Block 2003, 34),[60] and Block also mentions a characteristic he calls the "Rodgers' leap… a sudden leap to the third of the tonic chord, that appears with striking regularity after 1930, usually toward the end of the chorus" (35). Also, in the beginnings of choruses, Rodgers often has a melodic pattern of oscillation between the tonic note and a half step below it, followed by a leap (28). This can be easily seen in Rodgers and Hart songs like "Manhattan," but a similar pattern takes place in later works with Hammerstein like "This Nearly Was Mine" and "Some Enchanted Evening," both from *South Pacific.*

Much has been made of Rodgers' "surprise" elements, but these were carefully prepared: his harmonies and melodies interacted in such a way that a surprise element was paired with an expected element. A surprise chord would be combined with an expected melody note or vice versa (Block 2003, 35). This allowed for a "scaffolded" thwarting of expectation, causing the unexpected to be experienced as pleasurable surprise, and this feeling could be used for dramatic effect. Kaye points out that the surprise note in the first phrase of "Oh What a Beautiful Mornin'" (a flatted seventh on the syllable MORN-in') provides to the listener a depth of feeling that might not be conveyed by the expected diatonic seventh on that word (Kaye 1969, 71). This

[60] Block also mentions Goetschius' preference for stepwise melodic movement (Block 2003, 39), another stylistic element that finds its way into Rodgers' work with both his lyricists.

dramatic effect, caused by the "musical magnetics" (Rodgers 2002, 46) of the half step in Western tonal music, would have been Rodgers' actual goal: all sources, including Rodgers' own autobiography, agree that Rodgers was, first and foremost, a musical dramatist.

Rodgers' Scores and the Composer as Dramatist

It is impossible to examine Rodgers' compositional style without acknowledging that his music both created and served drama. This does not necessarily mean that Rodgers was always involved in the minutiae of theatrical issues, although he sometimes was, as in *Carousel* (Rodgers and Hammerstein 1945), where he strongly lobbied to abolish the characters of Mr. and Mrs. God, and succeeded (Block 1997, 161-162). What it does mean is that every Rodgers' song was imbued with the drama of both its lyrics and its theatrical situation. For example, in "A Ship Without a Sail" Rodgers expressed the emotional isolation in the piece with "dissonant chords to paint a mood of unease, even despair, all the more heartfelt for being understated" (Secrest 2001, 126). Block puts it differently, stating that "the absence of a tonal grounding succeeds as a musical metaphor for the idea of a ship without a sail" (Block 2003, 24).

Rodgers strongly believed that songs should be centered on the characters and the situations occurring in the plot. This was saying a lot in the early days of musical theater, when plots, if they existed at all, were often flimsy devices to hold together a collection of routines by singers, dancers, and other performers,[61] often stars from the

[61] *The Black Crook,* the first official American musical, was a hodge-podge, combining a play based on the German opera *Der Freischutz,* a visiting scantily clad French ballet troupe, and rousing popular musical numbers, which have been lost.

vaudeville stage. However, the integration of plot, lyrics, music, dance, and visuals (like costumes and sets) was an *idée fixe* of certain creators of musical comedy,[62] including composer Jerome Kern, whose musicals with Guy Bolton and P.G. Wodehouse represent the earliest major success in what became known as "the integrated musical." The young Richard Rodgers admired Kern and was heavily influenced by him; the idea that the music should serve the drama emerged early in Rodgers and remained with him all his life (Rodgers 2002, 20). In the early years, Rodgers and Hart were definitely trying to meet the challenge of Jerome Kern and the shows that Kern, Bolton, and Wodehouse developed for the Princess Theater (Block 2003, 41).

Early attempts to integrate the musical comedy—without turning it into operetta—began with the effort to compose songs reflecting the specific situation or the feelings of a character. Considering the presence of "trunk songs," musical theater's own version of the "suitcase aria,"[63] it could sometimes be an effort for the composer just to get a particular star to sing the song written for the play and not one of the star's own choosing. But Rodgers went even beyond that early in his career. In 1928, one year after the premiere of Hammerstein and Kern's *Show Boat*—the greatest success in the integrated musical up to that point—Rodgers developed the music for *Chee-Chee*, a musical with Lorenz Hart (lyrics) and Lew Fields (book) that involved the unfortunate topic of castration. While Rodgers was not enthusiastic about the

[62] As McMillin points out, integration in the musical had been both a goal and an achievement from the days of Jerome Kern and the early works of Oscar Hammerstein, such as in Hammerstein's *Rose Marie* (1924) (McMillin 2006, 21).

[63] *Suitcase aria* refers to an operatic aria that Baroque-era singers would carry with them and have inserted into other operas in which they performed, replacing songs by other composers. These arias usually showed off the singer's voice or were arias that the singer was known for performing.

castration theme (and neither was the audience, who gave Rodgers and Hart one of their few "flops"), he was particularly inventive with the use of music.[64] The team of Rodgers and Hart was able to unify song and story in a novel way for the musical: the sung parts in the musical were sometimes so short[65] that they were not proper Tin Pan Alley songs at all, but they were pieces that carried along the action. Their short length was "to avoid the eternal problem of the story coming to a halt as the songs take over" (Rodgers 2002, 118). As Secrest describes it, *Chee-Chee* was "through-composed, in imitation of an opera" (Secrest 2001, 121). As such, it reflected the influence of Wagner in the United States and the effect of the Wagnerian ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in musical dramas (McMillin 2006, 22).[66] *Chee-Chee* also demonstrates how experimental Rodgers actually was and how far he was willing to go in service of the ideal of the integrated musical.[67]

The drama was utmost in Rodgers' mind and was primary in the little we know about his composition process. Rodgers states that he only started writing a melody once he knew the dramatic content of the song.[68] As Rodgers makes clear, his songs

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[64] In a letter to his wife Dorothy, Rodgers enthusiastically assesses himself: "...it all sounds marvelous. I never realized how deeply I'd gone into it until I heard the orchestrations, and now I'm afraid that I've gone too far" (Block 2002, 41).

[65] Rodgers says these pieces were from four to sixteen bars (Rodgers 2002, 118).

[66] Later, Rodgers and Hammerstein would call some of their greatest musicals "musical plays," reflecting their view of the work as a music drama, not as a musical comedy.

[67] Recently, the idea of the integrated musical has come under fire, and some theater scholars point out that it is the lack of integration, the disjunct between speech and song, that is the overriding characteristic of the American musical (McMillin 2006, 2). However, it is very clear from a multitude of sources, including Rodgers' own autobiography, that integrating the musical and composing music that served the drama at all points was Rodgers' overriding concern and is reflected in his music. How this music (or the musical in its entirety) is experienced by a given audience member may differ greatly from the intent behind it. It is important to keep both the intent to integrate and the perception of disjunct in mind, however.

[68] From the Richard Rodgers' article "How to Write Music in No Easy Lessons: A Self Interview" (1939), originally published in *Theatre Arts* and appearing in Geoffrey Block's *The Richard Rodgers*

were written for specific characters in specific situations in theatrical works (Rodgers 2002, 106).[69] Rodgers also states that he considered the skills of particular singers when deciding on the ranges of melodies (106). One well-known example is Rodgers' songs written for Gertrude Lawrence in *The King and I*; the star's vocal limitations caused Rodgers to stick to a limited middle range for her character, Anna Leonowens (Secrest 2001, 310). However, Rodgers asserts that he composes "scores, not isolated song numbers" (Block 2002, 263), implying that Rodgers was always thinking of the music across the show and not just isolated musical moments. In addition, Rodgers asserts that any given song "must bear a family resemblance to the other musical material in the piece [i.e., the musical]," but should also create "sharp contrasts" between songs (Rodgers 2002, 263). This makes a strong argument for studying Rodgers' scores as a whole and not just analyzing songs in isolation, as Kaye, Wilder, Forte, and to some extent Wood do. It also explains why Alec Wilder has such difficulty with the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus, which represents the culmination of the integrated musical. For example, Wilder seems to give up on the song "Mr. Snow" (from *Carousel*) saying, "The more I examine this song, the more I'm certain that it should not be judged out of its theatrical context" (Wilder 1990, 219).[70]

Reader (2002, 261). Most of the article is quite playful and entertaining, but it contains precious little about actually writing music.

[69] Even when composing *Victory at Sea*, a purely instrumental work for television, Rodgers had the goal of music serving the drama. In an interview, Rodgers explains his composition process: "There were no lyrics—no words. But there were pictures, which made it the same as having words. How do you make a noise like a submarine? Well you make it your way. You've got your tool—which is sound—and you come up with sounds that, to you, are appropriate to a submarine. This actually happened. I had a submarine theme" (as quoted in Block 2002, 332). We might describe Rodgers as a composer of instrumental program music here, but Oscar Hammerstein II's description of Rodgers as "essentially a composer for plays" (quoted in Block 2002, 81) still applies.

[70] Wilder's preference for the Rodgers and Hart corpus may be due to the fact that they seem more easily analyzed independent of their shows and their scores.

Unlike Wilder, Block actually attempts to take on a whole Rodgers score in a way that illuminates certain features appearing across different songs. In his analysis of *South Pacific*, Block (2003) takes seriously Rodgers' claim of "family resemblances" and he searches for distinctive musical features that appear throughout the score. Block also assigns certain semiotic meaning to some of these features, demonstrating how certain feelings may be similarly expressed musically or how characters may be intertwined musically within a score or show. Block's work is extraordinarily important as a basis for studying semiotic meaning of any kind in Rodgers' work, and especially when trying to identify racial/ethnic markers; before deciding which musical features carry "orientalist" meaning, it is important to see which features and their interrelations can be explained dramatically, relating to plot or character, without reference to race or ethnicity.

In his analysis, Block begins by examining the score of *South Pacific* (Block 2003, 163-164). He asserts that leading tones (half-step movement) appear in the songs of: the female lead Nellie ("I'm in Love With a Wonderful Guy" and "Cockeyed Optimist" [her self-description]); her love interest Emile ("This Nearly Was Mine"); and in the theme song of the local island "Bali Ha'i." In addition, Block asserts that the leading tones may represent romantic passion or love in the musical, and may relate these characters to one another. A second feature Block finds is Rodgers' use of simple melodic sequences to construct the songs "Dîtes-Moi" (sung by Emile's French Polynesian children), "A Cockeyed Optimist" (sung by Nellie), and "Younger Than Springtime" (sung by Joe Cable). Block sees the use of simple sequences as somehow connecting the children with Nellie and with Cable. Block

admits that connecting the children with Nellie makes dramatic sense, but Cable has no interaction or thematic connection with them in the musical (Block 2003, 167). Finally, Block notices that certain rhythmic features recur in *South Pacific* and that these features create interconnections between certain characters. Block points out the resemblances in the rhythms of Nellie and Emile: the lovers share the same rhythms phrase by phrase in "Twin Soliloquies," and this same rhythm appears in their solos—Nellie's "A Cockeyed Optimist" and Emile's "Some Enchanted Evening" (Block 2003, 167). They also share Nellie's rhythm on the word *yellow* in "Cockeyed Optimist,"[71] which appears in Emile's "Some Enchanted Evening" nine times in the first twelve measures. In Emile's "This Nearly Was Mine," the words *paradise living for* have the same *yellow* rhythm with inverted pitches (Block 2003, 169). Block makes a strong case for the rhythmic integration of characters within a score.

While original in the Rodgers literature and very insightful, Block's attempt to connect dramatic characters with musical features in the score runs into problems. Because Block focuses only on a single show in search of "family resemblances" he cannot see the larger use of musical elements over the Rodgers corpus, a view that could greatly aid in interpretation. For example, the connection of the leading tone to romantic or sexual passion works well for Nellie's seemingly endlessly repeated "I'm in love, I'm in love…(with a wonderful guy)" and for "Bali Ha'i," a song about the island of sexual license where Cable carries on an affair with the young Liat. Both of these leading tones are emphasized (by repeated iterations or by length) and both

[71] The *yellow* melody consists of three quarter-notes (moving from the second scale degree, down a fourth, followed by a return) that begin on the first beat of the measure; the final quarter note is held for the last two counts of the measure and then for three counts over the bar line.

eventually resolve up. However, the leading tone device in Emile's sad "This Nearly Was Mine"—in which the tonic note is lowered to the leading tone, returns to the tonic, and then is followed by a leap in the melody—is a trademark Rodgers melody starter appearing in the Rodgers and Hart repertory starting with "Manhattan" (as mentioned earlier).[72] As such, its semiotic meaning within the drama is not unambiguous, and Block's interpretation that the leading tone connects dramatically the characters of Nellie and Emile does not have strong enough support. Also, Nellie's repetitive oscillation on the minor second (leading tone, tonic) of "I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love…" could also be related to other Rodgers' songs about obsessive characters, such as Frankie's song "It's Got to Be Love" from Rodgers and Hart's *On Your Toes* (*Rodgers and Hart: A Musical Anthology* 1995, 222), which Block actually mentions in a chapter on Rodgers from his 1997 book (Block 1997, 101). Block describes "a descending two-note figure" appearing in every measure of "It's Got to Be Love," which he claims "betrays Frankie's [romantic] obsession with her teacher" (101). This figure is a descending second, sometimes a half step, sometimes a whole step, but the repetition of the interval is obvious. It could be that repetition on a second is a Rodgers semiotic device across shows for the obsession of a character in love.[73] This opens the possibility that the half step is, for Rodgers, a generic device, one that

[72] For example, Block points out this same starting pattern in the melody of "What is a Man?" from *Pal Joey* (Block 1997, 110).

[73] It also must be pointed out that Block mentions the "prominent use of a leading tone that obsessively ascends one step higher to the tonic…as a unifying device" in "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" from *Pal Joey* (Block 1997, 202). Block points out that Vera Simpson sings "Bewitched" and "What is a Man?," with their prominent repeated leading tone patterns, when she is alone, ostensibly obsessing. When she sings a duet with Joey, this pattern is not present. The leading-tone half step resolving up may be Rodgers' own semiotic device for obsessive love across musicals.

indicates the dramatic mood of a character rather than connecting that character with another in a single show.

Block's interpretation of the simple melodic sequences is similarly limited by his exclusive focus on the score of *South Pacific.* These same types of sequences, for example, appear in *The King and I* in the song "Lord and Master," sung by the young Tuptim, who was made a slave in the King's harem against her will; and in "Getting to Know You," sung by Anna to and with the children (and wives) of the King. The simple melodic sequence may actually act as a semiotic marker across shows, being associated with simplicity, innocence, sincerity, or childlikeness in relation to certain characters.[74] Semiotic markers appearing in different shows in the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus should be considered part of Rodgers' overall style, and an interpretation of these markers should be more general to begin with. Additional score-internal connections between characters may or may not be present, but they do not need to be. Some of these connections will, of course, be more obvious than others. For example, Block points out that the Prince's song in *Cinderella,* "Do I Love You Because You're Beautiful," includes "nearly every phrase of the main section of Cinderella's main song, 'In My Own Little Corner'" (Block 2003, 189).[75]

Block is on his steadiest ground when he is discussing rhythmic connections in the music of a pair of lovers in a Rodgers musical. In addition to his analysis of the

[74] In this interpretation, "Dîtes-Moi" is an innocent child's song; "Cockeyed Optimist" represents Nellie's immaturity, youth and simplicity of outlook; and "Younger Than Springtime" represents Cable at his most sincere and innocent, and it also represents the youth and innocence of Liat, the young virginal girl with whom he has just been. There is no need to interconnect the characters in the plot as Block does.

[75] Block states that "it is fitting to think" that this musical interconnection means that the Prince recognizes Cinderella for her real self. In the 1997 remake of the musical (with Whitney Houston and Brandy), the book was rewritten to create a connection between the "real selves" of the Prince and Cinderella before the ball (Rodgers, Hammerstein, Norwood, et al. 2003).

lovers' rhythmic similarities in *South Pacific*, Block's analysis of *Carousel* (Block 1997, 168) demonstrates convincing connections between Julie Jordan's characteristic dotted rhythms and her lover Billy's use of these same dotted rhythms when interacting with her and when describing their future daughter in his "Soliloquy." It is clear how these rhythms differ from other characters in the musical, especially from Julie's friend Carrie, who is far more conventional than Julie and whose music does not use dotted rhythms.

Relationships among Scores/Shows

As I have hinted above, there may be regular generic semiotic markers across musicals, which Rodgers applies to different characters and situations. The prominent leading tone (or ascending minor second), repeated a number of times or significantly lengthened (as in "Bali Ha'i") seems to connect with obsessive love or passion across musicals. (The repetition of a descending minor second may also indicate a similar emotion.) Simple melodic sequences seem connected to childlike innocence, simplicity or sincerity across musicals. But there are others as well: Rodgers is known to have written love songs that are waltzes, a usage that goes back to the nineteenth century Viennese (and later American) operettas.[76] The waltz, and by extension triple time and even triplets,[77] become musical signifiers of love.

The similarities of some musical-dramatic devices across scores may indicate a use of certain formulas or certain features that would resonate with his audiences. The presence of such devices might also explain why Rodgers was often able to recycle

[76] Some examples: "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy" (*South Pacific*); "Hello Young Lovers" (*The King and I*); "Lover" (*Love Me Tonight*); and "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World" (*Jumbo*), among many others.
[77] See Block's description of the triplets in *Carousel* (Block 1997, 169).

early, unused songs for an appropriate new dramatic context (Block 2003, 63).[78] Not only songs were recycled, but some musical ideas also reappear from time to time; some of these are doubtless unintentional, but some may be deliberate and it may be difficult to know the difference. Some similarities may have to do with certain shows having been written closely in time, with the same compositional ideas in the mind of the composer. *Cinderella* (Rodgers and Hammerstein 1956/1981), for example, was composed for television within five years of *The King and I* (1951/2005), and the similarities that Block finds between "Impossible" (*Cinderella)* and "I Whistle A Happy Tune" (*The King and I)* (Block 2003, 283) may be a result of this closeness in time of composition, and, possibly, the similarity of the dramatic situation in which a strong female character stands up to fate with strength.[79] Even Hammerstein's song titles can show this kind of relationship. For example, Cinderella's fairy godmother sings that "impossible things are happening every day," which finds an echo in *Flower Drum Song* (1959) whose lead character, Mei Li, sings "A hundred million miracles (are happening every day)."

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[78] Well known examples of this recycling include: "Younger Than Springtime" from *South Pacific*, which originally was "My Wife" composed for *Allegro*; "Getting to Know You" from *The King and I*, originally "Suddenly Lucky" composed for *South Pacific;* and "No Other Love" from *Me and Juliet*, which was a "languid tango" first composed for the instrumental score of the television program *Victory at Sea*.

[79] Another example from *Cinderella* may not be so clear-cut: Block notes two musical features in the brief introduction to "In My Own Little Corner" (Cinderella's theme song) as being prominent earlier in "March of the Siamese Children" from *The King and I*—the "dactyl foot" and a juxtaposition of F♯ and F♮ to create tension. In my own research on *The King and I* (unpublished), I have found an F♯–F♮ juxtaposition or alternation present in "Something Wonderful" and "Western People Funny" as well. All of these pieces are either sung by or reflect Asian characters, and the F♯ creates a modal feel (Lydian mode) in "March of the Siamese Children." Modes, as will become evident in later chapters, are unusual for Rodgers and represent the exotic or the different. It is tempting to think that in making her introduction more exotic, Rodgers is indicating that Cinderella is very different from those around her.

It is also possible that certain features or musical motives may be intentionally used (or at least betray some kind of logic in their use) across shows. Block points out that in a late Rodgers musical, *Do I Hear a Waltz?*, an unsympathetic older female character is given "her Cinderella moment" when she sings the title song, one which bears a great resemblance to "Ten Minutes Ago," the waltz from *Cinderella* (Block 2003, 283).[80]

Of course, there may be some similarities that do not have a clear-cut explanation or perhaps indicate a subconscious connection in the composer's mind. For example, Block mentions that the chorus of "Singing a Love Song" from *Chee-Chee* (1928) foreshadows the release section of Bloody Mary's solo song "Happy Talk" from *South Pacific* (1949) (Block 2003, 223). It is tempting to think that the exotic settings of both musicals and their Asian characters (Chinese and Tonkinese) might have produced an unconscious connection in the composer's mind, but there is really no way to tell.

Finally, there is also the possibility of composers intentionally or unintentionally quoting other composers. Take the case of the songs "If I Loved You" from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* and "Make Believe" from Kern and Hammerstein's *Show Boat.* Both songs are tentative, indirect love songs sung by male characters who cannot admit their love for the women in their lives and who will end up causing them misery and heartache. Both songs, of course, have the same lyricist. So perhaps it is not surprising that there are musical similarities as well: both songs are

[80] This is at a moment when the woman's philandering husband is giving her a piece of jewelry and for a moment she has an illusion of love.

written in the key of D♭ major and, in both songs, the melody of the phrase-final words *love(d) you* is a repeated sixth scale degree (B♭) with a marked diminished harmony in the accompaniment.[81] Because Rodgers does not write much about his compositional process, it is hard to say if he is quoting Kern, whom he admired,[82] or if this combination of the sixth scale degree plus a diminished harmony remained in his mind as a musical marker of tentativeness, lack of commitment or pain.

Lyricists and Rodgers' Style

No survey of Rodgers' compositional style is complete without examining the lyricists with whom Rodgers worked during his years on Broadway. In fact, Kaye, Wilder, and Wood point out that Rodgers' compositional style changed remarkably when he stopped working with Lorenz Hart and began working with Oscar Hammerstein in the early 1940s. We have already seen Wilder's preference for the witty and urbane Rodgers and Hart songs as opposed to the later "musical complacency" in his work with Hammerstein (Wilder 1990, 164). From Kaye we learn that Rodgers' songs with Hammerstein "demonstrated a movement away from customary popular song forms" (Kaye 1969, 59). Kaye cites the influence of folk music in the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus, as well as "drastically altered popular forms" and "classical forms and adaptations" (73). Wood adds that Rodgers began to use anachronistic song forms in *Oklahoma!*, like strophic choruses (Wood 2000, 220). In breaking away from the Tin Pan Alley/popular song form, Rodgers also shifted his

[81] "Make Believe" contains a half-diminished vii chord (c–e♭–g♭–b♭), while "If I Loved You" contains a diminished ii chord (e–g–b♭).
[82] Wilder describes several of Rodgers' songs as being influenced by Kern (1990, 170), either melodically, harmonically, or in some other formal way, including "Dear, Oh Dear" (from *Chee-Chee)*, "I Must Love You" (also from *Chee-Chee*), and "With a Song in My Heart" (from *Spring is Here*) (Wilder 1990, 180).

use of harmony and rhythm, with less jazz-infused structures and more "complexity, alteration...and unusual cadences" (Kaye 1969, 73).

The shifts in both large-scale and small-scale compositional style cannot be understood outside of the context of the plays being dramatized or the change in lyricists. Rodgers had just finished composing the jazz-infused *By Jupiter* (1942) when the project that became *Oklahoma!* (1943) was presented to him (Secrest 2001, 223); had he continued to work with Hart, it is conceivable that Rodgers' 1940s musicals would have been more in the vein of *By Jupiter* and *Pal Joey* (1940). In fact, in his first musical after the death of Oscar Hammerstein in the 1960s, Rodgers returned to the jazz idiom in *No Strings* (1962), especially in the song he wrote for African American actress Diahann Carroll, "The Sweetest Sounds" (Block 2003, 210).[83] *No Strings* was the only musical for which Rodgers wrote the lyrics as well as composed the music. Clearly it was the presence of Hammerstein and the types of dramas for which Rodgers was creating the music that made the difference, pulling Rodgers away from the popular song idiom. The ASCAP ban may have also played its part, as Wood suggested; the music of *Pal Joey* was a casualty of that ban, which prevented classics like "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered" from being widely heard by American audiences until the 1953 revival of the musical (Secrest 2001, 217).

Hammerstein describes Rodgers as being "essentially a composer for plays" (Block 2002, 81), and the plays Rodgers created with Hammerstein differed greatly

[83] In 1997, this song was interpolated into Whitney Houston's production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Cinderella.*

from those with Hart, in setting, mood, and message. Most of the Rodgers and Hart corpus involved contemporary stories in urban settings, and even those that were deliberately written to be historical (*Dearest Enemy, A Connecticut Yankee, The Boys from Syracuse,* and the ill-fated *Chee-Chee*) were not written to seem authentic or genuine, but to get a laugh from the anachronistic nature of the shows. Songs like "Thou Swell," for example, played on the absurd juxtaposition of a past time period, with contemporary language and mores, expressed in a popular jazz-infused idiom.

By contrast, the historical shows with Hammerstein—*Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, and *The King and I*, for example—were more earnest in their attempts to depict the past, even an idealized past. It was this honest desire to be "authentic" that led Hammerstein to his (sometimes unfortunate) dialect choices and anachronistic song styles.[84] Hammerstein's collaboration also led to the heartfelt and sometimes preachy themes about social justice,[85] such as the overt anti-racist messages permeating *South Pacific* and *The King and I*. Rodgers points out that "You Have to Be Carefully Taught" (which certain Southern states attempted to ban from *South Pacific*) "has been denigrated…because it is considered propagandistic," a charge which Rodgers counters by explaining how the song fits the characters and the drama (Rodgers 2002, 261). This desire for a musical to represent and promote social good was not a

[84] The choice of anachronistic song styles may be something Hammerstein picked up working with Jerome Kern on *Show Boat*, in which song types—waltzes, ballyhoos, cakewalks, spirituals—and even old published songs (like "After the Ball") acted as signifiers of time period and, often, race. Block (2003, 231) mentions that with Hammerstein and Kern, the music was composed first, so the choices of song type may have been Kern's.

[85] Hammerstein had been a politically active liberal since the 1920s, serving as Vice President of the NAACP (Most 2004, 87), and by the late 1940s, he had become a "one-world federalist" (Hyland 1998, 192). Hammerstein's stature insulated him from the blacklisting of the 1950s, but when his friend Hy Kroft pleaded the Fifth Amendment in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee, Hammerstein supported him publicly (Fordin 1995, 313).

hallmark of the typical Rodgers and Hart musical. *Pal Joey,* for example, is a cynical musical about a womanizing cad, his adulterous wealthy lover, and a young showgirl caught up in an unpleasant plot.

For Rodgers, the change in lyricist meant a change in dramatic direction and a change in working relationship. Most of the available sources on Rodgers and Hart make it clear that while Rodgers might have a song title for inspiration, his musical compositions were usually finished well before Hart added lyrics.[86] However, other sources mention that Rodgers and Hart often collaborated closely as they were creating a song or show (Margaret Case Harriman, *Words and Music: Rodgers and Hart,* originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1938, as quoted in Block 2002, 56). Rodgers himself writes:

> Larry seldom gave me a completed lyric; at best it would be no more than a verse or an opening chorus. Occasionally he would give me a title which would suggest a melody. Most of the time I would play a completed melody for him and we'd sit around tossing titles and lyric ideas at each other. Once we agreed on a general theme, Larry would write the words and we would have a finished song (Rodgers 2002, 206).

Later in their partnership, Hart's alcoholism made him increasingly unreliable. During the writing of *By Jupiter,* Hart was hospitalized and Rodgers locked himself in the hospital room with Hart and a piano until the lyrics for the musical were finished (Secrest 2001, 221).

With Hammerstein, on the other hand, Rodgers would get the completed lyrics first. The presence of the lyrics in advance of the music changes the process of melody writing, especially for a composer like Rodgers who was sensitive to declamation

[86] See Kaye (1969) and Block (2003), among others.

(Block 2003, 37) and who would "carefully consider scansion, meaning and mood" (Kaye 1969, 22). These lyrics were not created in a vacuum, however. Hammerstein was very much involved in the song-writing process. He and Rodgers would meet early on to discuss song possibilities, and Hammerstein would offer suggestions, such as a book of cowboy songs he gave to Rodgers as inspiration for Curly's cowboy song in *Oklahoma!* (Wood 2000, 239). Block cites letters exchanged by composer and lyricist during the writing of *Cinderella* (when Hammerstein was out of the country), which show Rodgers making suggestions on lyrics and Hammerstein making suggestions on musical mode (Block 2003, 183).[87]

Although Rodgers worked closely with both of his collaborators, the presence of completed lyrics before the composition process clearly mattered to Rodgers and affected the kind of music he created. In his 1969 interview[88] with Milton Kaye, Rodgers acknowledges a rhythmic disjunct in the Rodgers and Hart classic "My Heart Stood Still," and states that he would not have written the melody in the same way had Lorenz Hart supplied the lyrics first (Kaye 1969, 22). It is possible, then, to note certain changes in Rodgers' compositional practices during the years with Hammerstein, although Wood demonstrates that Rodgers' usage of chorus structures actually remained consistent from his work with Hart up to and including *Oklahoma!* (Wood 2000).

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[87] Secrest points out that Rodgers felt "helpless" waiting for lyrics, but documents that, in fact, he did wait for them (Secrest 2001, 307).

[88] Several years after this interview, Rodgers worked with lyricist Sheldon Harnick on the musical *Rex* (1976) (Block 2003, 233). Harnick found Rodgers "incapable of writing the music first...Rodgers always needed the lyric in front of him, and he wanted it to be complete" (Secrest 2001, 390). Harnick attributes this to Rodgers' deteriorating health and problems with abstract thinking possibly due to a stroke (390), but it is possible that Rodgers had gotten used to working with a pre-existing lyric after his years with Hammerstein.

Rodgers' Compositional Features

Table 1 summarizes key features of Rodgers' compositional style, including the prevailing style of Tin Pan Alley songs, which guided much of his songwriting until the 1940s.

Table 1. Rodgers' compositional features

Structures	Description	Tin Pan Alley (TPA)/ Rodgers
Song Structure	**Song parts** 1. Instrumental introduction 2. Verse 3. Refrain (which contains chorus) 4. Sometimes extended forms, extended "limbs," or hybrid forms **Instrumental introduction** ▪ Verse ending in V (dominant chord) and possible fermata ▪ May foreshadow subsequent material **Verse** ▪ 16 bars long, though may vary greatly in length ▪ Least stable part of song: may differ from show to sheet music to film ▪ Expository function ▪ Like recitative in opera: delivered as something between speech and song **Refrain** ▪ Means of identifying the song ▪ Typically contains song title in lyrics ▪ 32-bar refrain standard ▪ Subdivided into four 8-bar sections ▪ First 16 bars called the "chorus;" often two identical 8-bar phrases (but not always) ▪ Third 8-bar phrase called the "release" or "bridge" ▪ Fourth 8-bar phrase repeats the chorus, either identically or with slight variation ▪ Two common structures: AABA (above) or ABAC (where B is a musical development section and C is new material which ends with original theme A)	TPA
	Irregular Forms ▪ Asymmetry ▪ Unusual forms like rondo ▪ Elimination of verse	Rodgers

Table 1, Continued

Structures	Description	Tin Pan Alley (TPA)/ Rodgers
Chorus Structure	**Chorus**: First 16 bars of refrain **Common Types** ▪ AABA (lyric binary [Wood 2000]): half cadence after the first eight bars and after the third set of eight bars, resulting in a cadence pattern of alternating half and perfect authentic cadences ▪ ABAC (parallel period [Wood 2000]): AB = antecedent (ends on half cadence) and AC = consequent (ends on perfect authentic cadence); thirty-two bar refrain of the parallel period chorus required to end in a half cadence	TPA
	▪ A flair for unusual releases (B-section bridges) ▪ Use of lyric binary choruses for the direct expression of love ▪ Use of parallel period choruses for more distant/formal expressions of love	Rodgers
Keys/Modes	▪ Preference for major mode ▪ Rarely uses minor or other modes	Rodgers
Time Signatures/ Rhythms	▪ 4/4, *alla breve* or 3/4 meter ▪ Recurring dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note values ▪ Charleston dance figures ▪ Syncopations	TPA
	▪ Syncopated rhythms with Hart ▪ Fewer syncopated rhythms with Hammerstein	Rodgers
Motives	Motives beginning on downbeat or anacrusis	Rodgers
Idiomatic Chords/ Harmonies	▪ Triads with the added sixth ▪ Chords borrowed from the parallel minor ▪ Unusual chords produced by compression or suspension ▪ "Ornamental" harmonies ▪ Borrowings from ragtime, jazz and blues	TPA
	▪ General reliance on diatonic harmony and traditional tonal key relationships ▪ Unexpected harmonies combined with expected melody notes ▪ The tendency of eight-bar sections to begin on a major triad ▪ Avoidance of tonic note/chord phrase endings ("pigs")	Rodgers

Table 1, Continued

Structures	Description	Tin Pan Alley (TPA)/ Rodgers
Idiomatic Pitch Choices	Use of "blue notes" (♭3, ♭5, ♭6, and ♭7)	TPA
	▪ Preference for repeated tones used as rhythmic propellants ▪ Use of unexpected chromatic melody tones for purpose of surprise ▪ Sometimes tailored songs to vocal ranges of particular singers	Rodgers
Idiomatic Melody Patterns	▪ A proclivity for stepwise/scalar melodies ▪ A penchant for a string of repeated notes in the melody, often for the purpose of rhythmic propulsion ▪ A characteristic melodic pattern of returning to a single pitch while moving other pitches down or up ▪ A characteristic melodic pattern of descending fourths (or thirds) ▪ Use of "the Rodgers' leap" of a third toward the end of choruses ▪ Pairing of unexpected melody notes with expected harmonies ▪ Oscillation between tonic and leading tone followed by a leap in the beginnings of choruses (and verses)	Rodgers
Lyrics	▪ Written in vernacular ▪ Straightforward, sincere, ironic, witty ▪ Assonances, alliterations, memorable sounds	TPA
Dramatic Considerations	▪ "Family resemblance" between songs within a show; the songs in a show sometimes develop from a central song (as in *Carousel*) ▪ Songs of lovers sharing rhythms or musical gestures ▪ Repetition, especially of seconds, to represent obsession ▪ Song types represent historical time periods (with Hammerstein) ▪ Use of chromatics for dramatic effect	Rodgers

CHAPTER THREE:

RODGERS AS ORIENTALIST COMPOSER

Introduction

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the technical literature about Rodgers as a composer and compiled a list of features that commonly appear in Rodgers' music. In this chapter, I will make the case for Richard Rodgers as an "orientalist" composer and explore his attitudes when composing for ethnic "Others" and the musical features he uses to express difference. This chapter will be divided into three parts. The first part will explore Rodgers' attitudes and methods in writing for what he considers to be racial or ethnic Others. The second part will connect Rodgers' attitudes and methods with Edward Said's (Said 2003) concept of "Orientalism" as it has been applied to music. The final section will explore Rodgers' use of features in his "exotic" or Asian-oriented musicals, demonstrating how they relate to stereotypical orientalist depictions, while still reflecting Rodgers' striving for originality.

Rodgers and Ethnic Others

The characters in Rodgers' musicals with Lorenz Hart were overwhelmingly white (Americans and Europeans), usually set in the United States or Europe, with one major exception.[89] In Rodgers' work with Hammerstein, even some characters with definite ethnic backgrounds in the original source material became white Americans. These include the mixed American Indian/white residents of the Oklahoma territory in Lynn Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs* (in *The Cherokee Night and Other Plays* 2003),

[89] This is the musical *Chee-Chee* which will be discussed later.

who became the strictly white community in *Oklahoma!*[90] Likewise, the Hungarians in Ferenc Molnar's play *Lilliom* became the New Englanders in *Carousel*, although this substitution does not carry the same domestic political import as suppressing American Indian heritage.

Nonetheless, Rodgers does musically dramatize some obvious ethnic Others in work with Hammerstein, even outside of the three major "exotic"/Asian musicals. There are evocations of ethnic music written for characters like the Mexican laborer in *Pipe Dream* (Rodgers and Hammerstein 1956) (based on John Steinbeck's *Sweet Thursday*),[91] an Italian couple (and Italy) in *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (set in Venice), an African American woman in *No Strings*,[92] British characters or content in *Rex* (and *The King and I*), and Austrians, in the faux-folk song "Edelweiss" from *The Sound of Music.* When dramatizing these characters and places, Rodgers explains that his wish is to avoid obvious or hackneyed stereotypes in his music. For example, in describing the music for *Do I Hear a Waltz?*, Rodgers writes, "We weren't going to resort to tarantellas or a comic ballet featuring gondoliers" (Rodgers 2002, 318). In *Pipe Dream*, Rodgers avoids the stereotypical Phrygian mode in composing the guitar

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[90] Lynn Riggs' mother was part Cherokee and Jace Weaver (2003), in his foreward to a recent reissue of Riggs' collection, describes *Green Grow the Lilacs* as "an affectionate and romanticized depiction of the land of Riggs' youth" (xii). In the end of the play, as the males of the community come to take Curly the cowboy to federal prison for the murder of Jeter (Jud) Fry, they argue with Aunt Eller, who accuses them of being "furriners" for supporting United States law against Territory law. In their defense, the men say that they are not "furriners" and that they are "plumb full of Indian blood" (Riggs 2003, 103). Weaver argues, "I believe that there is considerable textual evidence that *Green Grow the Lilacs* is not a play devoid of Indian characters at all but is, rather, in some sense, a play *about* [sic] them" (xiii). Clearly, this mixed heritage never appears in *Oklahoma!*.

[91] There is an offstage "Serenade" written for a minor Mexican character, Esteban, in A major, cut time, with rolled guitar chords, melodic raised half steps acting as leading tones, and Spanish lyrics.

[92] *No Strings* was Rodgers' first musical after the death of Oscar Hammerstein, and it was the only one for which he also wrote the lyrics to his songs. Here Rodgers returns to his jazz-infused roots, and it is not clear whether this return to jazz was due to the African American heritage of the main character or the absence of Hammerstein's operetta-influenced lyrics and song types.

serenade for Esteban. Rodgers' rejection of musical clichés, which had been part of American song writing since, at least, Tin Pan Alley, was a fight against the hackneyed, not a call for social justice or accuracy in representation.

Evocation of certain styles or time periods runs through Rodgers' work with Hammerstein, such as in the influence of cowboy song in "Oh What a Beautiful Mornin'" (*Oklahoma!*) and New England Protestant hymnody in "You'll Never Walk Alone" (*Carousel*). The evocation of musical style, along with the appropriation of certain instrumentation, rhythms, harmonies, and melodic structure, also expresses ethnicity. For the musical *Rex*, a late Rodgers' show with lyricist Sheldon Harnick based on the life of Henry VIII, Rodgers evokes English music by appropriating madrigal[93] and, as Block asserts, the carol "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," whose rhythm, mode, and pitch contour emerge in the song "Why?" (Block 2003, 239). I have also argued previously that the appropriation of Gilbert-and-Sullivan-style patter song in *The King and I* marks Anna's Britishness (Ponti 2006, unpublished manuscript). The song "Edelweiss" from *The Sound of Music* (Rodgers and Hammerstein 1960) was intended by Rodgers to evoke Austrian folk song, as was "My Favorite Things" (Rodgers 2002, 301).[94] Rodgers does not make his composition techniques explicit, but both "Austrian" songs are in triple time, evoking Viennese waltz; both have mostly diatonic harmonies (although "My Favorite Things" does alternate between parallel major and minor); both have scalar melodic movement as

[93] Block notes that these appropriations did not appeal to some critics, although most liked the score (Block 2003, 238).

[94] Rodgers also mentions that "The Lonely Goatherd" (with its stylized yodels) and the instrumental "Laendler" (also from *The Sound of Music*) were intended to evoke the Alps. One can tell with "The Lonely Goatherd" that it is not a typical Rodgers' stepwise melody, but relies on movement in large leaps (octaves, sevenths, and even ninths), which evoke yodeling.

well as melodic movement with consecutive leaps (usually along triads), but these are limited in size to intervals of a fifth; and both have square (unsyncopated) rhythms.[95]

Rodgers' evocation by appropriation is more sophisticated than the hackneyed clichés he was trying to avoid, but such evocations can become clichés in themselves, and take the risk of becoming racial or ethnic parody, especially when the music being evoked is connected to stereotyped images of the people being represented. Going back to the The *Sound of Music*, a song like "Edelweiss" might not be a blatant musical stereotype, although some audiences mistook it for an actual Austrian folk song (Wilk 1993, 146).[96] However, "The Lonely Goatherd," with its mountain setting and its stereotyped "yodeling" intervals, risks being the musical equivalent of the souvenir Alpine hats sold to tourists. "My Favorite Things," predominantly (and unusually for Rodgers) in a minor key, has proven to be the most flexible of the three songs, able to live outside the musical and its ethnic identification, thanks to the interpretations of jazz musicians, especially that of John Coltrane.

Rodgers' practice of appropriating musical styles and elements to evoke differences in time period, geographic location, or ethnicity/race occurs in the context of the larger function of the musical theater composer: dramatizing stock characters in often predictable situations without falling into oversimplification and cliché. Musical features function as shorthand for the audience, as a quick way to identify character traits, location and settings, and the quality of dramatic events. In his composing,

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[95] The song structure of each is different, however, with "Edelweiss" set up as a lyric binary (AABA) and "My Favorite Things" set up in a verse-refrain format, with three musically identical verses of AABC format followed by a refrain.

[96] Wilk (1993) retells a popular story about a fan who approached Theodore Bickel (cast as Captain Von Trapp). The fan told the actor how much he loved the song, which he claimed to have known for a long time in the original German (146).

Rodgers chooses predictable musical conventions from the Western tradition, selecting certain keys or modes, harmonies, or accompaniment figures to express various aspects of the drama. In *Oklahoma!*, for example, the antagonistic and dangerous character of Jud Fry sings "Lonely Room" in a predictably minor key with dissonant seconds and descending arpeggios[97] in the accompaniment. In *Pipe Dream*, when Doc, the marine biologist, is explaining the Darwinian world existing beneath the water's surface in "The Tide Pool," he and his assistants sing in C minor. In "Pore Jud is Daid" (*Oklahoma!*) the use of an old-fashioned revival hymn[98] with funeral march tempo, minor key, and unusual chromatic color tones, evokes not only the bizarre premise of the song—Curly is trying to persuade Jud to kill himself—but also the funeral service itself.[99]

In all of these cases, Rodgers was clearly drawing from the Western musical tradition with its well-recognized dramatic language for on-stage characters, and his influences include the opera and symphony,[100] European operetta, Tin Pan Alley, other American musicals, and popular musical styles. With Hart, Rodgers' compositional techniques stayed close to the established popular song structure; with Hammerstein, song structures and types became ways of communicating drama (as in "Pore Jud is Daid"). With both lyricists, Rodgers used keys, harmonies, melodies, rhythms and musical gestures as communicative devices within the established

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[97] These arpeggios are reminiscent of the downward moving chromatics under Iago's line "beva con me" in the accompaniment of the Brindisi from Verdi's *Otello*.
[98] Wood (2000) describes this song as "an outdated hymn sung at 'a mock revival meeting'" (237).
[99] This is an unusual piece in musical theater and for Rodgers, but there is no indication that Rodgers did any research when composing the music for this song. Rodgers actually claimed to have not done outside research up to *The Sound of Music*, although it is well documented that Oscar Hammerstein left Rodgers a book of traditional cowboy songs when the two worked on *Oklahoma!* (Wood 2000, 239).
[100] Secrest (2001) tells us that Rodgers and his wife were regulars at the opera and the symphony (144).

Western Music paradigm. It is this approach that Rodgers brought with him in composing for Asian characters in the musicals with Oscar Hammerstein.

Rodgers and Orientalism

Richard Rodgers first composed music to depict Asian characters in *Chee-Chee,* a 1928 musical comedy created with Lorenz Hart. *Chee-Chee* had the highly unusual theme of castration and was based on a 1927 novel by Charles Pettit called *The Son of the Grand Eunuch*. The musical's protagonist spends the entire play trying to avoid the fate of castration, which is necessary to inherit his father's title. Rodgers was unenthusiastic about the book, but Hart and Broadway legend Lew Fields drove the project forward to its inevitable box office failure.[101]

Chee-Chee was Rodgers' first experience composing a score for all Chinese characters, and his way of handling the score for this musical remained his modus operandi through the rest of his career:

> For *Chee-Chee,* my job was to compose music for a story set in ancient China. Obviously, it would have been inappropriate for me to write typically "American" music, but equally obviously, even if I could have written "Chinese" music, Broadway audiences would have found it unattractive—to say nothing of the impossibility of Larry's finding the proper words to go with it. The only solution was to compose my own kind of music but with an Oriental inflection, *reproducing a style rather than creating a faithful imitation* (Rodgers 2002, 118). [Italics mine]

Rodgers makes it clear that his goal was not to learn and imitate Chinese music, but to compose in a style that is readily identifiable by his American audience as "Oriental."

[101] A contemporary review of the show describes it as "sometimes cute and always dirty"—which is not meant as a compliment—and the review goes on to criticize substandard songwriting work by Rodgers and Hart (Unsigned Review 1928).

This approach, which Rodgers saw as a theatrical necessity, reflects an orientalist practice in which the West creates its own version of the Orient, in this case, without an authentic stimulus, such as a Chinese song or instrumental recording. A composer need not know music of the country or people he is trying to represent: "...only a knowledge of orientalist signifiers is required" (Scott 1998, 309). These signifiers abound in the discourses surrounding Western art music (including opera and operetta),[102] American popular music (including Tin Pan Alley and Broadway),[103] and in music for movies (and later television). The signifiers that Rodgers chose for *Chee-Chee* include "Ravel-like tone clusters and chord progressions" (Feingold 2002), that is, whole tone clusters and chord progressions, which Ravel used "for exotic effect" (Scott 1998, 313). Rodgers uses whole tone chord progressions again in South Pacific, most noticeably in "Bali Ha'i."

Rodgers' approach is clearly derivative; he is not encountering the Asian Other and appropriating features or styles which he hears. Unlike his British predecessor Arthur Sullivan, who incorporated a Japanese melody into the score of *The Mikado*,[104] and unlike his Broadway "descendant" Stephen Sondheim, who incorporated Japanese elements (like Noh Theater) into his *Pacific Overtures*, Rodgers does not use authentic material at all. He is drawing from the discourse of "theatrical exotic" and, while attempting to avoid cliché, is maintaining recognizable signifiers for his audience. Art

[102] A major influence, of course, was Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, which burlesqued the exoticism in operetta by exploiting popular European orientalist tropes.
[103] The history of musical theater is replete with "exotic" Others, and even the earliest musicals brought their audiences to the "exotic" stage versions of: Africa (*Evangeline*, 1874); Siam (*Wang*, 1891); and the Philippines (*Floradora*, 1900, and *The Sultan of Sulu*, 1902). Mast calls the Philippines shows (complete with female dancers in grass skirts) "big stick musicals" (Mast 1987, 15) after Teddy Roosevelt's foreign policy, and traces the direct link between these musicals and *The King and I* (15).
[104] The song "Miya Sama" incorporated the melody of a Japanese military march song titled "Ton-yare Bushi."

music composers might jump on Rodgers' practices as "pandering" to the audience's own musical ignorance, but Rodgers actually offers a challenge to this kind of implied criticism:

> Frequently composers try to reproduce the musical sound of a specific age or locale, often with some success, but I think it's a mistake. It leaves the writer wide open to comparison—usually unfavorable—with the real thing, and at best only reveals re-creative, rather than creative, skills (Rodgers 2002, 118).

I find this to be an interesting remark from Rodgers, presaging the current concerns surrounding authenticity and the appropriation of styles by composers and performers. Yet one might argue that Rodgers did appropriate African American jazz idiom in his songs with Lorenz Hart and that he appropriated musical styles of the American and European past (waltzes, hymns, cowboy songs, patter song, etc.) with Oscar Hammerstein II. But Rodgers was not a first-hand appropriator. By the time Rodgers was using African American idioms and European waltzes, for example, these were already grounded in the Broadway idiom, having been incorporated by white composers like Berlin, Gershwin, Kern, etc. from ragtime, jazz and operetta. Going farther back, African American musical practices had been appropriated by (white) minstrelsy, and through vaudeville, to the Broadway tradition. In other words, these appropriated practices were already a part of the Broadway musical palette, and this was the music on which Rodgers cut his musical teeth. For Rodgers, this palette was genuine, authentic to him, even though much of it had been appropriated.[105] Basically, Rodgers' authentic musical style was the mélange of musical signifiers

[105] However as Hyland points out, Rodgers was not as influenced by jazz as other Broadway composers (like Gershwin), and did not frequent jazz clubs, showing "no affinity for the blues and no interest in hot music" (Hyland 1998, 43).

known as *theater music*. All sources on Rodgers indicate that his focus was almost entirely on the music of the theater[106] and the function of his music was to dramatize characters and events.[107]

Rodgers feels on home ground with Broadway music, with its mix of popular styles, operetta, and its Western classical methods of composition and characterization. Rodgers regards the music of Asia as a different system in which he could never compose in a genuine or expert way. The question of authenticity is wrapped up in Rodger's lack of expertise, but this does not mean his concern about authenticity is manufactured.

More than twenty years after the premiere of *Chee-Chee*, Rodgers was once again faced with a score set in an Asian country, this time, the nineteenth-century Siam of *The King and I*. Rodgers writes of this compositional process:

> In composing the score, I followed my usual custom of writing the best music I could for the characters and situations without slavishly trying to imitate the music of the locale in which the story was set. Not only would I have been incapable of creating anything authentically Siamese, but even if I could, I wouldn't have done it. Western audiences are not attuned to the sounds of tinkling bells, high nasal strings, and percussive gongs, and would not find this kind of music attractive. If a composer is to reach his audience emotionally—and surely that's what theatre [sic] music is all about—he must reach the people through sounds they can relate to. I have always compared my approach to this particular score to the way an American painter like Grant Wood might put his impressions of Bangkok on canvas. It would look like Siam, but like Siam as seen through the eyes of an American artist. Any other approach would be false and self-defeating (Rodgers 2002, 273-274).

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[106] For example Hyland (1998, 43).

[107] Even the way in which Rodgers and Hart combined sweet melody with ironic, biting and clever lyrics is a reflection of Gilbert and Sullivan's style, a pillar of theatrical musical discourse. Critics often referred to Rodgers and Hart as "Gilbert and Sullivan," much to Rodgers' annoyance (Secrest 2001, 73); later, the team of Rodgers and Hammerstein was referred to in the same way (Hyland 1998, 211).

Here, after reiterating some of his previous concerns, Rodgers invokes the communicative function of theater and his duty to its audience, as well as expanding on his argument about authenticity.

Rodgers is defending his compositional choices here, and with *The King and I*, Rodgers actually had the option to use more authentic materials. Film composer Bernard Herrmann, known for his scores of classic American movies like *Citizen Kane* and *Psycho*, had researched Thai music for the film version of *Anna and the King of Siam* (Landon, Benson, Jennings, Dunne, Harrison, et al. 1946/2005), and he offered this research to Rodgers, who turned it down (Hyland 1998, 195).[108] Rodgers does not mention Herrmann in his autobiography, but his allusion to a hypothetical Grant Wood painting of Bangkok as "Siam seen through the eyes of an American artist" could be a reference to Herrmann's film score in this context.[109] It could also reflect a general belief in cultural immutability on Rodgers' part. Grant Wood, the painter of the iconic "American Gothic" represents quintessential Americanism (even though he trained in Europe and was heavily influenced by Dutch techniques). Wood's expression of rural Midwestern America connects to the musical expression of the

[108] While Rodgers officially turned Herrmann down, the film music may have had an effect on Rodgers' choice of features. "March of the Siamese Children" (*The King and I*) begins (after an octave leap) with what looks like the first six pitches of a descending C-major scale in the melody over an F–C (open fifth) harmony in the bass, giving a Lydian mode feel, with the B♮ as a raised fourth. This same combination of C-scale against an F in the bass can be found in the music from scenes in *Anna and the King of Siam* (Landon, Benson, Jennings, Dunne, Harrison, et al. 1946/2005). These include (from the 2005 DVD): Chapter 4, "Happy Birthday" opening music; and Chapter 22, "Staying On" (about 1:50 into the scene). Before *The King and I*, Rodgers used primarily whole tone scales and clusters (*Chee-Chee*, *South Pacific*) for a "Chinese" or "exotic" sound. The use of the raised fourth or Lydian feel, throughout *The King and I* and in *Flower Drum Song*, might possibly be connected with the Herrmann score. We know that the film was screened for Rodgers and Hammerstein, and that the pair took much from the film for their version of the musical (Mordden 1992, 132). Rodgers mentions nothing about the source of this raised fourth inflection in his autobiography.

[109] Herrmann's score was based on traditional Thai court music, but with Western orchestral instrumentation. There is, however, Balinese gamelan music interpolated in the film (dinner party scene) taken from a pre-existing recording.

rural frontier mythologized in *Oklahoma!* (Wood 2000, 223).[110] The implication of the Grant Wood comparison is that if one is culturally American, one's only authentic expression is an American interpretation of the subject at hand, even if that subject hails from another cultural tradition. This perspective, of course, leads to the conclusion that even if an American were highly trained in a foreign musical system, his or her expression in that system would always be inauthentic. If this were the case, then any attempt to compose outside one's own system is doomed from the start.

Exactly how far this argument about authenticity goes and to which foreign traditions it applies is not completely clear. For example, Rodgers, who was Jewish, managed a very authentic-sounding Catholic (Gregorian) chant and hymn in *The Sound of Music* (1959), and he did this by breaking his own rules[111] and researching Catholic religious music with the help of a nun who was the head of a college music department (Rodgers 2002, 301). In his autobiography, Rodgers states that he was apprehensive about writing church music because he was of a different faith and wanted the sound to be authentic (301). His concerns about authenticity may have had to do with a number of issues, including both the sacredness of the religious music and the presence of Catholic audience members, still steeped in the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass, who would readily recognize an inauthentic Catholic chant or hymn.

One could argue, of course, that Catholic chants and hymns are part of the Western tradition and that Rodgers would at least be *musically* authentic there, if not religiously so. Although Rodgers was not a seasoned composer of Catholic chants or

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[110] For a discussion of regional American art and the musical *Oklahoma!* see Wood (2000, 222-265).
[111] Rodgers claims in his autobiography that this was the first time he had ever done research for a theatrical musical composition (Rodgers 2002, 301).

hymns in the way he was of Broadway music, composing an actual Latin chant and four-part *a cappella* Catholic hymn[112] involved only an extension of his compositional skills, not a complete relearning of these skills. With appropriate help, Rodgers could compose a small Latin hymn, drawing from the authentic tradition, and compose it in the way it might be composed by its own practitioners. This, I believe, comes the closest to describing Rodgers' notion of authenticity as a composer. In this way, composing a Catholic hymn for Broadway could become as authentic to him as the cowboy song or the old-fashioned revival hymn from *Oklahoma!*.

Unable to authentically replicate the process of a trained Chinese or Thai composer, Rodgers was also unwilling to appropriate genuine elements of this music in a Western-style score (as Herrmann did), regarding this practice as ineffective or inauthentic. The conclusion, odd as it may seem, is that for Rodgers to be authentic, he needed to replace the musical tradition of the Other (which he could not replicate or appropriate) with the orientalist musical tools from his own compositional tradition.

Rodgers' concerns for authenticity were not exclusively philosophical, but also practical: his audiences, as he saw it, were themselves Americans steeped in a particular musical tradition. Anything that might alienate them was a problem. Rodgers sees theater music as communicating to a general audience, and the job of the composer is to emotionally move that audience, using musical devices familiar to the audience without falling into stereotype. Using a musical system foreign to the audience would defeat this purpose entirely.

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[112] The chant was built on Psalm 109 and was followed by a hymn in Latin with an Alleluia.

In actual practice, writing music for "foreign characters" or Others is a feat achieved by using certain accessible and well-accepted signifiers, which will have a certain emotional effect. As Derek Scott puts it:

> Oriental music is not a poor imitation of another cultural practice: its purpose is not to imitate, but to represent...therefore, a chain of signifiers may be assembled to represent a more defined Other culture... *[R]epresentations rely upon culturally learned recognition* (Scott 1998, 326). [Italics mine]

Rodgers, then, has to be considered an orientalist composer with all that this term (Said 2003) implies. Rodgers is not imitating but representing the Other, and he is using certain culturally shared and acquired signifiers for that representation. While he may have his legitimate compositional concerns regarding authenticity, his use of representational musical features takes place within a political context—a context in which Asians and Asian Americans have a particular role within a larger set of power relations.

Edward Said defines Orientalism as a discourse[113]—as a way of "dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (Said 2003, 3). Orientalism imposes limits on those who might write or think about or act on it; those limited by an orientalist discourse cannot really deal with what actually exists on its own terms, but only through an imagined construct called "the Orient," created by the West. Crucially, Orientalism involves political power and the ability of that power center to control the discourse; it is, in fact, a kind of ideological colonization, in which the colonized subject (the Other) is assigned those traits which the power center rejects for

[113] It is actually, more appropriately, a discursive formation in which understanding of the Other is guided and delimited by a "system of knowledge or grid that filters" the Other "into the consciousness of the West" (Macey 2001, 283).

itself and then the Other is defined and circumscribed by those traits in all interactions. Those traits can then be used as a justification for maintaining the power structure. The actual experience or point of view of the Other is unable to be heard or acknowledged. In creating this construct of the Other, the power center creates its construct of itself, explaining why a power center might cling to its stereotyped notions of the Other, since its own constructed identity is bound up in them. Rodgers, as an American composer, is musically representing Tonkinese, Polynesians, Siamese, and Chinese American characters with Western orientalist musical features. His motivations may not be to "idealogically colonize" these characters, but the effect can almost not be helped, especially with audiences who may have never heard music from these traditions and mistake Rodgers' creative work for the genuine article.

Said's (2003) description of Orientalism definitely fits the character of King Mongkut in *The King and I*, but it does not so easily fit the Chinese Americans in *Flower Drum Song* who exhibit different responses to their assimilation into the American "melting pot." It is important to keep intent in mind when examining the use of these musical features. The desire to avoid racial stereotyping even while working within an orientalist framework may seem to be contradictory, but for Rodgers and Hammerstein it was a modus operandi. Much of this contradiction can be explained by understanding Asian characters as both Asian and as standing in for assimilating Jews (as Andrea Most [2004] implies in her analysis of *The King and I*) and their concerns about racism in America. This understanding will explain how Rodgers and

Hammerstein could challenge the American audience's racism,[114] sometimes even to the point of backlash,[115] and yet still characterize an Asian king as a buffoon who speaks Pidgin English.

Orientalist Musical Features in Rodgers' "Exotic" Musicals

In this section, I will look for those compositional elements that are associated primarily with Asian characters in Rodgers' music from *South Pacific* and *The King and I*, and with Asian and Asian American characters in *Flower Drum Song*. My working method for deciding on their status as signifiers will be based on: (1) the information about Rodgers' compositional style from the review of the literature in Chapter Two; (2) the presence of certain musical features in songs or music relating to Asian (or "exotic") characters or locales and their absence in songs relating to white characters or American locales; (3) the available research on orientalist musical features in Western music; and (4) Richard Rodgers' own comments (when available) on the intent behind certain features.

In Chapter Two, I presented a complete review of the available literature on Rodgers' compositional style and choices. From this review we know that Rodgers' style had very definite features, and any deviation from his more regular compositional practices in the three "exotic" musicals might indicate a characterization of a foreign person or place, especially if that unexpected feature is associated exclusively with an Asian/"exotic" character or locale. In addition, there is

[114] Oscar Hammerstein II, an activist and one-time Vice President of the NAACP, began challenging audiences in 1927 with *Show Boat*, and continued to do so in the post-war period through *South Pacific* and *The King and I* (Most 2000, 326).
[115] When *South Pacific* premiered, one Southern state introduced a bill to outlaw what some lawmakers saw as Communist-inspired entertainment (Most 2000, 307).

a body of literature on orientalist features in Western music, against which Rodgers' irregular choices may be compared. For example, we know (from Chapter Two) that Rodgers wrote most of his music in major keys. The few songs that use minor keys (like "Lonely Room" and "The Tide Pool") have a dramatic reason for doing so. We also know that Rodgers avoided mixing modes, except in a handful of songs like "My Funny Valentine" (from *Babes in Arms*) and "My Favorite Things," in which a minor key is transformed into its relative major by the end of the song or refrain. Rodgers did not use modes outside major or minor at all in his usual composition. Therefore, if we come across a use of Dorian, Phrygian or Lydian mode or some unusual mode mixing in *The King and I*, for example, we have a candidate for an Asian signifier. We can then compare this to orientalist musical features discussed in the literature: use of modes outside of major and minor is one way Western composers have created the "exotic" (Scott 1998, 327). At that point, we can follow this mode usage through the score of the musical to insure that it has not been used for a non-Asian character.

A painstaking investigation to identify a single signifier might seem a long way to go for a small amount of information, especially if a particular musical element sounds like an "obvious" exoticism. However, there will be some elements that are not so obvious, and it is important to be clear on what role a given musical element has or does not have structurally before interpreting how it is used and what its message might be. Otherwise, we risk "cherry-picking" our examples to fit a pre-existing theory or point of view.

It is also important to look across musical scores for indications of how a particular musical element or construction is used before judging how it appears to

function in a single work. Geoffrey Block's "simple melodic sequence" (Block 2003, 167), for example, occurs in *South Pacific* (as Block discovers)[116] in: the song of Emile De Becque's biracial children, "Dîtes-Moi;" Nellie Forbush's "Cockeyed Optimist;" and Lt. Joe Cable's "Younger Than Springtime." But this kind of simple melodic sequence also occurs in *The King and I* ("Lord and Master") and *Flower Drum Song* ("I Am Going To Like It Here"). The thread tying all these occurrences of sequences together is a certain childlike simplicity or innocence; this feature may represent: Emile's children's innocence; Nellie's innocent (and naïve) optimism about life before obstacles present themselves; the young Liat's innocence reflected in the lyrics which Cable is singing (and perhaps a reflection of his own return to innocence); Tuptim's youth and innocence which will soon be taken from her as the newest member of the harem; and Mei Li's simplicity, a result of both her youth and lack of corruption by American values.

Timbral Features

One of the most salient features in music is timbre, or the instrumentation of a piece. A change in timbre can indicate a completely different interpretation of what a piece actually is or represents, especially in a theatrical context. The faux-folk song "Edelweiss" and Esteban's serenade from *Pipe Dream* are both played on the guitar, a portable instrument able to be played by amateurs, which signals a "folk" interpretation or, traditionally, a Spanish serenade in European and American music. These songs would not be interpreted the same way if played on the organ or in full orchestration. The simple, diatonic "Edelweiss" on an organ would bring to mind a

[116] See the **Rodgers' Scores and the Composer as Dramatist** section of Chapter Two.

church hymn (as opposed to a secular folk song) because of the organ's dominant presence in church music but not in most other venues. Timbre, then, is a sociocultural signifier.

Instrumentation is also a key to representing the Asian Other. There is a history of "exotic" timbres in Western music, many appropriated from original sources, which eventually became reduced, with other musical features, to "a Euro-American all-purpose shorthand for representing primitive or exotic peoples" (Gorbman 2000, 236). Derek Scott has compiled an extensive list of these features (Scott 1998), and those that I have listed below from Rodgers' "exotic" musicals[117] do occur on his list. However, my choice of these items as orientalist features comes from my own examination of the scores.[118]

The first group of instruments representative of Asian or "exotic" timbres is used exclusively in the three "exotic" musicals and nowhere else in the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus. These are gongs, "oriental drum," xylophone, mandolin, banjo, tom toms, and wood blocks.[119] These instruments are used sparingly, in particular songs or situations, and then tend to be used in music representing the native Asian characters in *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song*. The presence of these instruments becomes very important in *Flower Drum Song* when all the characters are

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[117] This instrumentation is marked in the vocal scores and may have been Rodgers' own choices or those of his orchestrator, Robert Russell Bennett.

[118] This includes the scores of the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus: *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *Pipe Dream*, *Me and Juliet*, *The King and I*, *Cinderella*, *Allegro*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Flower Drum Song*. This also includes original cast recordings for: *The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*, *Pipe Dream*, *Me and Juliet*, and *Allegro*; as well as DVDs for *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *Cinderella*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Flower Drum Song* (see Reference List and Bibliography).

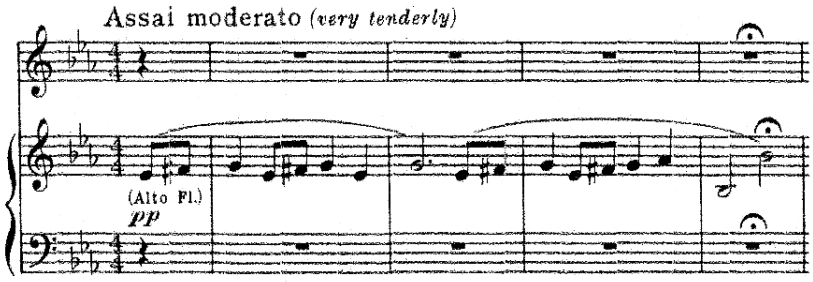
[119] These are instruments that are associated by Westerners with an Eastern sound, even if they are also used for Western music. The mandolin, for example, is a European instrument but is analogous to the yue qin, the Chinese mandolin, and is used to represent the native timbre of that instrument.

racially Chinese but some are assimilated, or assimilating, Americans. For example, the oriental drum, mandolin, and banjo (as well as guitar) are used almost exclusively in the music of Mei Li, the recent Chinese immigrant, with the exception of the use of mandolin in "You Are Beautiful" which is supposed to be a Chinese *heritage tune*.[120] The songs of assimilated (Americanized) characters like Linda Lowe, the nightclub dancer, do not contain these four instruments, with the exception of the clichéd song from Linda's nightclub act, "Fan Tan Fannie," in which the gong has a cheap comic effect, overtly becoming the theatrical cliché that it is. The second timbral group includes instruments that may be used in other scores but are used in "an orientalist manner" in the depiction of the Other in Asian/"exotic" musicals. These are all Western instruments: harp, guitar, strings, flute, oboe, muted trumpet, cymbals, and bassoon. An orientalist usage of these timbres usually involves the co-occurrence of the instrument with one or more other musical or dramatic features, and the combination becomes, or is recognized as, a signifier. For example, fast whole tone scale arpeggios played on the harp, dissonant seconds in the melody played on strings, and the use of flute or oboe (as opposed to brass or strings) as the main voice of a descending melody have orientalist connotations. An orientalist usage can also involve an irregular use of the instrument for effect, such as plucking violin strings (*pizzicato* strings), or a strictly dramatic use of instruments, such as using flutes and piccolos to

[120] The term *heritage tune* comes from Raymond Knapp (2005, 191) and indicates a song that is supposed to be a traditional folk-type song known only by cultural insiders. Knapp uses the term in reference to "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" (*Show Boat*), a song whose role is to "out" the biracial Julie as black to the audience. Julie has been passing as white and has married a white man. Her knowledge of this song raises suspicions in Queenie and foreshadows the issue of miscegenation that emerges in the show not long afterwards.

represent the foreign language speech of characters on stage. These kinds of orientalist usages date to the nineteenth century, and Rodgers applies them heavily throughout his musicals. Some obvious examples include: the limpid descending modal melody of "March of the Siamese Children" (from *The King and I*) being scored for flute; the switch from brass instruments to dissonant strings in the melody of "Bloody Mary" (*South Pacific)* which accompanies the focus on the Tonkinese character herself; and the use of solo alto flute in a melody with a consistent raised second degree[121] which introduces Mei Li's song, "I Am Going To Like It Here."

Illustration 1. Introduction to "I Am Going To Like It Here"



The third group of orientalist timbral choices includes the use of female vocal features like breathy or thin vocal timbre (as opposed to Broadway belting), ethereal female chorus, or a complete lack of female voice at all. Rodgers and Hammerstein had a habit of "softening" female characters that they adapted for musicals; Lovensheimer, for example, documents the softening of Nellie Forbush, especially in regard to her racism (Lovensheimer 2003, 187-193). Anna Leonowens (*The King and I*) was also greatly softened from her judgmental Christianity, her early intolerance of

[121] This raised second degree (F♯) is a consistent alteration in what is basically a melody in E♭. The augmented second gives the melody a modal feel and evokes the augmented second in the harmonic minor.

Thai social customs,[122] and her overt vehement antipathy against harem life as a form of slavery.[123] Young Asian female characters underwent the same kind of softening process, which almost always resulted in the worst of orientalist stereotypes. Mei Li, for example, was a much stronger character in C. Y. Lee's novel, *The Flower Drum Song* (1961); upon her arrival in San Francisco, for example, she gets into a fight with Master Wang's maid at the front door and stubbornly sits on her suitcase until Wang Ta arrives home, meets her, and lets her into the house (Lee 1961, 156). Wang Ta's choice to run off with May Li[124] (and her father) is actually a sign of the young man's rebelliousness against his father, who was trying to arrange a marriage for him (226-228).[125] In the musical, Mei Li becomes the soft, passive "China doll" representing perfect filial devotion and sexual innocence, and Wang Ta's choice of her as a wife indicates his own filial duty and return to tradition. Mei Li's softness and humility are represented by Miyoshi Umeki's vocal timbre in the original cast recording: her voice is thin and breathy, with occasional bursts of strength, but never enough to overwhelm the gentle, almost tentative sound.

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[122] This reading of Anna is based on my reading of her autobiographical novel, *The English Governess and the Siamese Court* (1999). Anna's intolerance, a result of ignorance of Thai culture, is sometimes explained by Margaret Landon in her retelling of Anna's story in *Anna and the King of Siam* (Landon 2000, 34-35).

[123] In her book (1999), Anna regards the early suggestion that she might be there to join the harem as "a monstrous suggestion that struck me dumb" (19), which countered her own desire for freedom (15) and her status as a Christian. Anna declares to the King's wives that: "An English, that is a Christian woman would rather be put to the torture, chained and dungeoned for life, or suffer a death the slowest and most painful you Siamese know, than be the wife of either [the King or the Prince]" (20). In Landon's retelling of the story (2000, 39), Anna makes no such declaration, although the suggestion that she was to be part of the harem still strikes her as "monstrous." However, this entire segment disappears completely in *The King and I*, and Anna is instead given a song to sing to the harem about her love for her dead husband Tom, "Hello Young Lovers."

[124] This is the spelling of her name from the novel.

[125] The entire novel has been considerably lightened, and the racism that kept Wang Ta and other college-educated Chinese characters from being employed was only lightly touched upon in the stage musical, and was completely written out of the 1961 film.

However, Mei Li ends up better off than Lt. Cable's love interest, Liat, in *South Pacific,* who ends up with no songs at all, and very little dialogue. Liat's muteness is underscored by her performance in "Happy Talk" in which she accompanies her mother's singing with mimed hand gestures directed toward Lt. Cable. The irony of the song's title is not lost on Andrea Most who remarks that Bloody Mary "offers [Cable] the opportunity for endless 'happy talk' with a girl who cannot speak" (Most 2000, 315). In Michener's novel, Liat speaks both Tonkinese and French, and she and Cable have many long conversations in "half-French, half-English sentences" (Michener 1984, 200). Rodgers and Hammerstein transformed Michener's character—itself a stereotype of the young, sexually yielding Oriental woman—into a caricature by giving her no timbre at all except silence.

Finally, in the film version of *South Pacific,* a female chorus is used to create a certain "exotic" effect in the song "Bali Ha'i" and its instrumental interludes. The chorus is especially featured on the whole tone harmonic progressions (which will be discussed later), but all the harmonies are lush and the timbre is light but sensual. The effect can be interpreted as the singing of sirens in this context, and their addition in the film support the idea that "Bali Ha'i" is in fact calling Lt. Cable, as the lyrics state.

The timbres above represent those chosen by Rodgers, but the composer also definitely rejected certain timbres. When planning *South Pacific,* Rodgers was concerned that he would have to use steel guitar ("wailing guitar" as he put it) with xylophone or marimba to represent island music; he was comforted when he found out

he would not since James Michener,[126] the author of the novel, had not heard any instrumental music played while he was stationed on the island that inspired his writing (Nolan 2002, 183).[127] As we have seen, Rodgers also rejected the "tinkling bells" and "high nasal strings" (Rodgers 2002, 273) that he associated with Asian music. In the end, Rodgers rejected appropriating most authentic timbres in favor of representing "exotic" timbres through Western orchestral means.

Modes and Scales

We know from the research in Chapter Two that Rodgers vastly preferred the major scale for composing songs, and that his use of minor mode was uncommon, usually having a dramatic purpose. For Rodgers to choose a mode outside of the classical major/minor system was more than atypical; in the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus, modes (or suggestions of modes) appear overwhelmingly in his Asian/"exotic" musicals and almost nowhere else.[128] This fact alone argues for their status as orientalist features in Rodgers' work. Derek Scott lists modes as an Orientalism (Scott 1998, 321), although their use is much broader. Gorbman, for example, identifies modal music as an American Indian signifier[129] in Hollywood movies as well (Gorbman 2000, 235). The specific modes used by Rodgers—Aeolian, Lydian, Phrygian, and Dorian modes—are not marked for East Asia as opposed to the Middle East (Scott 1998, 327), but these modes appear in songs sung by Rodgers'

[126] Michener wrote the novel *South Pacific* when he was stationed with the United States Navy in the South Pacific as a naval historian.
[127] Rodgers later writes, "To my amazement and joy I found that in this part of the South Pacific there was no instrumental music of any kind" (Nolan 2002, 183).
[128] This is based on my own research of the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus.
[129] Gorbman traces modes as well as parallel fifths, fourths, gapped scales and pentatonicism to Stoepel's symphony *Hiawatha*, and describes all of these features as generic signifiers of the Other.

Chinese and Thai characters and in background music for *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song*. Some selected examples include: the expository piece "Arrival at Bangkok" (*The King and I*) which contains Phrygian sections; "March of the Siamese Children" which has a main theme in Lydian mode (or with Lydian inflection) with a bridge in Aeolian mode; and the King's two main songs, "A Puzzlement" and "Song of the King" which make use of Dorian and Phrygian inflections, respectively. In *Flower Drum Song*, Aeolian mode (with ♭3, ♭6 and ♭7) appears in "The Other Generation," a lament by Old Master Wang and his sister-in-law, Madam Liang, about Wang's sons who seem hopelessly Americanized; "A Hundred Million Miracles," a heritage tune sung by Mei Li, her father, and members of Wang's family, suggests Lydian mode with its sharped fourth scale degree (harmonized with the major II chord); and Mei Li's "I Am Going To Like It Here" contains a sharped second scale degree (F♯ in the key of E♭) in the melody, which occurs over E♭ harmony, suggesting a non-Western inflection.

In addition to modes, Rodgers also used non-heptatonic scales to represent Tonkinese, Thai and Chinese characters and locales. Taking a cue from his Ravel-inspired music from *Chee-Chee*, Rodgers used harmonic progressions from the whole tone scale in *South Pacific*'s "Bali Ha'i."[130] These harmonies are "non-functional" in that they are not directed toward a particular structural harmonic goal and provide what is referred to as "color." Rodgers also made use of the pentatonic scale, although much of this usage shows up in melodies and in accompaniment figures like arpeggios. Tuptim's solo aria "Lord and Master" (*The King and I*) is strictly

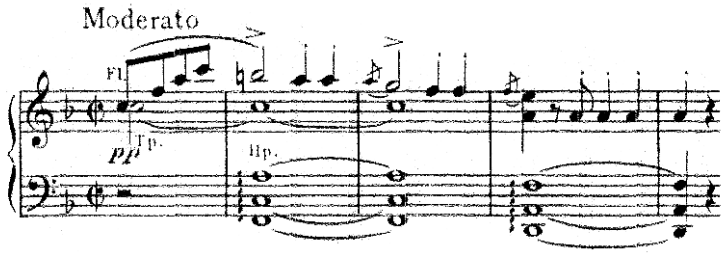
[130] He also recycled music from *Chee-Chee* in the verse of "Happy Talk" (Block 2003, 70).

pentatonic in its opening lines, and almost strictly pentatonic until the song's bridge; "You Are Beautiful" (*Flower Drum Song*), a heritage tune, begins with a pentatonic melody. Pentatonic-scale arpeggios show up in a portion of "Getting to Know You" (*The King and I*) when the King's wives and children join in singing with Anna; pentatonic scales also show up in "Arrival at Bangkok" and in the overture of *The King and I*. Finally, there is the brief appearance of hexatonicism in the overture of *The King and I* and in "Arrival at Bangkok," but these do not reappear in the score.

Melodic and Harmonic Features

We have already mentioned the use of various scales and modes and have touched on how they have affected certain melodies and harmonies. There are several melodic features that recur and deserve mention. These are: the raised (Lydian) fourth, the chromatic half step (especially when proceeded by a large melodic leap), and other chromatic accidentals. The raised fourth, which appears only in the songs of native Asian characters in *The King and I* and in *Flower Drum Song*, seems to mark that native status and also marks the site of culture clashes, by an alternation around this scale degree between the expected (perfect) fourth and its raised version. In *The King and I*, the rhythmically stressed raised fourth (B♮) over the tonic chord in "March of the Siamese Children" drives the modal feel of the main theme of the piece as the King's children are introduced. When Prince Chulalongkorn, heir to the throne and Anna's student, is presented, the key of the march changes and the raised fourth completely disappears. (However, the rhythm, a dactyl foot in the melody, remains.)

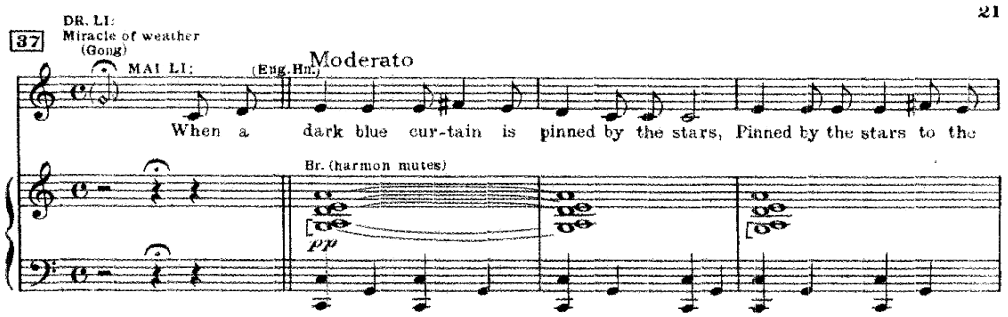
Illustration 2. Raised fourth in main theme of "March of the Siamese Children"



The raised fourth also plays a crucial melodic role in the "Song of the King" which contains King Mongkut's philosophy on having a harem. The fourth is sharped throughout the piece except when the King briefly mentions a Western man's fidelity to one woman, at which point the fourth is lowered. Lady Thiang's song with the royal wives, "Western People Funny," also contains this raised fourth in the accompaniment of the song against a perfect fourth in the sung melody, which creates a definite musical dissonance demonstrating the cultural dissonance they are feeling in the piece. Lady Thiang's signature piece, "Something Wonderful," also plays on the sung melodic alternation between the sharped fourth and the perfect fourth in the scale. The fourths are approached by downward leap and by upward scalar movement, and there is very definite alternation from sharped to perfect fourth and back. It is not a coincidence that Lady Thiang is singing to Anna (the perfect fourth) about the King (the sharped, Lydian, fourth) and trying to get her to accept him as he is and help him. In *The King and I*, then, this melodic fourth becomes a site of conflict. In *Flower Drum Song*, however, the raised fourth occurs consistently in the first internal verse of "A Hundred Million Miracles" and Mei Li seems to have no conflict represented by this scale degree. This could mark the presence of little cultural conflict for a Chinese

girl in Chinatown among Chinese Americans. It could also indicate that Mei Li's character is not developed enough to demonstrate a conflict.

Illustration 3. Mei Li's melody with sharped fourths in first verse of "A Hundred Million Miracles"



Another exoticism in these musicals involves the chromatic half step (leading tone) in "Bali Ha'i" which is of extended duration in an accented position with accompanying, non-functional whole tone harmony. The most identifiable part of "Bali Ha'i" is its main motif, which is a melodic leap, followed by a chromatic half step fall to the sharped fourth scale degree,[131] and then a half step resolution back up to the fifth scale degree (and the fifth of the tonic chord beneath it). This two-measure motif (with either a leap of an octave or a sixth) is repeated eight times within the first sixteen measures of the chorus, with the leaps and the resolution within the tonic chord and harmonized as such, and the chromatic half steps harmonized with a diminished seventh chord (spelled vii°7/iii but resolving on I). The chromatic half step falls are stressed: they occur on downbeats of their respective measures, are held for three

[131] The final repetition of the motive has the melodic half step spelled as the ♭6 (and not the ♯5) and leads to a chromatic drop down to scale degree 1 (and the tonic triad).

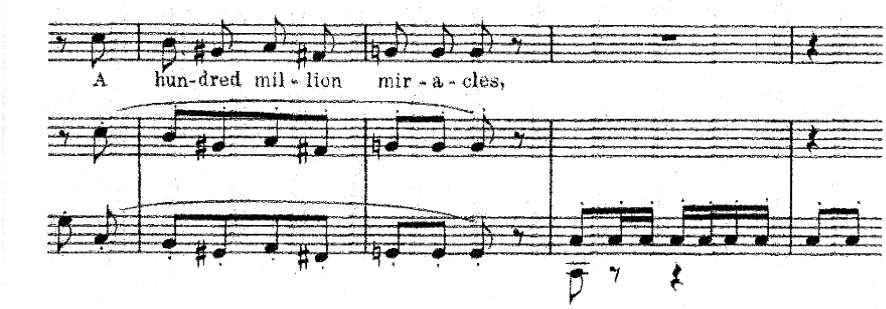
beats, are reiterated twice (once on the next downbeat), and only resolve on beat two of the following measure.

There is nothing intrinsically "exotic" about the harmonic language here: all of it falls into Western common music practice. There is also nothing intrinsically "exotic" about a leading tone, or even about a sexual or romantic obsession on a leading tone. As discussed in Chapter Two, Block found that the repeated leading tone/tonic pattern in Nellie's waltz song, "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy" (Block 2003, 164) expresses her romantic obsession with Emile.[132] It is not the leading tone by itself, but its co-occurrence with other orientalist features—whole tone and chromatic arpeggios, whole tone harmonies (in the introduction), and instrumentation—that create the "exotic" effect.

Other chromatic figures occur in these musicals, often the result of Aeolian and Dorian modes, as in "The Other Generation" and "A Puzzlement." However chromatic alterations occur in the introduction of "You Are Beautiful" (a lowered seventh scale degree in the eighth and ninth measures), and in the main theme of "A Hundred Million Miracles" (a sharped fifth and fourth approached downward by leap and resolving up by half step). Chromatic scalar melodic movement appears in the swing tune "Grant Avenue" when the traditional Chinese elements (e.g., "Tall pagodas and golden banners") appear in the lyric.

[132] At the end of the chorus, Nellie repeats "I'm in love" five times, where "I'm in" is on the tonic note (c1) and "love" falls on the leading tone (b); the tension is resolved by "with a wonderful guy," ending on the tonic.

Illustration 4. Sharped accidentals (leading tones) in "A Hundred Million Miracles"



Accompaniment and Other Figures

The features in the next set are all well-recognized Orientalisms (Scott 1998, 321) and occur with far greater frequency in the "exotic" musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein than in any of the others. All act, in one way or another, as musical signifiers of the Other, but one of these (the oscillating second) has a special role in plot and characterization.

Intervals and drones. Certain intervals, especially when repeated or in parallel progression, are considered Orientalisms in the literature: the open or ascending fifth, the open or parallel octave, and the open or descending fourth (Scott 1998, 321).[133] The importance of these intervals to Rodgers is clear by their prominent placement and by their sheer repetition. For example, the very first sound of the stage overture[134] of *The King and I* is an open fifth (A–E) with the entire orchestra playing (*tutti)* in the score. This fifth is accented, held (with a fermata) and is again repeated.

[133] As mentioned in the **Modes and Scales** section of this chapter, Gorbman identifies these intervals as signifiers of American Indians in Hollywood films (Gorbman 2000, 235). One has to conclude that these intervals are merely signifiers of generic Otherness, surviving primarily by repetition in popular entertainment.

[134] The film score begins with "March of the Siamese Children." Rodgers sometimes modified his overtures for film to stress a hit song.

The open fifth occurs often in the score of *The King and I*, and is prominent in the accompaniment of the King's song, "A Puzzlement."

Flower Drum Song also contains its share of open fifths, especially in the dance number "Chop Suey" and in the heritage tune "A Hundred Million Miracles," where the chorus sings the response to Mei Li's verses in open fifths. Parallel open octaves are also prominent in this musical, occurring in the Chinese night club act, "Fan Tan Fanny" and in "Grant Avenue," especially in the bridge section, under chromatic melody which describes "A western street with eastern manners/Tall pagodas and golden banners." From the same musical, Wang Ta's sung introduction to "Like a God" is accompanied by a repetitive set of octave leaps, all on the pitch A; the octave leap ascends in the bass and descends in the treble, giving a sense of narrowing space.

Octaves also play a crucial role melodically in *South Pacific* and *The King and I*: both "Bali Ha'i" and "March of the Siamese Children" begin with an octave leap on the fifth scale degree, followed by a chromatic half step down (the sharped fourth). In "Bali Ha'i" the sharped fourth becomes a leading tone; in "March of the Siamese Children," the fourth descends by step. While there are other octave leaps in the Rodgers and Hammerstein literature ("The Lonely Goatherd" for example), this is not a common opening for a Rodgers melody.

Finally, open fourths act as signifiers in these musicals. The accompaniment of "Don't Marry Me" (*Flower Drum Song*) has a very obvious and repetitive pattern of an open fourth chord [d–g] descending to a third [c–e]. It is the constant repetition of

this chord pattern from the sung introductory verse into the refrain itself that creates the orientalist effect.

In addition to these intervals, accompaniment drones on these intervals (especially octaves and fifths) play a part in Rodgers' creation of an Asian sound. The music that accompanies the raising of the curtain in *The King and I* contains a five-measure-long C drone in open octave while the upper strings play a melody based on the pentatonic scale. This is followed by an open fifth bass drone, F–C, which occasionally dips to a D–A drone, and returns. Rodgers is sparing in his use of drones: the only song to use them is the prayer to Buddha in "Finale Act I," in which various chords are held as the King sings his prayer over them.

Rapid figures. Rapid scale passages and arpeggios, especially played on harp or flute, are considered Orientalisms by Scott (1998, 328). These features often co-occur with usage of modes or chromatic alterations. A good example of this kind of feature occurs in "We Kiss in a Shadow" (*The King and I*). It is a decorative descending five-note flute motif, and is scalar, covering a perfect fifth. The first four pitches comprise a four-note thirty-second note figure, followed by a whole note (which is sometimes tied across the bar line to another dotted half or whole note). It is the rapidity of the notes, co-occurring with flute instrumentation and the distance of a fifth, that creates the "oriental feel" of this ornament.

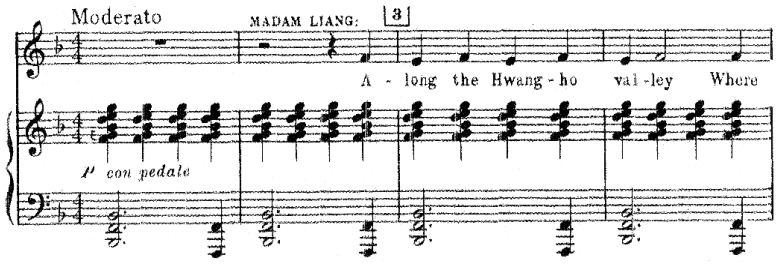
These kinds of motifs occur throughout *The King and I*, from the overture to the opening of "March of the Siamese Children" (also on flute). "Bali Ha'i" (*South Pacific*) is filled with scalar and whole tone arpeggios on harp. In *Flower Drum Song*,

these figures occur mostly in the ballet, "Ta's Dream."[135] Mei Li's songs, where one would expect to see passages like this, do not have them, although some harp chords (which are played slightly arpeggiated of necessity) do appear in "A Hundred Million Miracles," but their effect is more restrained than those in Bali Ha'i." The night club song, "Fan Tan Fannie" does make use of these kinds of arpeggiations (in open fifths), but these are not included in the vocal score, as most of Rodgers' accompaniment figures are. These can be heard in the original cast recording and may have been added later, either by Rodgers, or by his long time orchestrator, Robert Russell Bennett.

Seconds: dissonances and ostinati. Harmonic dissonances of a second (or ninth), including those on grace notes, are Orientalisms (Scott 1998, 321) that do occur in all three musicals. In the melody, they sometimes create the effect of an instrument slightly out of tune, as is the case of the dance in "Bloody Mary," when a dissonant (half step) grace note figure is added to stressed pitches in the melody. When the King sings "A Puzzlement" (*The King and I*), he is accompanied by dissonant ninths played on the xylophone. The sung introduction to "You Are Beautiful" pits the voice in a dissonance of a second against the accompaniment, and contains dissonances of a second in the accompaniment figures as well. The introduction of "I Enjoy Being A Girl" has a pronounced dissonance of a ninth in the accompaniment until the beginning of the refrain.

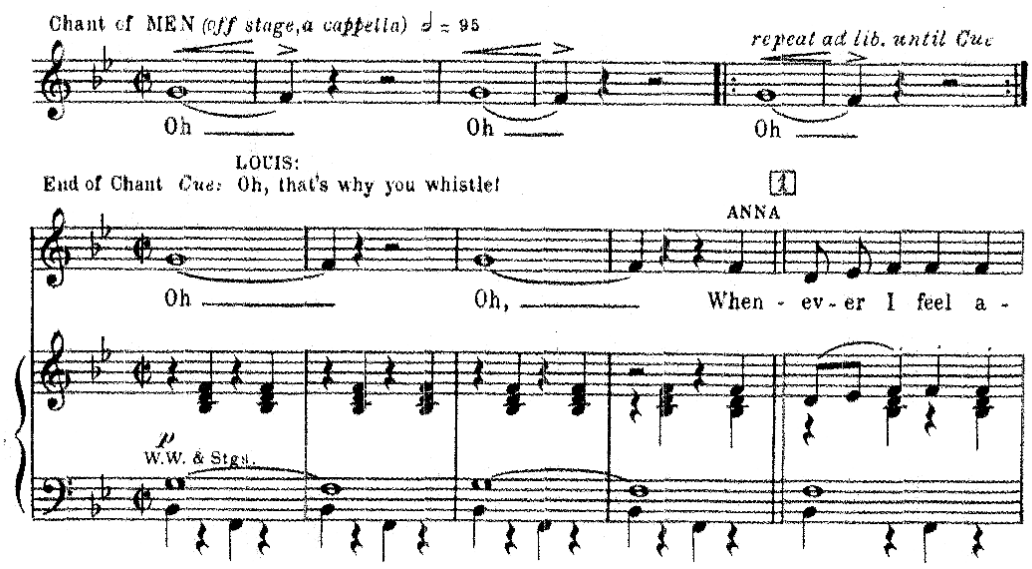
[135] This ballet becomes Helen Chow's dream in the movie and is connected to her song "Love Look Away."

Illustration 5. Introductory verse to "You Are Beautiful" with dissonant chord clusters



The second also plays a crucial role in the oscillating whole step ostinati that are used as orientalist signifiers. This is an especially important figure in Rodgers' music and can be traced in a very detailed manner. Rodgers' figure is an oscillating whole step (second), often on a crucial scale degree like the fifth. We know that Rodgers himself identifies this figure with Asian characters because he has the Siamese officials, who are coming to meet Anna on the ship, sing this oscillating whole step on "Oh" (*a cappella*) on their way ("Arrival in Bangkok"). While the men are singing, the music for Anna's "I Whistle A Happy Tune" begins, and the song becomes a musical response to this chant. During the bridge, when Anna sings about making believe to overcome her fears, the same oscillating whole step becomes part of the accompaniment, a stand-in for the chanting officials who trigger her fear.

Illustration 6. The oscillating second motif in the monks' chant before "I Whistle A Happy Tune"

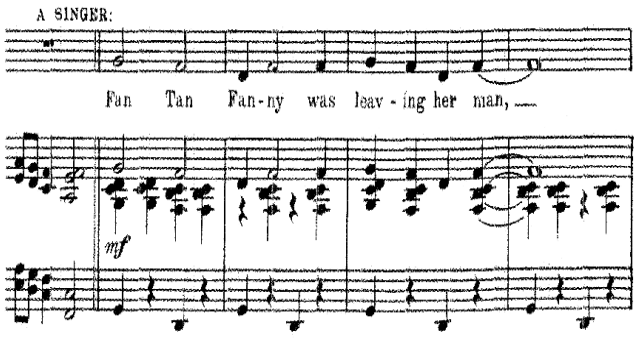


This oscillating second becomes a way of representing Otherness or the Other (or a particular person who is Other) in the music of both the Asian/"exotic" characters and the Western characters. Some crucial places to find this oscillating second are in: "Younger Than Springtime" (*South Pacific*), in the portions where Cable is singing about Liat; "Getting to Know You" (*The King and I*), in the fan dance section, where the wives and children join in the singing and dancing; "We Kiss in a Shadow" (*The King and I*), where the oscillation is a crucial accompaniment figure but disappears when the two lovers discuss the freedom to love; and "You Are Beautiful" (*Flower Drum Song*), a heritage tune, which also becomes the love song that Ta sings to Mei Li.

A stereotyped figure. In his encompassing article on Chinese musical stereotypes in American popular music, Charles Hiroshi Garrett describes an orientalist trope that he describes as "one of the most efficient that the West has

developed to signal 'Asia'" (Garrett 2004, 131). This is a four-pitch feature with a whole step drop, followed by the drop of a minor third, and then a leap back up a minor third as in [A–G–E–G]. Rodgers uses this trope in *The King and I*, most obviously in the overture,[136] where he follows it up with a jazzy version of the trope. This may have been a self-conscious joke on the trope. The idea of a humorous usage of this trope continues in *Flower Drum Song* where the cheesy night-club song, "Fan Tan Fannie" contains this trope in the melody for the title words. This melodic trope co-occurs with gong, wood blocks, mandolin, and descending ornamental flute figures built on open fifths, which is very overdone Orientalism for *Flower Drum Song*.

Illustration 7. Orientalist trope in the melody of "Fan Tan Fanny"



Conclusion

I have addressed two major tasks in this chapter: the first was to give a detailed description of Rodgers as an orientalist composer; and the second, to describe some of the more important elements of Rodgers' orientalist features. These features will become very important in Chapter Four as I trace character development in songs from the musicals. Since all three musicals deal with intercultural contact and the values

[136] Rodgers does use this trope in 13 measures of the opening instrumental music of "Arrival in Bangkok" for *The King and I*, but does not use it afterwards.

that are attached to the cultures in question, Rodgers' features become more than just musical markers of Otherness; they become clues as to the inner evolution of the characters. Chapter Three has been the necessary preparation work to begin the analysis in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CHARACTERIZATION AND CULTURE

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I identified Richard Rodgers as an "orientalist" composer and enumerated his typical musical signifiers for representation of the "Other." In this chapter, I will show how Rodgers uses these signifiers to develop characters who are encountering a culture different from their own: from the fear or wonder of a first interaction, to the deliberate act of internalizing another culture and value system. Rodgers musically dramatizes both—the points of encounter between characters of different backgrounds, and the identity conflicts within characters—by manipulating the presence or absence of certain signifiers in melody, harmony, timbre, and accompaniment figures and motifs. The relationships between these signifiers become very important in expressing who each character is, personally and culturally, and how each character handles intercultural struggles. This method of interpreting orientalist signifiers as dramatic agents is supported by the scores of the three musicals themselves, which exhibit certain regularities, and by Rodgers' own statement to Milton Kaye that "every song was written for a specific character at a special point in his or her development" (Kaye 1969, 22).

Interpreting Features

The way in which certain musical features should be interpreted depends a great deal on their location in the music. In the Rodgers and Hammerstein exotic musicals, melody lines, keys and modes most often represent a character's own

cultural identification.[137] Altered tones, especially modal inflections, like the sharped fourth, are typically found in the melody lines of the Eastern characters in *The King and I* and of the native Chinese characters in *Flower Drum Song.* The Western characters remain melodically heptatonic, typically singing in major keys. When an Eastern character, like King Mongkut, takes on a heptatonic melody line in a major key, this is a sign of assimilation or adoption of a Western cultural identity or self. Because musicals are a singer's medium and the singing voice serves to dramatize the character's inner self and feelings, the melody lines are crucial, and they are well thought-out in this Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus.[138]

The orientalist accompaniment figures typically do one of two things: they either reinforce the "Otherness" of the melody line of an Eastern character; or they represent the Other in the music of a Western character. One can often tell how a Western character is handling the encounter with the Other by listening closely for these accompaniment features, especially the motif of the oscillating second, which very often represents the presence of a particular person involved in the encounter. Timbral features also act to identify not only certain cultures, but sometimes certain individuals. The mandolin solo in the "heritage tune"[139] "You Are Beautiful" (*Flower Drum Song*), for example, connects to the mandolin (and guitar) in the "traditional" sound of Mei Li's songs. Wang Ta eventually sings "You Are Beautiful" to Mei Li,

[137] This observation and all the others that follow in this section are based entirely on my own analysis of these scores.
[138] Rodgers and Hammerstein typically treated songs in their musicals like arias in opera—as pieces which stopped the action of the musical while the singer revealed the innermost feelings of the character.
[139] The term *heritage tune* was coined by Raymond Knapp (2005, 191).

and the mandolin, China and Mei Li are finally and inextricably connected musically by that mandolin timbre, which appears in no one else's music.

The musical features, whether melodic, harmonic, motivic, or timbral, reflect character development, although not all the characters are treated equally in terms of their development. Some characters remain musically static, and their chief importance seems to be their effects on other characters. Mei Li's music in *Flower Drum Song*, for example, always maintains its "Eastern sound" of melodic altered pitches and plucked stringed instruments, even though she falls in love with and marries a Chinese American man who is, at least, half-assimilated to his new country. The lack of change in the music of characters like Mei Li may actually reflect the original source material. The focus of the love story in C. Y. Lee's novel, *The Flower Drum Song*,[140] was the protagonist Wang Ta, whose relationship with Mei Li causes him to alter his life and relationship with his father.[141] The catalyst to change can remain musically static (although not always), but the music of the affected character is always altered in some way.

The source material is also important for understanding which characters in the musicals are given songs to sing and which are not. Typically, those characters who cannot communicate in English in the original stories are denied songs of their own. In *South Pacific*, the French-speaking Liat is assigned no songs, and is given only

[140] Rodgers and Hammerstein dropped the definite article from the book's title for the musical.
[141] In the novel, this change is actually a final defiance of his father, not a return to filial duty and harmony as it is in the musical.

hand signals for communication in "Happy Talk."[142] In *The King and I*, the non-English-speaking Siamese harem women are first represented instrumentally by flutes.[143] The Kralahome's non-English-speaking men are given an *a cappella* chant on "Oh" to intone, but are not included in any songs as one might expect a men's chorus to be in an ordinary musical.

The one exception to this practice is the song of Emile De Becque's children (*South Pacific*) who are French-speaking but sing "Dîtes-Moi," a faux-French folk tune, which plays a significant role in the musical. The children speak practically no English (other than "Hello"), so why do they have a song of their own when the francophone Liat does not? Here, a look at the source material is helpful. In the novel, *Tales of the South Pacific*, author James Michener actually has De Becque and his children singing the well-known "Au Clair de la Lune" when Nellie arrives to tell De Becque that she will marry him and accept his mixed-race children (Michener 1984, 143). Nellie, who, like many Americans, knows the song from childhood, then joins in the singing. Her entrance into the chorus has the dramatic significance of unifying the future family with a song that everyone can sing, even the American nurse who speaks no French. The song maintains this unifying role in the final scene of the musical as "Dîtes-Moi." Because Nellie knows the song and because the message it communicates is not literal but symbolic, the De Becque children have a voice in the

[142] There is, however, a French-language reprise of the song "Bali Ha'i" in the stage musical, which occurs after the affair between Liat and Cable begins, and which may be seen as representing Liat. The reprise is sung by a female chorus in F major (a fourth up from the C-major key of "Bloody Mary").
[143] Later, the harem is given a song, "Western People Funny," as they are preparing for the important dinner party with the British officials. By this time, Anna's tutelage is assumed to have had its effect on the harem. This song was dropped in the movie version, depriving the musical of the harem's perspective on their teacher and her people.

musical, regardless of their ability to speak English. This is one possible interpretation of the musical presence of the children despite the language barrier. There are other examples as well, some of which will be considered later in this chapter.

Interpreting Characters

In interpreting the characters of Asian or Islander background in these musicals, the obvious place to start would be the songs these characters are given to sing. However, the presence of their musical signifiers in the songs of the Western characters indicates their influence and is a part of their depiction as well. For each major character of non-Western origin, I will be investigating both their own songs and their presence, by overt mention or by signifiers, in the songs of Westerners. This will give us a fuller picture of their depiction, and allow us to decide how seriously a given character and his or her transformation is treated. Any transformation of Western characters, as central as their development may be to the plot of the musical, will be treated as an extension of the non-Western character's influence.

Character development, of course, occurs within the plots of stories and musicals. The characters introduced for analysis will be preceded by a brief synopsis of the musical in which they appear, and a particular character's dramatic and musical transformations will then be interpreted in relation to the plot. At the end of each section, I will attempt to summarize how the non-Westerners in the plot are being depicted as a whole and how this depiction might compare to depictions in the other two Rodgers and Hammerstein Asian-themed musicals.

Musical Depictions in *South Pacific*

South Pacific was based on several stories in James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, written during World War II while Michener was stationed with the United States Navy in the South Pacific as a naval historian.[144] The book is fiction, although it chronicles what was probably the very real racism of young Americans far from home, and it was this aspect that appealed to Rodgers and Hammerstein (Fordin 1995, 261). Two stories dealing with racism became central to the musical. The first was "Fo' Dolla'," the story of a young American lieutenant who falls in love with a young Tonkinese girl but whose racial prejudice prevents him from marrying her. The second, which actually became the main focus of the musical, was "Our Heroine," the story of an army nurse who falls in love with a French planter on the island, but refuses his offer of marriage because he had a former Polynesian wife (now deceased) and has children who are half Polynesian. Later, she changes her mind, conquering her prejudices. The musical *South Pacific* was clearly seen as addressing American racial prejudice even though there were no African American characters in the show (other than a single soldier with a bit part) (Most 2000, 308). *South Pacific*'s status as a classic of musical theater, in fact, rests on its reputation as a strong statement against racism and prejudice (312).

Its reputation notwithstanding, the musical has come under fire for its stereotypical depictions of its non-Western characters, particularly those of Bloody Mary and her daughter Liat.[145] An additional criticism is that the characters inhabiting

[144] For a full discussion of Michener's book as it relates to the musical, see Lovensheimer (2003).
[145] There are many discussions of this in the literature. See, for example, Most (2000), Klein (2003), and McConachie (1994), among others.

the South Pacific island chain are not the real center of the story; the young Americans and their own soul-searching on the topic of racism become the real heart of the musical. The Tonkinese women and the mixed-race children act more as catalysts on the American characters, Joe Cable and Nellie Forbush, as opposed to being developed characters in their own right. However, this does not mean that they are not depicted at all or that they are totally denied agency. In particular, the character of Bloody Mary deserves musical analysis because of her central role in the musical. However, even Liat and the children can be found to be musically influential.

Bloody Mary

The character of Bloody Mary is Tonkinese, a native of Southeast Asia, which is part of French Indochina at the time of the story. Michener describes a great many Tonkinese workers brought to the South Pacific islands to work on the French plantations as a form of indentured labor, much like that existing in the early British-American colonies (Michener 1984, 168). One of Michener's American characters explains that after making a sufficient sum of money on the plantation, the Tonkinese workers return home with a savings that makes them well-off in their own country (168). Bloody Mary, however, finds ways to supplement her plantation salary, chiefly by running a black-market operation in native grass skirts to sell to the newly arrived American servicemen. She also sells shrunken heads (and other souvenirs) as well as cheap alcohol, some of which seems to have been procured from the United States military itself (197). It is the grass skirt business that gets Bloody Mary into the most trouble, however, because the French plantation owners want a cut of the business, and demand that she sell the skirts to them cheaply so that they can resell them to the

Americans for a profit. It is because of this black-market operation that Lieutenant Joe Cable first meets Bloody Mary and, at the behest of the French plantation owners, tries to stop her from selling grass skirts directly to American servicemen.

Michener's portrait of Bloody Mary is more comic than serious, especially at first. It is clear that Mary has picked up much of her English—including an entire vocabulary of offensive profanity—from the American servicemen who laugh at the results of their tutelage but consider her an "honorary Marine" (172). Her ability to disarm their commanding officers with her streams of obscenities is especially amusing to the servicemen.

Yet Bloody Mary's status as a comic character is somewhat undercut by her treatment of her own daughter, Liat, whom she offers to Lieutenant Cable as easily as she sells shrunken heads to American servicemen. In fact, Cable thinks virginal Liat is a prostitute working for Mary until after their first sexual encounter when Liat tells him, in French, that Bloody Mary is her mother (187). It is only the fact that Bloody Mary wants a marriage for her daughter, and does not intend to prostitute Liat, that saves Bloody Mary's character in the novel and her depiction in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical.

We are told that Bloody Mary received her sobriquet "Bloody" for the betel nuts she chews, which create a gash-like stain around her mouth (170). Yet Michener later reveals in his autobiography (Michener 1992, 149) that the real character on which Bloody Mary was based actually received the "Bloody" sobriquet for her politics, and that her plans involved returning to Vietnam at the end of World War II to fight the French and get them out of Indochina (Klein 2003, 169), which sheds new

light on Bloody Mary's desire to safely marry off her daughter to an American serviceman.

In depicting the character of Bloody Mary for the musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein cull from Michener's novel Mary's comic qualities, her salesmanship, and her desire to get her daughter married. Her comic status as an "honorary Marine" is acknowledged in the song "Bloody Mary," in which the Marines sing of her as "the girl I love." Bloody Mary herself does not sing here but she is present musically through signifiers.

Technically, "Bloody Mary" is a refrain in 2/4 meter with no introductory verse and no instrumental introduction save a single measure of brass chords. There are three stanzas to the refrain, the first ironically stating that Bloody Mary is "the girl I love," and the second and third describing two of Mary's negative attributes. The structure of the lyric is simple and repetitious:

> Bloody Mary is the girl I love.
> Bloody Mary is the girl I love.
> Bloody Mary is the girl I love.
> Now ain't that too damn bad!

The harmonic structure is strictly diatonic, and the song has the feel of a preexisting tune (or military chant) to which new lyrics may be improvised on the spot, as if the lyrics were being invented by the soldiers as they worked. When the lyrics have been sung, the soldiers begin to dance to the music, which changes keys from E♭ major to C major. Mary's key for the song "Bali Ha'i" is C major, and Bloody Mary announces a new focus on her as the music changes key and the dance section begins: "She make wave like this" (Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Michener 1949, 32). It is at this point that

we see certain orientalist musical signifiers appear. For this portion of the music, the melody line is ornamented with ascending grace note minor seconds at stressed pitches in the melody where certain key words from the lyrics would be. These minor seconds create the effect of an instrument slightly out of (Western) tune. The melody is played on woodwinds (as opposed to brass), a timbre which Rodgers often employs in an orientalist fashion. After forty measures in C major, the dance returns to its original key and the dissonances disappear completely as the Marines pick up the song again.

In this way, Rodgers uses orientalist signifiers in the music of the Marines to introduce us to Bloody Mary and to her special, if comic, status with them. In terms of dramatic structure, "Bloody Mary" is also our introduction to the story of Lieutenant Cable and Liat, and Mary's presence as a pivotal character begins here.[146]

Our first impression of Bloody Mary may be through the eyes of the Marines, but Mary is present laughing, dancing, and selling, and she will soon have a good portion of the servicemen's paychecks. Bloody Mary's own songs, "Bali Ha'i" and "Happy Talk," depict her as a particularly persuasive saleswoman who knows the weaknesses and needs of her customers, in this case, Lt. Joe Cable. Her sales talent is not hampered by her lack of English language proficiency, which is depicted in Oscar

[146] In the stage musical, the love story of Nellie Forbush and Emile De Becque has already been established by this time, and the function of "Bloody Mary" is to introduce the second major story line of Cable and Liat. However, the film version introduces Lt. Cable first, flying into the South Pacific on a military aircraft, and "Bloody Mary" becomes the first song in the musical as a whole, thereby emphasizing her character's importance to an even greater extent.

Hammerstein's lyrics an as unfortunate Pidgin English.[147] In "Bali Ha'i", Bloody Mary persuades Joe Cable that his dreams and desires can be satisfied by a trip to the island of Bali Ha'i, where, unbeknownst to him, Bloody Mary's adolescent daughter is safely ensconced in a convent school waiting for her mother to find her a husband. In "Happy Talk," Bloody Mary does her best to convince Cable that he should marry her daughter and settle on the island. Both songs are similar in function, and both contain regularities in the structure of Bloody Mary's melodic lines, which are marked by large ascending leaps (octaves, sixths, fifths, and fourths) in the main themes of the refrains, and strict scalar movement of limited scope: in the stanzas of "Happy Talk," and in the internal verse and the B-section release of "Bali Ha'i."

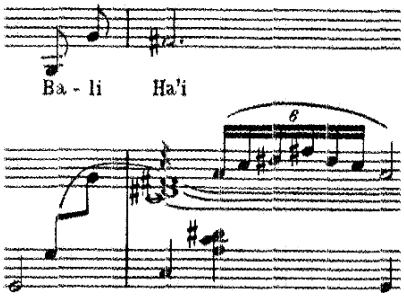
Bloody Mary's large ascending leaps may all be drawn from the famous "call motif"[148] from "Bali Ha'i" which is a melodic octave leap, followed by a chromatic half step down to the sharped fourth scale degree, and then a half-step resolution back up to the fifth scale degree, which is the fifth of the tonic chord beneath it. The leap is altered to an ascending fifth after its first iteration in any given A-section of the refrain; however, the chromatic half-step drop and its resolution up remain, until the final repetition of the motif at the end of each A-section, when the descending half

[147] Hammerstein's attempts at dialect and other altered speech patterns are currently seen as somewhat insulting and inaccurate, although Hammerstein himself felt that they were important to the depiction of characters.

[148] We know this motif is a "call" from the internal evidence of the score. The motif of the octave leap plus chromatic half-step fall occurs four times before Bloody Mary's introductory verse, and the fourth time the motif is preceded by Bloody Mary actually calling out to "Lootellan" Cable. After a dramatic pause, the instrumental introduction to "Bali Ha'i" begins, and the motif of leap with chromatic half-step fall occurs in the bass line four times, under a rapid arpeggio of a whole-tone sequence (G♭–A♭–B♭–C–D). On the fourth iteration, Mary says to Cable, "You hear island call you. Listen." After another fermata, the motif occurs again, and Mary asks Cable, "Hear voice?"

step, spelled as the flatted sixth (and not the sharped fifth), leads to a chromatic drop down to the tonic.[149]

Illustration 8. The "Bali Ha'i" call motif

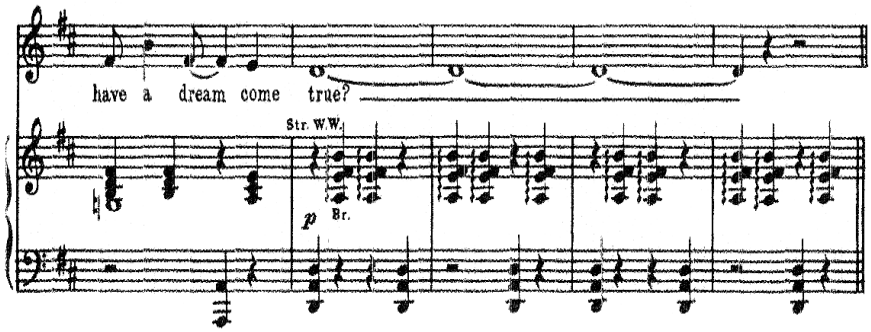


The harmonic inflections in each song differ greatly depending on what Mary is trying to sell. Both songs are written in major heptatonic scales, but "Bali Ha'i" is permeated with whole tone (non-functional) chordal progressions (often arpeggiated) in its introductory verse and refrain. The call motif's chromatic half-step falls on a long held diminished chord, and the scalar melodic movement in the B-section and internal verse is marked by chromatic half steps as well. "Happy Talk," on the other hand, is diatonic with conventional base harmonies and a rhythm whose syncopations in cut time are highly reminiscent of a Rodgers and Hart song from an earlier era.[150] "Happy Talk" does have its conventional "Orientalisms," including dissonant seconds (produced by chords with added fourths and sixths) and open fifths in the accompaniment, but these are light touches and they act to support the cultural

[149] "Bali Ha'i" has a typical AABA structured refrain, an introductory verse based on repeated notes, and an internal verse based, like the B-section release, on descending scalar movement of limited scope.
[150] Forte (1995) describes how such songs used syncopated figures to avoid "the regular coincidence of text accent and metric accent," which made a more danceable piece (21). In "Happy Talk" we see an exact replica of a figure Forte mentions: the last note of the phrase ending on the weakest beat of a measure and then syncopated across the bar line, "which allows the underlying metrical pulse to shine through," and aids dancing. Measures 9 and 11 on the word "dream" do just this in "Happy Talk."

identification of the speaker.[151] The unsyncopated stanzas[152] contain two distinct melodic motions: diatonic scalar descent over an interval of a fifth; and repeated leaps of a fourth—scale degree six to scale degree two—over a ii^7 harmony, leading to the V, and then back to the refrain.

Illustration 9. Tonic chords with added fourths and sixths in "Happy Talk"



The harmonic differences in these songs reflect the contrast of what is being sold and the state of the customer at the time of sale. In "Bali Ha'i" it is exoticism itself that is being sold in the siren call of the island with its whole-tone chords. Bloody Mary perceives Joe Cable's discontent, which contains both sexual privation and frustration with his conventional life back home. The siren call in "Bali Ha'i" promises him, "Your own special hopes/Your own special dreams," which are vague and unarticulated except for their promise of sexual bliss, but which carry the need for something very different from what he knows. Like any good salesperson, Bloody Mary succeeds by persistence and repetition: she reminds Cable constantly of his

[151] Juanita Hall's vocal technique when performing this piece (in the original cast album and in the movie) gives a staccato feel to the melody line, already being sung in Pidgin English. This certainly is an orientalist performance practice, but there is no direction given to the singer in the vocal score.
[152] "Happy Talk" is a strophic song with refrain, a structure probably referencing folk song here, which leads Lovensheimer (2003) to speak of it as "unsophisticated and immensely charming" (234).

sexual tension (in the long and often-repeated chromatic half step of the call motif) and of the "exotic" island's solution to his problem.

In "Happy Talk" Bloody Mary is no longer selling the siren call of the island to a desperate Cable, but selling marriage with her daughter to a young man, who, despite being in love, has serious reservations about the future of the relationship. Mary still plays on Cable's discontent and his need for something more than his normal American life: "You got to have a dream/If you don't have a dream/How you gonna have a dream come true?" The leaps in this melody line are often as large as some in "Bali Ha'i" but they are on short quarter notes in cut time, which indicates a more playful mood and a more conventional outlet of marriage to satisfy the siren call. Bloody Mary builds her case in the stanzas, whose images of nature indicate a pleasant and easy life on the island. In later dialogue, Bloody Mary offers to support them both financially.

Bloody Mary does not develop musically beyond her saleswoman persona, and as such remains more of a stereotype than a full-fledged character. Yet, she controls Joe Cable's destiny from the moment she meets him, which accounts for her powerful presence in the musical.

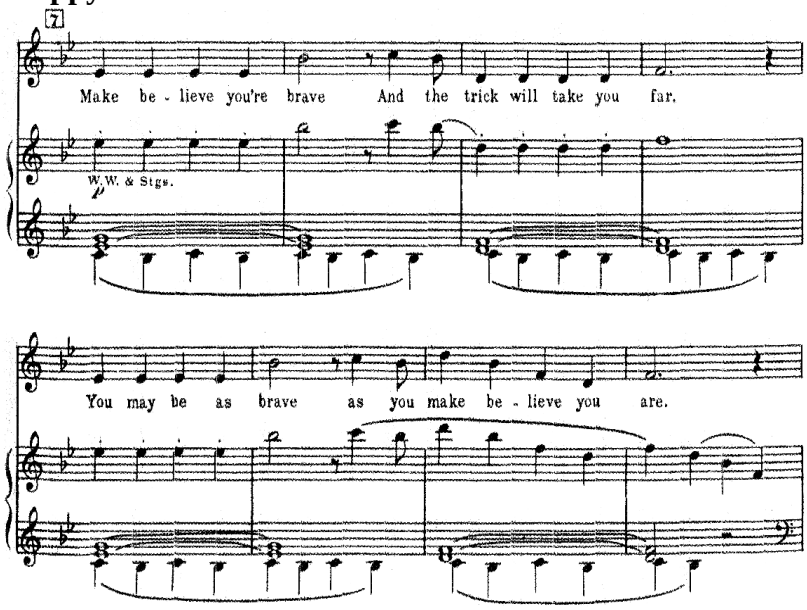
Liat

While Liat has no song of her own, there is music that represents her in several places in the stage show. "Entrance of Liat" is a 19-measure cut time musical interlude in F major played before the orchestral introduction to "Happy Talk" in the Broadway show. Liat appears in measure 17 to musical features reminiscent of "Bali Ha'i:"

arpeggiated triplet chords played in common time by strings and harp, ending on a diminished chord. Liat is not a person here, just a concatenation of signifiers.

Liat also has a presence in Lieutenant Cable's song, "Younger Than Springtime," which he sings to Liat after their first sexual experience. The song is a lyric binary (AABA) in F major and common time. The harmony and instrumentation are entirely Western, but there is an oscillating major second ostinato (D–C) occurring throughout the accompaniment; in the vocal score, this ostinato occurs in both clefs and is constant through the lyrics that describe Liat: "Younger than springtime, are you/Softer than starlight, are you." The oscillation stops in the eight-measure B-section in which Cable is describing his own internal reactions, and resumes once he begins describing Liat again, in the repeat of the A-section. We do not learn much about Liat herself here: we learn more about Cable's reaction to her. Here it is helpful to compare how another Western character, Anna Leonowens (*The King and I*) interacts with this same ostinato. The major second in Anna's "I Whistle A Happy Tune" emerges from the *a cappella* chant of the Kralahome's men, who frighten her and her son. The oscillating second (G–F) is banished as soon as Anna begins her song on the F. It returns after the AABA refrain in an internal verse, where Anna tells Louis, "Make believe you're brave/And the trick will take you far," but the oscillation (this time C–B ♭) has been sped up to jaunty quarter notes that no longer sound threatening, and they remain well in the lower lines of the accompaniment.

Illustration 10. The jaunty oscillating second in the accompaniment of "I Whistle A Happy Tune"



Anna is keeping the Other out by ignoring its presence (the disappearance of the ostinato) or by transforming it into something non-threatening (the jaunty quarter note oscillation) in the music furthest from her vocal line. Cable, on the other hand, invites the ostinato in, closer to the vocal line, allows it prominence, and sings his vocal line almost totally in duet with it.

Rodgers' use of the oscillating second to represent the Other allows us to understand his characters' feelings in an intercultural encounter. It does not, however, describe who the Other is. We never learn how Liat really feels or who she is. She is merely a presence to which Cable is reacting, and this musical depiction mirrors the general depiction of Liat throughout the musical. This is the ultimate orientalist usage: denying the Asian woman her own identity and using the Western male to speak for her (Said 2003, 6). To be fair, Rodgers did inherit an impoverished character from Michener; even as Cable and Liat share many conversations in French, the focus is on

Cable and his transformation, not on Liat. When Cable finally refuses to marry Liat, Bloody Mary arranges a marriage for her with an older French planter.

The De Becque Children

The dramatic function of the children's one-stanza song, "Dîtes-Moi," has already been discussed, but it is worth noting that the children are musically depicted as Western, despite their mixed heritage.[153] The score is marked *A l'antique*, indicating that "Dîtes-Moi" is supposed to be an old French folk song, certainly taught to the children by their father. The instrumentation is suggestive with strings, harp, bells, and oboe, but these instruments are not used to "exotic" effect and the harmonies are strictly diatonic. Lovensheimer (2003) rightly indicates that the island's colonial situation is being played out in these children (114), but the assimilated child is actually a standard character across these Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. Ngana and Jerome[154] join Crown Prince Chulalongkorn (*The King and I*) and Wang San (*Flower Drum Song*) as being assimilated, musically and culturally, unlike others in their orbit. Prince Chulalongkorn is introduced by Western-style heptatonic music with brass instrumentation in the otherwise modal and limpid "March of the Siamese Children." Wang San speaks entirely in American slang, dresses in a baseball uniform, and can sing the lyrics of a new rock-and-roll song.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's view of the assimilated child most likely draws on the experience of European immigrants in the United States. The American "melting pot" ideology required cultural and linguistic assimilation, but this was usually only

[153] The children not only sing in French but conduct a pretend concert, with Jerome as conductor, as they sing (Lovensheimer 2003, 114-115).
[154] These names were invented by Hammerstein for the musical. Michener's De Becque has nine mixed-race daughters from several different mothers, all Francophone, who are not named.

partially achieved, if at all, by adult immigrants. It was the children who quickly acquired the English language and American ways, and this common immigrant experience certainly informed the creation of the assimilated child character in these musicals.

Summary: *South Pacific*

The musical depiction of Asian/Islander characters in South Pacific falls along very narrow and stereotypical lines. Much of this can be traced to Michener's original focus on the experiences of the American military in a war zone, which also happened to be a strange and "exotic" backdrop. The characters who learn and develop are Americans; the Tonkinese women and the half-Polynesian children are primarily catalysts for this development. Nonetheless, a case can be made for Bloody Mary's ambition and skills as a capitalist, and even the procuring of Cable as a potential husband can be seen as a way in which Bloody Mary provides for her daughter's future security and protection.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical emphasizes the symbolic value of both Bloody Mary and her daughter Liat, even as it reduces their value as real characters. Both women are symbolically merged with the island of Bali Ha'i, which itself represents an archetypal feminine: "It was small. Like a jewel...It was green like something ever youthful, and it seemed to curve itself like a woman into the rough shadows formed by the greater island of Vanicoro" (Michener 1984, 179). More prosaically, Bali Ha'i is the location where the French have sequestered the women from the surrounding islands to protect them from being raped by the American troops

(180).[155] Bloody Mary becomes the conduit for the voice of this island of women, channeling its call to Cable in her song "Bali Ha'i." Richard Rodgers actually planned the role of Bloody Mary as the "exotic" female voice of the island:

> ...Oscar and I had been talking about a song for Bloody Mary which would evoke the exotic, mystical powers of a South Seas island. I knew that melody would have to possess an Oriental, languorous quality, that it would have to be suitable for a contralto voice, and even that the title was going to be "Bali Ha'i" (Rodgers 2002, 262).[156]

In the hands of Rodgers and Hammerstein, the black marketeer with a daughter to marry off suddenly becomes an "exotic" archetype for an island of which she is not even a native. Yet, as a woman, Bloody Mary is visually repellent, even as the call she channels is auditorily compelling. It remains for Liat, who is also merged with the island, where she lives and is being educated (by nuns), to provide the attractive face of Bali Ha'i, where she has her encounters with Cable. Bloody Mary and Liat together symbolize a twin face of the "exotic" that mirrors the Western reaction of repulsion and attraction. Like the siren call, which both attracts and kills, the "exotic" creates both desire and dread.

For the Americans, the twin reaction is the culture shock of first encounter, the self-involvement of a displaced ego trying to process radical difference, and the self-revelation that invariably follows the process of attempting to adapt. What is most to

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[155] Rape by American soldiers is a common occurrence in Michener's book, and American nurses are often targets. Before she meets Emile De Becque, Nellie Forbush is attacked and almost raped by an American officer while on a date. See the chapter entitled "An Officer and a Gentleman" (Michener 1984, 50).

[156] Rodgers' terms—*exotic*, *mystical powers*, *langorous*—come straight out of Western orientalist depictions of Asia. These images were common in Hollywood film during much of the twentieth century (see Dong 2008). Lovensheimer (2003) states that "Bali Ha'i" actually "recalls Hollywood's popular musical expression of the South Pacific and its peoples in the 1930s and 1940s" (233).

be dreaded is the hidden self, its own desires and its own brutality. Bloody Mary and Liat are saddled with the weight of this projection, which prevents them from having their own musical and dramatic development.

Musical Depictions in *The King and I*

The King and I was based on several sources. The Rodgers and Hammerstein score credits Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam* as the primary source of the musical. In actual fact, the team found Landon's book "plotless," simply "spinning out episode after episode" (Mordden 1992, 132). It was not until Rodgers and Hammerstein viewed the 1946 Hollywood film, *Anna and the King of Siam*, that they agreed to write the musical for Gertrude Lawrence, who had bought the rights to the book and wanted a star vehicle for herself (132-133). However, the film's screenwriters, Talbot Jennings and Sally Benson, had taken some great liberties with the original story. They created the close relationship between Anna and the King, with its romantic undertones, which had not existed either in Landon's book or in her original source material, *The English Governess and the Siamese Court,* Anna Leonowens' own account of her experiences. The screenwriters also arranged for King Mongkut to die at the end of the film while Anna stayed on to tutor the children, especially the young Crown Prince. In actual fact, Leonowens left Siam for the United States in 1867, when King Mongkut was alive and well. Despite the factual origins of Anna Leonowens' story, the film represents such a complete revision as to be almost entirely fiction.

The few remaining facts are: that Siam's King Mongkut avoided colonization by incorporating a program of Western education and by developing a trade

relationship with Britain; that Anna Leonowens was hired as an English teacher to the royal children and harem of the Siamese court as part of this education program; and that Leonowens regarded the harem system as slavery and wrote about it as such when she moved to the United States. The fabricated romantic relationship between Anna and the King, and the fiction of the King's early death speak to Hollywood conventions but may also have had wider-reaching implications. The end of World War II marked the defeat of Japan and its occupation by the Allied powers. This occupation, beginning in 1945 under General MacArthur, called for a Westernization program with a pro-American orientation. The symbolic death of the 1946 film's King Mongkut could have easily resonated as the Japanese defeat, with Anna's agreement to stay on symbolizing the occupation. This is an important distinction for the agency of King Mongkut in the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. The real Mongkut deftly avoided a Western takeover, and the education program he instituted was targeted at maintaining Siamese independence. The film Mongkut, on the other hand, ends up with a Western takeover, in the form of Anna, and her tutelage now becomes a hegemonic project, even beyond his death.

The musical, which owes most of its plot to the film, is best seen as a case of twentieth-century post-war American hegemony in nineteenth-century costume. In terms of the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus, the relationship with Asia has changed from the wartime footing of *South Pacific*, with its culture shock and projection of desire and repulsion, to a policy of education and hegemony, which is an equally self-involved goal but one which at least must acknowledge the Other as whole characters in the drama. Rodgers and Hammerstein will musically develop two characters, King

Mongkut and Tuptim, in relation to their Westernization. A third, Lady Thiang, will remain a musical bridge between cultures, understanding the new ways but well entrenched in the old.

King Mongkut

Rodgers and Hammerstein originally wanted Rex Harrison, who played King Mongkut in the film, for the musical (Nolan 2002, 201) despite his lack of singing ability,[157] but he was unavailable. Harrison's depiction of the King, complete with elliptical speech, was certainly the inspiration for Oscar Hammerstein, who gave his Mongkut an "emphatic, abrupt style" of dialogue with "elliptical" syntax and no articles (Fordin 1995, 293). This is not Margaret Landon's King Mongkut, who speaks in full sentences, complete with articles and correct tenses:[158] the style clearly derives from Hollywood Chinese characters, such as Charlie Chan (Dong 2008).

Despite the obstacle of Hammerstein's dialect, the musical's King is not a typically effeminate Asian male stereotype. While this may owe something to the recent memory of Imperial Japan and the ferocity of Kamikaze fighters,[159] it is primarily the result of Yul Brynner's performance, which "came close to stealing the show" from its star, Gertrude Lawrence (Fordin 1995, 295).[160] Brynner was an Afghani folk singer who impressed Rodgers with his "unearthly yell" and

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[157] Harrison later intoned his way through the part of Henry Higgins in the film musical *My Fair Lady*.
[158] This is based on my reading of the book.
[159] Pasler (2000) describes how Said's orientalist binary of West as masculine and East as feminine needs to be challenged when there are changes in the perception of power relations between East and West due to military threat (86). Japan's military prowess had been respected and feared by American Presidents since Theodore Roosevelt (Vought 2004, 48-49), and, if contemporary audiences connected *The King and I* with the occupation of Japan, King Mongkut's character had to maintain a certain amount of strength. He could not be an effeminate figure.
[160] When Lawrence died of leukemia in 1952, Brynner did receive top billing, as he did in the 1977 Broadway revival.

"heathenish" sounding song in the audition (Nolan 2002, 202). Brynner's Asiatic appearance, bald head, and "regal bearing" helped as well (Ewen 1957, 268). Brynner seems to have been hired because he was Other, even if he was not the right Other.[161]

The musical characterization of the King is best reflected in two pieces where the King is featured: a solo patter song "A Puzzlement;" and a short song, which precedes his dance with Anna, "Song of the King."[162] While "Song of the King" comes last chronologically, it is useful to examine it first, since in this piece the King is defending his tradition of the harem, which is one Eastern custom he does not wish to give up. Musical signifiers appearing here reference the King's traditional, Eastern values that are resisting the hegemonic project.

"Song of the King" has a sixteen-measure introductory verse, which the King shares with Anna, and then a brief solo song of twenty measures, which precedes the dialogue to "Shall We Dance." The introductory verse has flat melody lines with syllabically set quarter notes in 4/4 time. The King sings a total of three pitches over eight bars, and the syllabic setting of Hammerstein's "elliptical" English gives a chopped staccato sound, which is a recognizable orientalist feature. The key signature of this introduction is D major, but the fourth scale degree is consistently raised; this Lydian inflection appears both in the melody and the (spare) harmonic accompaniment, as the King sings about a male being "pleased by many women." After eight bars, Anna interrupts with her Western version of love; her melody lines are fairly static as well, but her fourth scale degrees are not sharped, but rather are

[161] He was also a friend of Broadway star (and *South Pacific*'s original Nellie Forbush) Mary Martin, who had encouraged him to audition.

[162] There is an additional solo piece, a faux-Buddhist chant, in "Act I Finale," but its key features exist in the other two works and need not be discussed separately.

diatonic. When the King ends the conversation, judging Western men who are faithful in marriage with the spoken, “They are sick,” the accompanying harmony returns to the Lydian inflection.

Illustration 11a. The King’s raised fourth scale degree in “Song of the King”

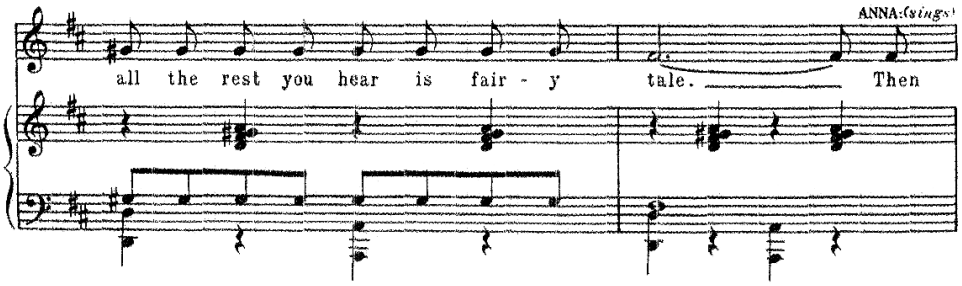
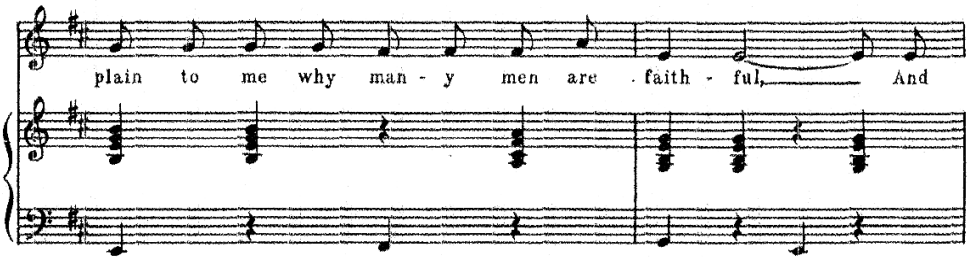


Illustration 11b. Anna’s diatonic fourth scale degree in “Song of the King”



The twenty-measure song that follows the verse—the King’s own version of “the birds and the bees”—is still in D major but modally inflected with the now predictable sharped fourth. However, at the end of the second sung phrase (measure nine), the descending scalar melody line has a pronounced Phrygian inflection, with a lowered second and third scale degree. The melody line is not flat as it was in the introduction, but is based on oscillating seconds, duplicated by the accompanying strings, which play dissonant second grace notes on the strong beats (one and three) in most of the measures.

The King’s Eastern musical features, then, comprise modal inflections (Lydian and Phrygian), along with other features we have seen previously in *South Pacific*:

dissonant second grace notes; the motif of the oscillating second; and syllabic (staccato) setting of lyrics, sometimes on a single pitch. We have also established the sharped (Lydian-inflected) fourth as a signifier of conflict between East and West, and modal inflection in general as a cultural marker. These are useful elements for helping to unravel the personality of the King as he is trying to assimilate Western ways in "A Puzzlement."

"A Puzzlement" is the King's main song, both his longest and most introspective. Rodgers and Hammerstein call it a *soliloquy*, a term they use for self-reflective pieces, which are always sung by major characters and demonstrate their inner conflicts. In *The King and I*, both Anna and the King get such pieces to sing alone,[163] denoting that their inner struggles are important. Both characters reveal uncertainty, which plays out musically in the juxtaposition of two differently composed sections. Both soliloquies are inspired by Gilbert and Sullivan patter song, which would have been roughly contemporary with Anna's mid-nineteenth-century stay in Siam[164] and may mark her Britishness in the musical. The difference between the two pieces is that Anna's patter comes easily to her in the manner of Gilbert and Sullivan, with rhymed couplets, multi-syllabic words, and many iambic feet. She is a British character speaking in her own idiom.

The King, on the other hand, is given Hammerstein's "elliptical" English, which indicates a man speaking outside his native idiom. In "A Puzzlement,"

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[163] Anna's piece is "Shall I Tell You What I Think of You," in which she privately expresses her rage at the King. The conflict in this piece is her love for the children which emerges in sweetly sung portions that contrast with her angry patter.

[164] Rodgers and Hammerstein often used older styles of music to denote different time periods, such as their use of the waltz meter in *Oklahoma!*.

Hammerstein gives the King lines filled with monosyllabic words and trochaic feet, the reverse of the iamb.[165] The effect of the trochaic feet is a non-native prosody at odds with British English:

> There are times I almost think I am not sure of what I absolutely know;
> Very often find confusion in conclusion I concluded long ago,
> In my head are many facts that, as a student, I have studied to procure
> In my head are many facts of which I wish I was more certain I was sure.

The conflict between Siamese and British ways is the theme of "A Puzzlement," and the song has an alternating ABABA structure in which the King tries to solve the dilemma of where he belongs in the hegemonic project.

The A-section patter is composed in F major with no altered tones or modal inflections in the melody or basic harmony, indicating a Western idiom. However, there are descending open fifths in the chordal accompaniment, repetitive descending fourths in the bass line, instrumentation with harp and xylophone, and occasional dissonant seconds.[166] These features do not affect the overall heptatonic feel of the section; however, they do indicate the Eastern speaker who is trying to fit into a Western cultural idiom, a process which brings him "confusion."

The melodic contour is flat, and each line of the patter is sung syllabically on a single repeated pitch, with the final measure of each phrase outlining the cadential triad. This flat contour of repeated pitches certainly may be considered an Orientalism (or a lack of English prosody), or Rodgers may also be using these repeated notes as

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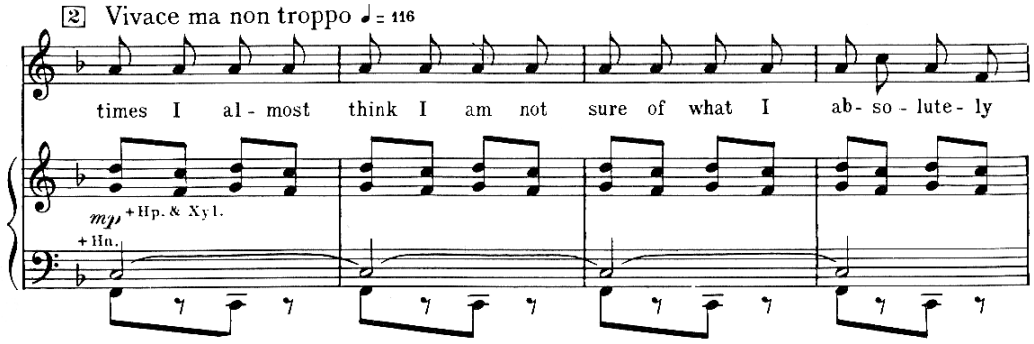
[165] In my previous study of this piece, 42 words of one syllable were counted in the first four lines of patter alone (as opposed to Gilbert and Sullivan's "I Am the Very Model of a Model Major General" which used half as many monosyllabic words and many more multi-syllabic words).

[166] These dissonant seconds are very pronounced in the introductory verse, but become occasional background in the A-section.

"rhythmic propellants" (Kaye 1969, 61).[167] The repeated tones lead us quickly to the stressed (masculine) rhymes at the end of each line, rhymes which might indicate the King's strength, "barbarity," or simply his insistence, as if he is trying to talk himself into a way of life with which he is still uncomfortable.

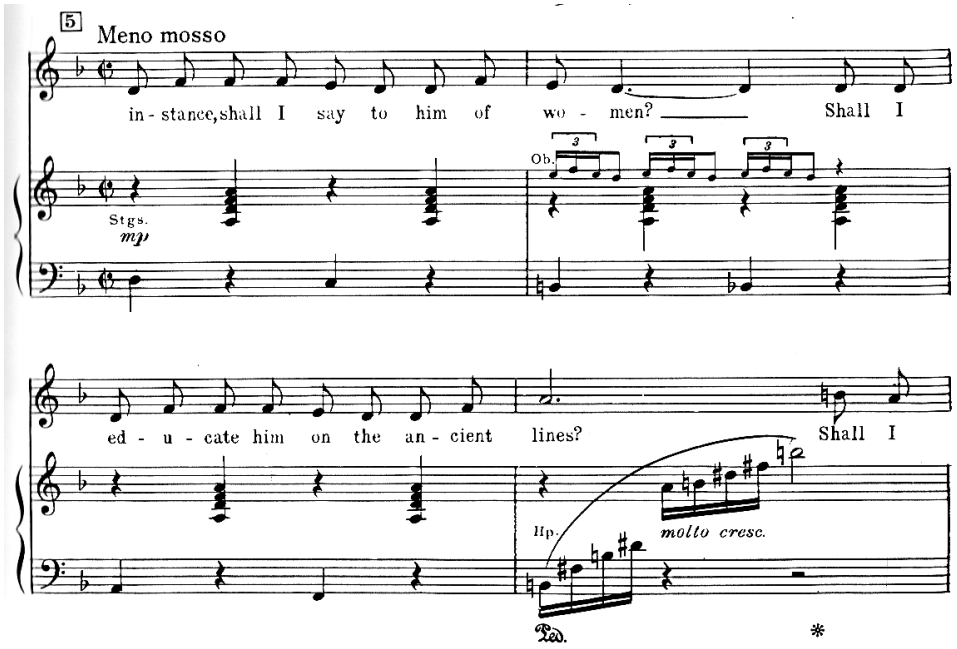
Illustration 12. Melodic contour of King's melody line in the A-section of "A Puzzlement"



The B-sections, on the other hand, are in the key of D minor, with Dorian inflection provided by B-naturals. Rapid triplet figures played by oboe occur at some phrase endings as do rapid harp arpeggios. The melody moves a little more freely than in the rigid A-section within the range of an octave. This increased mobility is paired with questioning lyrics, and indicates the wavering uncertainty the King feels. The rhyme scheme (a b a b) allows for unstressed (feminine) rhymes, which seem to indicate some vulnerability or some uncertainty. At the end of the verses in the B-sections, the King realizes his disagreements with his own Eastern values, and there is a return to the A-section.

[167] The marking of *Vivace ma non troppo* on the score, a notice for the performers not to pick up too much speed, actually supports this interpretation.

Illustration 13. Melodic contour of King's melody line in the B-section of "A Puzzlement"



The F major tonality and Dorian mode musically mark the cultural differences in the systems that are fighting for dominance within the King. The orientalist musical features in the A-section indicate the lack of fit between the hegemonic project of Westernizing the King and his own identity. The melodic uncertainty in the B-section indicates that the home culture is no longer a comfortable fit either. He continues to waver back and forth until the coda, when he decides to leave the issue in the hands of Buddha. The coda continues the A pattern musically, but the key shifts up to G major and the King's pitches rise urgently higher until the apex (on d1). The song ends with the King back where he started, speaking the line, "It's a puzzlement." The issue of where the King stands is not truly "solved" until he is faced with the runaway concubine, Tuptim, and raises a whip to beat her. It is Anna who stops him, judges him ("You *are* a barbarian!") and, according to the Kralahome, destroys him. The

King dies without solving his own internal dilemma, leaving it to the Crown Prince to solve, with Anna's "occupation" firmly in place.

Tuptim

The character of Tuptim comes from Anna Leonowens' *Romance of the Harem* (1991), a book of stories written after Leonowens published the well-known account of her five years teaching in Siam.[168] When Margaret Landon re-imagined Leonowens' experiences, she added the story of Tuptim to her novel, and from there the story made its way into the Hollywood film and Broadway musical.

In the novel, Tuptim is one of many adolescent girls gifted to the King for his harem. Tuptim rebels, hiding or claiming to be ill when she is supposed to go to the King's bed, and incurring the wrath of Lady Thiang, the head wife and overseer of the harem, who physically punishes[169] the girls who do not comply. Tuptim eventually escapes, shaves her head, and enters a monastery disguised as a boy to be near a young novice monk to whom she was previously betrothed. However, she is eventually captured, put on trial, and convicted. Anna intercedes for Tuptim with the King, but upon reading the proceedings of Tuptim's trial, the King sets up a scaffold in front of Anna's windows and has Tuptim (with her fiancé) burned to death on it.

In Landon's novel, the grisly story of the runaway concubine is one episode among many, and Anna remains in Siam well after the incident. However, Rodgers and Hammerstein make Tuptim's punishment—transformed for the musical from an execution into a potential whipping (stopped by Anna's intercession)—the catalyst

[168] Editor Susan Morgan describes these harem stories as "preposterous," while demonstrating that at least one of them seems to have been based on an actual historical event (Leonowens 1991, xxxiv).
[169] Beating, whipping and starving are some of the punishments described in Leonowens' book (1991, 16).

for Anna's immediate departure from Siam, which is stopped only by the King's death. The musical also reinforces the connection between the harem and slavery by having Anna introduce Tuptim to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*[170] early in the drama, and having the story of Stowe's runaway slave become the central entertainment of the King's dinner party. When Tuptim escapes during the party with her lover, Lun Tha, the inescapable conclusion is that she has rejected an Eastern system of sexual slavery for a Western system of freely chosen romantic (and monogamous) love, inspired by Anna's teaching and influence.

Richard Rodgers' use of orientalist signifiers in Tuptim's music supports this connection between the Eastern harem system as bondage and Western monogamy as freedom. However, the pattern of these features also supports a reading of Tuptim as Western in her cultural identification, well before she ever meets Anna. From her first song, "My Lord and Master," Tuptim's melodic and harmonic language is never marked with modal inflections, not even the Lydian fourth which emerges in the music of the King, the children,[171] and Lady Thaing.[172] In her only solo piece, "My Lord and Master," where Tuptim's melody is almost entirely restricted to pentatonic pitches, the underlying harmonic structure is heptatonic in a major key, indicating that the only thing preventing Tuptim from expressing her inner Westernness is her enslaved condition.

[170] Stowe's book actually appears in *The Romance of the Harem* as a favorite book of another one of the wives, Sonn Klean (Leonowens 1991, 248).
[171] In "March of the Siamese Children."
[172] In both "Western People Funny" and "Something Wonderful."

"My Lord and Master" is a short, fifty-six-measure song, expressing Tuptim's contempt for her new enslaver. She is alone on stage, her freedom gone by the word of the King, who states that he is "pleased" with her as a gift for the harem.

The song, with no introductory verse, has an unusual ABA song structure with a nine-measure coda. The key signature is B major and there are no modal inflections. The melody of both A-sections contains only pentatonic pitches, and Rodgers limits the range of the singer[173] to a tenth (d1–f2). The melody of all three sections is built on short, repeated phrases (constructed mostly of quarter notes) and small, simple sequences. The text is set syllabically and there are no dotted rhythms. The harmonies in the A-sections are repetitious chord clusters (containing dissonant seconds) under which is a very simple diatonic harmony: I–IV–I. The rhythm of the accompaniment is also a repetitious pattern throughout both A-sections. The instrumentation includes strings and woodwinds.

If the voice is the self, then Tuptim is trapped in strict orientalist pentatonicism, repetition, childish simple sequences, and harmony that cannot express its normal V–I movement. This is the condition of the slave: infantilized by force and restricted in speech and movement. The heaviness of the plodding, monotonous chord clusters in the accompaniment comes from the outside, weighing her down.

The lyrics in the A-sections describe the King's ignorance of the condition of his slave, Tuptim, specifically making reference to all the things he does not see. The lyrics of the twelve-measure B-section describe what the King *does* see when he looks at Tuptim: "Something young, soft and slim/Painted cheek, tap'ring limb." The King

[173] The original Tuptim, Doretta Morrow, was operatically trained.

sees a collection of physical features, not a human being. The music also indicates that the King does not see someone who is enslaved and miserable: Tuptim's B-section melody breaks out of its strict pentatonicism with the addition of the seventh scale degree (A♯), and the harmony breaks out of its weighty dissonant chord clusters into more varied diatonic harmony, including the V^7 chord on which the section ends. The melodic patterns are still repetitious, relying on a monotonous rhythmic pattern  along descending intervals, which references bowing or deference. This represents the master's view of the happy, bowing slave who exists "just for him."

The final A-section returns to the original pentatonicism and repetition in the melody, but the heavy clusters lose some of their dissonances, as Tuptim asserts that the King will never know about the man she really loves. In the coda, the melody breaks the range limit of a tenth to its apex on A♯3, on which appears the word "*another* [man]." The high A♯ becomes Tuptim's note of potential rebellion, and presages her escape with Lun Tha.

Unlike the King, who is indelibly Eastern and is only confused by the hegemonic project, the young Tuptim is already the same, underneath, as her Western educator, Anna. Her freedom, if she obtains it, will allow her to express who she already is, not change her basic nature. Tuptim reflects the modernist idea that all people are basically the same underneath cultural trappings, which was a key belief underlying post-war Westernization programs.

Tuptim's other songs are duets with Lun Tha, "We Kiss in a Shadow" and "I Have Dreamed," both of which are composed in major keys with typical Western harmonic movement. "We Kiss in a Shadow" is more laden with orientalist features

because it references the oppressive situation in which the lovers find themselves in regard to the King. "I Have Dreamed," on the other hand, contains very few of these features, describing a dream rather than the reality of the situation.

In both songs, the presence of Siam and its king is expressed in a major second oscillation motif, an ostinato, which we have seen in this role before.[174] In "We Kiss in a Shadow," this oscillating ostinato is constant through the A-sections of the AABA song structure, disappearing only in two places: the B-section release when the two lovers sing about their "one smiling day to be free," and the final sung eight-measure phrase of the song ("Behold and believe what you see...") where they sing about the freedom to have their love be seen openly. In "I Have Dreamed," the King's ostinato intrudes only in Tuptim's verse[175] where she sings of her present situation ("Alone and awake, I've looked at the stars..."). The ostinato disappears with the reappearance of the main theme, "I have dreamed."

Ideas of bondage and freedom also play out melodically in these songs, with ascending vocal lines and high notes representing freedom, while descending vocal lines represent oppression and secrecy. The melody of "We Kiss in a Shadow," for example, is built on overall descending melodic lines, with the exception of the B-section lyric, "One shining day to be free," and the lyrics in the final eight measures "Behold and believe what you see..."—both of which have patterns of ascent and contain the highest pitches in the song. "I Have Dreamed," expressing the unrealized

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[174] See "Younger Than Springtime" and "I Whistle A Happy Tune" earlier in this chapter (in the section entitled **Liat**). Also note the oscillation as melody in "Song of the King."

[175] The location of this verse is between Lun Tha's solo rendition of the refrain ("I Have Dreamed") and Tuptim's rendition. It is "Rehearsal 3" in the vocal score (Rodgers, Hammerstein, Sirmay and Landon 2005, 128).

dream of freedom, is built on an overall pattern of melodic ascent.[176] Another exemplar of freedom is the dominant (and dominant seventh) harmony, denied to Tuptim in "My Lord and Master," but returned to her in "We Kiss in a Shadow." As Kaye points out, "the entire first section [of the song] is built on the tonic and dominant" (Kaye 1969, 394). In Western tonality, the dominant chord is considered to have a "need to resolve" which "pulls" it in the direction of the tonic chord. The idea that the V chord "needs" to move is the underpinning of Western functional harmony, which assumes movement as an underlying principle. In Tuptim's music, the dominant chord is not only about her freedom of movement but represents the need for all human beings to be free to move in the direction in which they are naturally "pulled."

As a character, Tuptim does not succeed in her quest for freedom, although *The King and I* leaves her future unresolved.[177] Her primary function in the musical is to provide counterpoint to the unassimilable King, as she represents an Easterner who is, at heart, Western where it counts: in her quest for human rights and freedom.

Lady Thiang

The head wife, mother of the Crown Prince, and overseer of the harem, Lady Thiang[178] holds an influential position, having the ear of both the King and Anna.

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[176] Even some smaller accompaniment features follow this same pattern. "We Kiss in a Shadow" contains a recognizable orientalist grace note figure of four descending thirty-second notes, played on flute or violin. This figure appears consistently at the beginning of every sung phrase and at the end of every musical four-bar phrase in the "oppressive" A-sections, but disappears in the B-sections. Before the final sung phrase, this figure is transformed into an ascending grace note figure and seven sixteenth notes.

[177] Upon the King's death, the Crown Prince would inherit responsibility for the harem, but with Anna's influence, it hardly seems likely that he would enforce the punishment of Tuptim. Whether she would be freed is another matter.

[178] Lady Thiang is actually an amalgam of different characters from Leonowens' books: Lady Talap, a young wife of the harem who greets Anna with a religious song taught to her by English missionaries (Leonowens 1999, 60); the deceased queen, mother of the Crown Prince Chulalongkorn (Leonowens

However, her character is not very well developed other than as a happy representative of the harem system and as the one wife who actually loves the King.[179] She is depicted as not fitting well into Western ways (unlike Tuptim), although Lady Thiang's music is not inflected modally outside of the appearance of raised fourths. She is also depicted, dramatically and musically, as the bridge between Anna and the King in the song "Something Wonderful," and she makes some caustic commentary on the hegemonic project in "Western People Funny."

Her music contains the crucial raised fourth, which is the musical representative of culture conflict in *The King and I*. The raised fourth inflection first appears for Lady Thiang in "Western People Funny,"[180] sung as the harem dresses in English-style hoop skirts for the King's dinner party. The ultimate goal of the party is to impress visiting British dignitaries with Siam's "Britishness" so that the British will not try to take a "barbaric" Siam as a colony. The irony of this situation comes out in Hammerstein's lyrics for Lady Thiang:

> Western people funny,
> Of that there is no doubt.
> They feel so sentimental,
> About the oriental,
> They always try to turn us inside down and upside out.

The lyrics are set to a Gilbert-and-Sullivan-like patter, led by Lady Thiang and sung by the harem chorus in F major. The sung fourths are diatonic throughout, but there is

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1999, 149); and Lady Thieng, the head wife and overseer of the harem (Leonowens 1991, 16). Rodgers and Hammerstein's Lady Thiang (with an "a") takes on all of these roles in the musical, although her role as harem overseer, with its corporal punishment duties, is excised. The only hint we get of this role is her comment that Tuptim is "a foolish child" for being unhappy in the King's palace.

[179] Her characterization as the wife who really loves the King is taken directly from Landon (2000) and Leonowens (1999).

[180] This song was cut from the 1956 movie version.

constant alternation in the sharp stacatto chord accompaniment between the raised fourth scale degree (B♮) and the diatonic (B♭), giving a sense of things not fitting or going together properly. A flute solo between sections contains only raised fourths.

"Western People Funny" is reminiscent of the King's patter in "A Puzzlement" and both Gilbert-and-Sullivan-inspired pieces deal with Asian characters trying to fit into the hegemonic project. Lady Thiang's sung diatonic fourth in this piece is her effort to go along with the project (much like the King's major key in "A Puzzlement"). However, for Lady Thiang, the altered fourth is always in the background, demonstrating how shallow the change actually is.

Lady Thiang's persuasive "Something Wonderful," sung to an angry Anna after her fight with the King, is entirely in Western tonality. However, its play on the alternation between the sharped fourth and the diatonic fourth both: depicts Lady Thiang's attempt to balance the King's needs and Anna's frustration with his personality; as well as mirrors the raised and diatonic fourth of the King and Anna in "Song of the King."[181]

Lady Thiang's characterization is troubling when contrasted with Tuptim's obvious experience of the harem as slavery. Rodgers and Hammerstein's Lady Thiang is happy with her lot, content with her culture and her King, and sees no reason to Westernize, although she will go along with his wishes. Hammerstein gives her an innate wisdom about people and an ability to handle difficult personalities. Lady

[181] See the discussion in the **King Mongkut** section earlier in this chapter.

Thiang may represent what can be lost in the traditional culture with the hegemonic project, but neither her character nor her music is developed enough to know for sure.

Summary: *The King and I*

Much of the current research on *The King and I* centers on its depiction of the American hegemonic project in Asia in the immediate post-war period. According to Christina Klein, the United States was pursuing a dual strategy in Southeast Asia of containing communism militarily and trying to win "hearts and minds" in Asia by forging bonds of affiliation and cooperation (Klein 2003, 41-43). The latter goal was as important to the State Department as military action because the United States was ascending to world leadership during a time of rapid decolonization in Asia and Africa. Overt re-colonization was out of the question; the solution was to persuade the newly decolonized nations that their self-interest intersected with the interests of the United States, and to make them feel they had a role in building their own new social and political orders with guidance from the United States. The object was cultural hegemony and its means were to build "structures of feeling" in which "the ideological principles that support a given arrangement of power are translated into regularized patterns of emotion and sentiment" (7). For these structures of feeling to work, however, the United States had to clean its own house on issues of racism, both overseas and on the home front. Klein shows that traveling Americans (whether on business or pleasure) were exhorted to be culturally tolerant abroad, to enjoy cultural differences and not to "look down your nose at those who are different" (112). Klein also demonstrates that the United States' credibility abroad was undermined by racism

at home, especially that directed toward African Americans, and she implies that much civil rights legislation was passed with an eye to the opinions of allies overseas.

The King and I ties all these themes together, which is why Klein gives it such prominence in her study. Anna represents the stereotypically feminine role of building ties and affiliations so necessary to the United States' project of hegemony. The Siamese characters in the musical represent different reactions to that project: the King, who could not accept human rights for women; Tuptim, who already held Western principles and reflected America's slave-owning past; Chulalongkorn, the child who could be educated, assimilated, and developed into an "enlightened" ruler; and Lady Thiang, who, while skeptical of the hegemonic project, could understand it and speak to it in its own language, all while maintaining her native wisdom and perhaps teaching something to the hegemon. Rodgers' use of musical signifiers supports this view of the Asian characters. However, Rodgers composed for characters, not necessarily for ideologies. His music does make not a judgment on which character was "right" in a political sense. The fact that Lady Thiang's "Something Wonderful" re-emerges in the orchestra as the King is dying reminds the audience of the loss involved in the hegemonic project.

Musical Depictions in *Flower Drum Song*[182]

The third of Rodgers and Hammerstein's Asian-themed musicals, *Flower Drum Song* is set in San Francisco's Chinatown and is based on the novel of C. Y. Lee (1961), a Chinese immigrant to the United States. Lee remembers that Rodgers and

[182] The organization of this section will differ slightly from the previous sections in this chapter. *Flower Drum Song* requires some introduction—especially in regard to the controversy surrounding the depictions of Chinese Americans in the musical—before analyzing the depictions of individual characters.

Hammerstein were looking for "foreign material" and were committed to Asians playing Chinese roles, which he found "very exciting" (Shin and Lee 2004, 83). However, *Flower Drum Song* premiered at the end of an eight-year slump[183] for Rodgers and Hammerstein, and they were definitely looking for a hit (Lewis 2006, 14). This may explain the lack of depth in the musical, as Rodgers, Hammerstein and director Joseph Fields (who actually acquired the rights to the book for the duo) "took the safest commercial route" (33). Instead of an artistic, risk-taking "music drama," *Flower Drum Song* remained a strictly safe musical comedy "crammed with jokes and gimmicks" (73), with both Rodgers and Hammerstein obsessively gauging audience response.[184]

The commercialization included changing the focus of the story. The novel's main character, Wang Chi-yang, leaves China during Mao's communist takeover, and settles with his two sons in San Francisco's Chinatown, maintaining a strictly Chinese lifestyle and ignoring the American world outside the small enclave. The book chronicles his shift to a posture of acculturation after a heartbreaking experience with his elder son, Wang Ta, who runs off with May Li.[185] The focus of the musical,

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[183] After *The King and I* (1951), the team produced the unsuccessful *Me and Juliet* (1953), which suffered from a lack of plot; and *Pipe Dream* (1955), a musical based on John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, whose prostitutes and seedy characters were not well served by Oscar Hammerstein's sunny lyrics and warmhearted approach (Lewis 2006, 7). Both men had been ill as well, and in the interim, more daring musicals like *West Side Story* had gone beyond the Rodgers and Hammerstein formula. The one success in these years was *Cinderella* (1957), a musical written for television, which did well in a live broadcast and catapulted Julie Andrews to stardom.

[184] C. Y. Lee mentions how Hammerstein "kept his eyes closed and would listen for the chairs...If the chairs squeaked too much, he knew the audience was restless" (Shin and Lee 2004, 82).

[185] The spelling of her name is changed in the musical to Mei Li.

however, is not on Wang Chi-yang and his character development, but on the son Wang Ta, who struggles to find love (Lewis 2006, 33).[186]

The musical also tends to alter the darker elements of the novel, including the original flower drum songs themselves, whose topics include: poverty-stricken parents selling children; people marrying stupid or ugly mates (Lee 1961, 152); and political revolution (225). In their place, Hammerstein creates an optimistic song about everyday wonders, "A Hundred Million Miracles," whose only connection to the originals is the use of the drum. Other negative elements, like the discrimination in employment that Wang Ta experiences,[187] are mentioned in the stage musical[188] but not in the 1961 film version. The suicide of Helen Chao, one of Wang Ta's girlfriends, is completely left out of both versions of the musical,[189] although her character remains to nurse an unrequited love for him.[190] Another element excised in the story is the sub-plot of the maid, Liu Ma, who connives to frame May Li as a thief by putting an heirloom clock in her room. In the novel, this connivance brings about the "moment of truth" for Wang Chi-yang, when Wang Ta sides with May Li and leaves

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[186] C. Y. Lee "didn't raise any questions" about these changes. In a 2004 interview, Lee states that Rodgers and Hammerstein "made it kind of funny and more commercial" (Shin and Lee 2004, 85).

[187] In the novel, Wang Ta has a bachelor's degree in economics from University of California, but has only been offered a job as a dishwasher (which his wealthy father forbids him to take). Wang Ta attends medical school for the duration of the novel, not because he wants to be a doctor but because it will take the longest amount of time to finish before he has to face an overtly racist job market again (Lee 1961, 23). His friend, Chang Ling-yu, has a Ph.D. in history, but is working as a clerk in a grocery store (23).

[188] See *Flower Drum Song: A Musical Play* (Rodgers, Hammerstein, Fields and Lee 1959, 36). Wang Ta is now attending law school for three years and mentions specifically: "Well, it is difficult for a Chinese, even with a college degree, to find employment."

[189] In the novel, Helen Chao is unattractive due to her severe skin problems. Wang Ta considers her only a friend until she seduces him after getting him drunk, which leads to a short affair. Wang Ta breaks off the relationship when Helen begs him to marry her, on a night when an aggressive skin treatment has left her face brutally red and raw. Two weeks later, Helen's body is found "washed ashore" on the beach and the newspaper describes her as "an attractive Chinese woman" (Lee 1961, 99).

[190] During the out-of-town tryouts, Helen's role was diminished even further, thanks to audience response (Lewis 2006, 68).

home in an act of rebellion against his father. In the musical, Wang Ta's marriage to Mei Li actually falls in line with his father's wishes.

If the musical subtracts negative elements, it also adds comic ones, like the character of Sammy Fong, the owner of the Celestial Bar, a nightclub where Linda Low is a stripper. Fong's character appears nowhere in the novel,[191] although both a "businessman's club" where Linda dances (Lee 1961, 127) and a club with blonde "exotic" dancers in North Beach (68) are mentioned.[192] Fong and Linda Low actually provide the action in the musical, making it possible for the more passive Mei Li and Wang Ta to meet and fall in love. Mei Li becomes a mail-order bride[193] arranged for Fong by his mother. Fong, who prefers Linda Low, pawns the girl off on the Wang family, providing proximity for Wang Ta and Mei Li to interact. Meanwhile, Linda Low has become Wang Ta's fiancée, until Sammy interferes by inviting all the Wangs to his club to see what Linda does for a living. The engagement is broken, and despite a drunken night with Helen Chao, Wang Ta realizes his feelings for Mei Li. The happiness of both couples is threatened when Fong's mother, apprised of the arrival of her son's Chinese bride, honors the contract by arranging the wedding for Mei Li and Sammy. The contrivance preventing this marriage concerns Mei Li's legal status: she and her father have escaped China without documentation. When Mei Li realizes, thanks to a television program, that her legal status could be a problem for the

[191] He seems to have been based on Charlie Low, the owner of the Chinese Sky Room in San Francisco (Lewis 2006, 34).
[192] The former is the club where a gunfight breaks out between two of Linda Low's admirers, and the latter is visited, accidentally, by Wang Chi-yang who is horrified and goes home to burn purifying incense.
[193] The mail-order bride, often seen as a stereotypical racist element of the show, is actually from the novel itself. Wang Chi-yang orders a bride from Hong Kong for Wang Ta (Lee 1961, 137).

marriage contract, she informs Sammy Fong's mother who declares: "My son cannot marry a wetback!" Wang Ta happily marries Mei Li despite her status, while Sammy ends up with Linda Low.

Flower Drum Song and Racism

Flower Drum Song has ended up being the most problematic of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals, not only because of its own lack of depth and an inferior film version (Lewis 2006, 102), but because of its timing in history. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s changed how America dealt with race and challenged the notion of who had the right to speak for a particular community in works of art. As the only American movie with an entirely Asian cast until *Joy Luck Club* (1993), *Flower Drum Song* (1961) became the target of much of the wrath of a new generation of Chinese Americans, who decried its shallow stereotypes and white view of Asian American communities. The musical was labeled "racist" and became difficult, if not impossible, to stage (Lewis 2006, 118-120). It was not until David Henry Hwang, author of *M Butterfly* (1988), rewrote the script in 2003 (Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003) that *Flower Drum Song* was performed in a major professional venue again. Hwang describes a love-hate relationship that he and most Chinese Americans have had with the film:

> *Flower Drum Song* is a guilty pleasure because it is...really a lot of fun to watch...and there are wonderful performances...and there's great music and some amazing dance in it...[But] it's a little bit unsettling to watch a bunch of Chinese Americans dancing around singing about chop suey. Who eats chop suey? It's an American invention that was...created to satisfy white tastes, people who...wouldn't feel comfortable eating actual Chinese food (Dong 2008).

The idea that *Flower Drum Song* was written for white tastes is also complicated by some of the casting decisions. The lead female role, Mei Li, was played by Miyoshi Umeki, a Japanese-born Academy-Award-winning actress and singer. *Joy Luck Club* author, Amy Tan, describes the resentment of the Chinese American community at the casting of the Japanese actress:

> The fact that the role of the new immigrant woman had been played by a Japanese woman elicited...a response of resentment among...those of us of a certain age...as a Chinese person whose country had been under Japanese occupation, Japanese attack (Amy Tan, quoted in Dong 2008).

This kind of casting[194] underscored for Tan, and many others, the ignorance of white America, who often could not distinguish one Asian group from another:

> It was after the war and people were still confusing Japanese with Chinese people...I would be called, sometimes, "Jap" in school. You wanted to say to people, "You know there is a difference. There's a historical difference, and you shouldn't confuse me with that." So then they would call me "Chink" of course (Amy Tan, quoted in Dong 2008).

In addition, certain jokes were seen as insensitive, such as when comedian Frankie Wing[195] quips, "Well, back to the laundry," when his jokes do not go over well at the night club.[196]

The conviction that *Flower Drum Song* is racist draws on the perception of its characters as Chinese American stereotypes, and criticism is often directed at C. Y.

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[194] Pat Suzuki (Linda Low, stage), James Shigeta (Wang Ta, film), and Jack Soo [Suzuki] (Sammy Fong, stage and film) were also cast. Part of the reason for the mixed casting was the difficulty of finding Chinese actors. As C. Y. Lee puts it, "Acting is considered to be a lower than low profession. We don't have many performers" (Shin and Lee 2004). Lewis documents the painstaking search for Asian actors, some of which came from the amateur ranks (Lewis 2006, 37-48).

[195] Frankie Wing was originally played by comedian Jack Soo, who took over the Sammy Fong role later in the stage production and in the movie.

[196] Oddly enough, James Shigeta (Wang Ta, movie) remarks: "I think [*Flower Drum Song*] was special because it portrayed a Chinese family that was not doing laundry. It just seemed like a refreshing change of pace from what you usually see of a Chinese family" (Dong 2008).

Lee himself for having written a "stereotypical" novel. Lee defends his literary choices by saying, "It was the period...this was an accurate portrayal of people during the period I was writing about" (Shin and Lee 2004, 85). Yet despite its drawbacks, David Henry Hwang describes *Flower Drum Song* as "a musical that presented Asian Americans as a vital part of this country's great social experiment" (Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003, xiv).

And perhaps this is what ultimately redeems *Flower Drum Song*, despite its checkered history: in a nation where Asian immigrants were considered so unassimilable that even the ideal of the melting pot did not apply to them (Vought 2004, xv), Rodgers and Hammerstein created a musical where Asians *were* Americans, *were* assimilable, and *were* part of the great American melting pot. The musical came on the heels of the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act,[197] itself a result of a change in dialogue about race following World War II, as the pseudo-science of eugenics, tied ideologically to the Nazi regime, fell into disrepute and the melting pot began to be re-thought.

Hwang understands the intent behind *Flower Drum Song* to be "a very...positive and revolutionary (for its time) portrayal of Asian Americans" (David Henry Hwang, as quoted in Dong 2008). Hwang places the musical in its political context:

> When *Flower Drum Song* the musical was on Broadway, it was 1958, and Japanese Americans had only been released from internment thirteen years earlier; you'd just gotten out of the McCarthy period where there had been a lot of FBI investigations into Chinese

[197] The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the "gentlemen's agreement" between Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese government in 1907 were two vehicles used to impede Asian immigration to the United States (Vought 2004, 50).

> Americans as possible subversives. So for Rodgers and Hammerstein to make the statement in 1958 that Chinese Americans are Americans and part of the great social experiment, it's a huge landmark (David Henry Hwang, as quoted in Dong 2008).

In regard to the Asian American experience, *Flower Drum Song* is best interpreted as a melting-pot musical of its time, with Asian Americans finally regarded as assimilating like their European counterparts and, in this way, belonging to the larger American community. However the assimilation does not require a total loss of ethnic characteristics. Different characters in the musical maintain different levels of their Chineseness. One can see in this musical the beginnings of the notion of "the salad bowl," in which each immigrant group retains certain defining characteristics. The "salad bowl" began to replace the melting pot as the metaphor of assimilation in the latter half of the twentieth century. *Flower Drum Song* may hint that a different view of assimilation in American society is necessary.

Flower Drum Song was also revolutionary in its (mostly) Asian cast (entirely Asian American in the movie version), which pushed beyond decades of both "yellow face" in films, and over a century of faux-Chinese make-up in stage musical and dramatic productions. In this way, the musical was also was quite progressive for its time and provided work for many Asian American actors.

Because of its forward-looking elements and despite its flaws, *Flower Drum Song* cannot simply be dismissed as a relic of a racist past. It has to be seen as coming from a strong impulse to redefine Americanism in a more inclusive way, no matter how off-the-mark it may be in some of its specifics.

Musical Depictions[198]

In *Flower Drum Song*, all the characters are ethnically Chinese, but their levels of cultural assimilation into the American mainstream differ. Mei Li and her father are recent immigrants and the most culturally Chinese; the Wang family is assimilating in varying degrees, from the stubbornly Chinese old Master Wang to his completely assimilated younger son Wang San; and the characters of Sammy Fong and Linda Low are completely assimilated,[199] with American values regarding love, sex and marriage. The musical continuum, on which the self-expression of these characters lies, ranges from a "Chinese sound"—quiet, melodically inflected with sharps or pentatonicism, and instrumental references to flutes, drums, and plucked instruments—to an "American sound"—brassy, jazzy, and usually loud, including styles of musical theater, jazz, blues, and swing, and even a reference to rock-and-roll. Where a character appears on this continuum roughly indicates their degree of assimilation.

Almost all of the characters have some orientalist signifier in their music, even the assimilated Linda Low and Sammy Fong, whose jazzy melodies seem at odds with certain signifiers[200] in their accompaniment. A rhythmic or stylistic mismatch may indicate a conflict with the expectations of the Chinese community (in the case of Sammy Fong's "Don't Marry Me") or rebellion against its values (in the case of Linda Low's "I Enjoy Being A Girl"). The one character who has no orientalist signifiers in

[198] Unless otherwise noted, the musical analysis that follows is my own.
[199] In the film version, Sammy Fong tells his mother that Linda Low "came into this country the regular way, through her mother," indicating that she is American-born and that Sammy might be as well (Lee, Fields and Hammerstein 2006, episode 18).
[200] These signifiers are predominantly dissonant seconds, oscillating second motifs, and open fifths.

her music is Helen Chao, whose ballad "Love, Look Away" is described as "the most tautly crafted blues song Dick and Oscar would ever create" (Lewis 2006, 70). Even the demanding Alec Wilder describes it as "a very interesting song unlike anything of Rodgers I know" (Wilder 1990, 222).[201] Composed for Arabella Hong, the first Helen Chao, the song is brooding and references her despair in love without overtly showing her suicide.[202]

The lack of orientalist markers indicates that Helen may be the most Westernized of the characters: in her life, she is independent, employed as a seamstress, and has no parents or family interfering with her life. However, she is the outsider in the group, and like typical outsiders in Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, she does not get her happy ending. Helen Chao's combination of Western music, American lifestyle, and tragic love life seems to support Klein's contention (2003) that the most important characteristic of the immigrant in *Flower Drum Song* is to be able to balance ethnicity and assimilation.

Characters and Their Signifiers along the Continuum: China

While the nation itself is not an official character in the musical, its depiction can be gleaned from two heritage tunes[203] that represent it musically: "You Are Beautiful," which Wang Ta claims is based on an old Chinese poem;[204] and "A Hundred Million Miracles," representing the northern Chinese flower drum songs

[201] There is some indication that the feel of the song was inspired by Arabella Hong's audition piece for the part of Helen, Menotti's "Steal Me, Sweet Thief" (Lewis 2006, 42). In the film, the song was dubbed by opera singer Marilyn Horne.
[202] In the film version, "Love Look Away" segues into a "dream-sequence" dance number, which ends with Helen slipping down an incline into a body of water (Lee, Fields, and Hammerstein 1961/2006, ch. 13).
[203] See Knapp 2005, 187.
[204] See Rodgers, Hammerstein, Fields and Lee 1959, 12.

from the C. Y. Lee novel. Both songs contain melodic and harmonic pentatonicism,[205] dissonant seconds in chord clusters,[206] plucked instruments (mandolin and banjo), and an emphasis on woodwinds in the orchestration. The melodies in these pieces are often scalar, along with either heptatonic or pentatonic scales; melodic leaps are limited.[207] With few exceptions, the actual underlying harmonic movement is conventionally Western and, crucially, is not modal, despite certain raised melodic scale degrees in "A Hundred Million Miracles."[208] The dynamic markings are consistently moderate (*mezzo forte, mezzo piano*) or soft (*piano, pianissimo*).[209] The lyrics include references to the natural world: rain, rivers, flowers, birds, wind, and so forth. The entire effect is one of quiet restraint (even contemplativeness), connectedness to nature, and a foreignness that is charming but not unnecessarily jolting. It is, as contemporary critic Brooks Atkinson called it, "pseudo-Asian music" (Atkinson 1958b, X5), and it is, in his words, "pleasant." It also seems to be a nostalgic view of an old culture tossed off by the Maoist revolution, which Mei Li and her father are fleeing. This old, venerable China is not dangerous in the 1950s: the Communists are.[210]

Characters and Their Signifiers along the Continuum: Mei Li

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[205] This harmony is often understood to be a tonic harmony with added pitches, and occurs in chord clusters containing all five pitches of the major pentatonic scale based on the tonic pitch.
[206] The fifteen-measure introductory verse of "You Are Beautiful" has dense, dissonant clusters, alternating between an E half-diminished ninth harmony, an F-major ninth harmony, and a C-minor seventh harmony in an F-major key signature.
[207] "You Are Beautiful" has a single large leap of a minor sixth near the end of its B-section when the lyric describes "a falling lotus leaf."
[208] This includes the accidentals in the musical motif to the main lyric, "a hundred million miracles." The two-measure motif basically outlines a scalar descent of a fourth down the C-major scale (c1–g), with minor third drops to non-diatonic leading tones of adjacent pitches (c1–b1–g♯–a1–f♯–g). The accidentals, especially the sharped fifth, give a pungency to the line that is similar to that of other raised scale degrees in Rodgers' orientalist language.
[209] In contrast, "I Enjoy Being A Girl" and "Don't Marry Me" include a number of *forte* markings.
[210] David Henry Hwang inserts Mao and his little red book into the prologue of his remake of the musical, and makes "A Hundred Million Miracles" a song of protest against the Communist regime (Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003, 9-14).

Mei Li's musical depiction includes some differences from previous Rodgers and Hammerstein Asian-themed musicals. She is associated with new instruments (the banjo and the "oriental drum"[211]) and with new song forms. Her two main pieces, "A Hundred Million Miracles" and "I Am Going To Like It Here" are both structured on non-Western (and non-Broadway) forms.

"A Hundred Million Miracles" represents a flower drum song from C. Y. Lee's novel, performed on the street in Chinatown[212] by May Li and her father. The song in the novel[213] has seven sections: an introductory beating of the gong and drum; a sad verse of song; a gong and drum reprise; a spoken dialogue; a second gong and drum reprise; three (sad) verses sung in alternation by May Li and her father; and then a final gong and drum section (Lee 1961, 151-154). "A Hundred Million Miracles" actually follows this structure very closely, excising only the spoken dialogue portion and one of the gong and drum reprises, and adding an *a cappella* introduction and coda for Mei Li. The final structure still has seven parts: the *a cappella* introduction; the sung theme with drumming section; the first verse (about the weather); the theme and drum reprise; three short verses sung in alternation by Madam Liang and Wang Chi-yang, with a chorus response; a final theme section with drumming; and the *a cappella* coda. Rodgers and Hammerstein include a small gong to punctuate the beginning of both the song and Mei Li's verse. The structure of "A Hundred Million

[211] Rodgers marks the instrument this way in the score.
[212] A second flower drum song is a single verse sung in Wang Chi-yang's home while May Li is beating his back (Lee 1961, 225). Both the street scene and the back beating appear in the musical.
[213] Lee (1961) cites the following source for the song: Chiu-Hsin Yao Chen, and Shih-Hsiang Chen. *The Flower Drum and Other Chinese Songs*. New York: The John Day Company, Publishers, 1943.

Miracles" cannot be understood without reference to the novel, and it fits no typical Broadway song form.

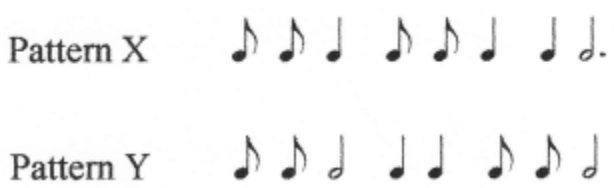
"I Am Going To Like It Here" also takes its structure from outside Broadway, specifically from a Malaysian poetic form, the pantoum:

> ...Oscar went back to an ancient Malaysian form called the "pantoum," in which the second and fourth lines of each four-line stanza become the first and third lines in the following stanza. It was meticulously worked out...(Rodgers 2002, 295).

The first two stanzas of the song give a feel for the repetitive quality:

> I am going to like it here.
> There is something about the place,
> An encouraging atmosphere,
> Like a smile on a friendly face.
>
> There is something about the place,
> So caressing and warm it is.
> Like a smile on a friendly face,
> Like a port in a storm it is (Rodgers, Hammerstein and Fields 1959, 49-50).

The choice of this form inspired Rodgers to create a new kind of repetition in the music, restricting himself to two rhythm patterns consisting of two measures each:



The song's six stanzas and coda[214] each contain eight measures of music, comprised of four rhythm patterns, which are either Pattern X or Pattern Y. They appear as follows:

[214] There is no sung introduction.

Table 2. Rhythm patterns in "I Am Going To Like It Here"

Song Section	Rhythmic Pattern (Pattern X or Pattern Y)
Stanza I	X, X, X, X
Stanza II	X, Y, X, Y
Stanza III	Y, X, Y, X
Stanza IV	X, Y, X, Y
Stanza V	Y, X, Y, X
Stanza VI	X, X, X, X
Coda	X, X, X, X

The time signature of the piece is 4/4, and both Pattern X and Pattern Y always begin on the last beat of the preceding measure, stressing the quarter (or half) note on the downbeat of the following measure. This creates a repetitive phrase-initial accent pattern.

Each rhythm pattern also has a specific melodic pattern associated with it. The two eighth-note cells in Pattern X are always built on a move of three half steps, written either as an augmented second (with an accidental) or minor third. The following quarter notes usually ascend another half step.[215] The final two notes of Pattern X, the quarter and dotted half note, are freer to move and are often accompanied by a change in the harmony. In Pattern Y, the phrase-initial eighth-note cell is also built on a move of three half steps, and the following quarter note usually

[215] In one two-measure phrase in Stanza II (which is repeated in Stanza III), the ascent is two half steps.

ascends a half step.[216] The rest of Pattern Y is usually descending scalar movement, with occasional leaps up or down.

Here again, the patterns of repetition in the lyrics and the music are unlike anything related to typical Broadway music. The use of both the pantoum and the flower drum song structure need to be regarded as orientalist features marking Mei Li as culturally Chinese. Other markers that belong exclusively to Mei Li are the raised melodic fourth[217] in the first internal verse of "A Hundred Million Miracles"[218] and the raised melodic second in "I Am Going To Like It Here," both of which are used to mark her Otherness. Also exclusive to Mei Li is her "reedy" sound and childlike delivery, representing her youth, filial piety, and obedience to her father. Her dynamic markings are almost entirely *piano* and her accompaniment when singing alone is sparse, with use of plucked instruments, flutes and woodwinds.

Characters and Their Signifiers along the Continuum: The Wangs

The Wang family members are portrayed at varying degrees of assimilation: Wang Chi-yang maintains his Chinese ways; Wang Ta is confused and split; Madam Liang is doggedly pursuing assimilation and citizenship; and the adolescent Wang San is portrayed as completely assimilated. Yet none of these characters is without conflict, and this is represented in their music. Madam Liang, for instance, sings the

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[216] The eight-note cell differs slightly in Stanza IV, where the interval is a major second (four half steps). The quarter note in both Y-patterns in Stanza II (and the second Y-pattern in Stanza I) ascends by two half steps.

[217] This exclusivity is accidental. The song "My Best Love," intended for Wang Chi-yang, also contained the raised melodic fourth, but it did not do well in out-of-town try-outs, so it was dropped from the show (Lewis 2006, 71). David Henry Hwang returns the song to his 2003 remake, sung by a new character, Chang (Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003, 73). The sharped fourth would have made Wang's adherence to his native culture musically explicit.

[218] The fourth scale degree is consistently raised (to F♯ in C major) and the diatonic E♮ gives the same inflection over a ♭VII harmony for a few measures.

musical's theme of assimilation, "Chop Suey,"[219] a cha-cha dance number of overt American raucousness which contains certain melodic features—oscillating seconds and simple scalar movement up and down small intervals—which have marked orientalist melodies in other Rodgers and Hammerstein songs and musicals. [220] The signifiers in "Chop Suey" are well integrated musically, and lyrics about "birds and worms," stars, and trees coexist with laboratories, nuclear war, and television. Yet Madam Liang's other two songs are: the heritage tune, "You Are Beautiful," which she nostalgically initiates; and "The Other Generation," a lament about the Americanized behavior of Wang Chi-yang's sons. The latter aligns her with her brother-in-law's mistrust of American values. The song also demonstrates that the younger son, Wang San, might not be immune from the affects of his assimilated behavior.

"The Other Generation" is structured much like "A Puzzlement" (*The King and I*), a song also expressing confusion and doubt about taking on Western values. "The Other Generation" has a similar ABAB structure, with the A-sections complaining about the behavior[221] of the Wang sons and the B-sections helplessly questioning how to handle that behavior. Also similar is the alternation of the musical features between the A- and B-sections: the A-sections are in a major key with fast tempo marking (*allegro*), flat melodic contour on eighth notes, trochaic feet, and

[219] In her Afterword to David Henry Hwang's version of *Flower Drum Song*, Karen Wada explains that "Chop Suey" is the key to understanding both the original version of the musical and Hwang's version. "Chop Suey" was Rodgers and Hammerstein's way of "creating American-ness;" the song was Hwang's way of expressing satire (Wada, in Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003, 109, 113).
[220] The verse from Juanita Hall's song "Happy Talk" (*South Pacific*) comes to mind here.
[221] The behaviors lamented are disobedience, arrogance, staying out to all hours, using American slang, and finding inappropriate (i.e., stripper) girlfriends.

phrase-final ascents[222] with a terminal drop of a fourth. The B-sections are in minor mode[223] and are slower (*moderato*), with oscillating melodic contour, and the additional effect of triplets against a 4/4 time signature, which adds to the depiction of confusion. The overall situation of the speakers in both songs is also the same: a stalemate, to which there is no solution. King Mongkut leaves the answer to Buddha, but Madam Liang and Wan Chi-yang leave the answer to less spiritual beings: "I hope our grandsons give their fathers hell."

Like the Westernized Prince Chulalongkorn in *The King and I*, the assimilated Wang San will reprise his father's lament.[224] In the film version of *Flower Drum Song*, the parallel is exact: Wang San and his friends sing "The Other Generation" when confused by Wang Chi-yang and Madam Liang,[225] indicating that the misunderstanding of assimilated children and their foreign-born parents occurs on both sides. Because Wang San's Americanization is the goal of the melting pot, his dissatisfaction indicates some of the flaws in the assimilation ideal.

The most torn person of the family, however, is Wang Ta, whose issues with assimilation play out with his choice of mate. His dilemma in choosing between the

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[222] The ascent is scalar here, as opposed to triadic movement, leading to the octave (instead of the fifth as in "A Puzzlement") and then dropping to the fifth scale degree (F♯).

[223] The repeated descending scalar movement in the melody of "The Other Generation" stresses the lowered thirds, sevenths and sixths and minor iv and v harmonies, although there are dominant harmonies throughout (usually at two-measure and four-measure phrase endings) and, melodically, there is a single oscillation of the tonic and leading tone in certain phrase-initial positions.

[224] Prince Chulalongkorn reprises the A-section of "A Puzzlement" in the stage musical, but not in the 1956 film version.

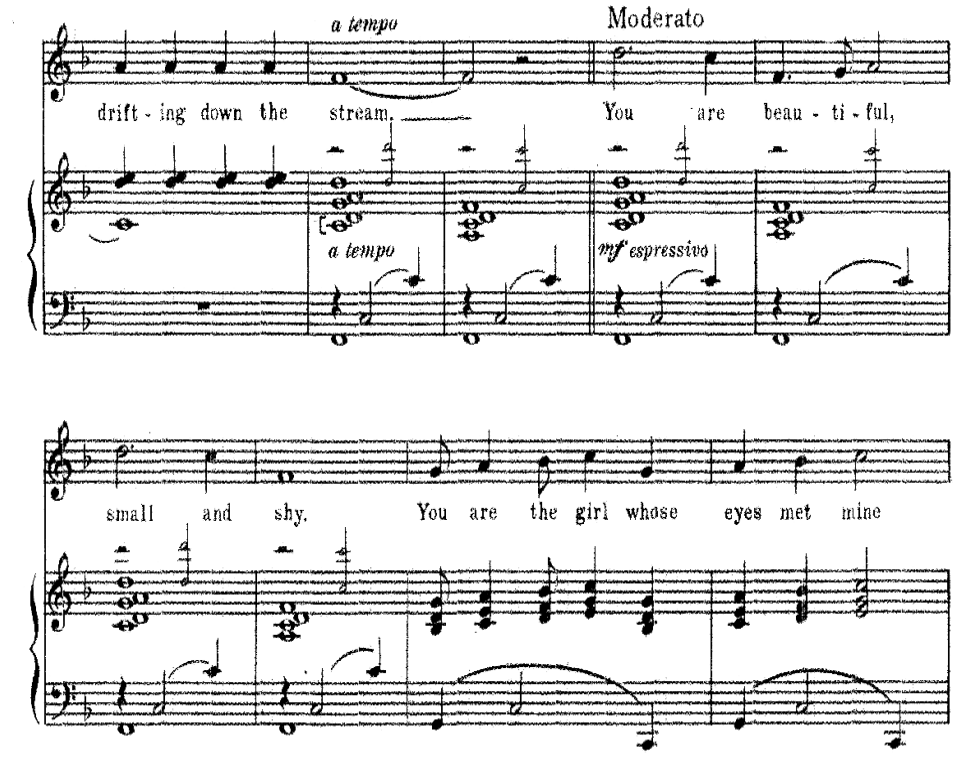
[225] In the stage show, Wang San reprises the song when confused by the behavior of Linda Low and Sammy Fong, who are "the other generation" to him and his adolescent friends. This performance makes more sense in light of the lyrics, "They used to shout, 'Red Rover, Red Rover, please come over!'" Linda and Sammy's American childhoods would have included exposure to this game. The lyric was kept in the film, where it is awkward once the complaint is about Wang San's Chinese-born father and aunt.

brassy, Americanized Linda Low and the traditional and very Chinese Mei Li is reflected in his two love songs, "Like a God" and "You Are Beautiful." The former is a fast-paced, lively (*animato*) declaration of male self-confidence and more than a little arrogance, which matches Linda Low's own energy, sexuality, and rebellion[226] against tradition. The latter is a softer, pentatonically inflected love song, which paints a romantic picture of a girl in a flower boat sailing downstream, a song clearly more connected to the personality of Mei Li. Wang Ta cannot integrate these parts of himself any more than he can integrate these two separate songs. He truly has a sense of dual consciousness, with an American "half" and a Chinese "half" which he describes to Linda Low early on in the musical.[227]

[226] In the stage version of the musical, Linda Low's character had a raw sexual energy and strength due to Pat Suzuki's personality and her belting rendition of "I Enjoy Being A Girl" (Lewis 2006, 107), which made the song a defiant anthem against the tradition of arranged marriages and submissiveness. One of Suzuki's co-stars describes her Linda Low as a "liberated woman" (85). The film version reduces the song and the role, however.

[227] See Rodgers, Hammerstein, Fields, and Lee (1959, 37).

Illustration 14. "You Are Beautiful" with pentatonically inflected chords and melody



In the end, Wang Ta is forced to make a choice, and he chooses the traditional Mei Li, rather than either of the Americanized Chinese women in his orbit. In making a choice for tradition, however, Wang Ta has not necessarily solved his long-term problem of dealing with American culture; he has only postponed it until his future children will force him to deal with it again. But this dilemma is outside the realm of musical comedy, which of course is the genre of *Flower Drum Song.* It would have taken a more serious music drama to really underscore the contradictions inherent in the American process of assimilation, as well as the rocky history of the melting pot ideal in the history of American politics.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to demonstrate how Rodgers' use of orientalist signifiers defined or dramatized the Asian or Islander characters in *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*. White Western characters were not included in this analysis unless a signifier of an Asian or Islander character was present in their music, representing a relationship with, or an effect of, that character. The focus up to this point has been an examination of the scores themselves, with some mention of performance practice. The next chapter will integrate this musical knowledge into a more sophisticated analysis of the politics of assimilation and the melting pot in these three musicals.

CHAPTER FIVE:

MUSICALS: ASSIMILATION, THE MELTING POT, AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

In the last chapter, I identified certain musical features as Orientalisms in the songs of the Tonkinese, Siamese and Chinese American characters in three Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. Using the distribution of these features in the songs and across the songs of Asian characters, I posited an underlying theme of cultural contrast and assimilation. Assimilation was related both to the experience of Western hegemony and to American immigration. In this chapter, I will further explore this assimilation theme.

First, I will demonstrate how the musical and dramatic depiction of Asian and Asian American characters in these shows does not actually reflect the real assimilation experiences of Asians or Asian Americans, especially in *Flower Drum Song*. I will argue, using Andrea Most's perspective in *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (2004), that the assimilation themes in these musicals are related to the Jewish experience of assimilation in America. An exploration of basic assimilation themes related to the Jewish community in Europe and in the United States will follow, especially in relation to the American ideal of the "melting pot." Finally, I will re-analyze the three musicals from the perspective of assimilation as an internal (and difficult) process, and demonstrate how each musical depicts assimilation. This re-analysis will require a change in focus from the Tonkinese characters to the American characters in *South Pacific*, and a change in perspective on assimilation entirely in *Flower Drum Song*.

Whose Assimilation?

South Pacific, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song* contain characters that are identifiably Asian, but the music used for these characters is a creation of Richard Rodgers, not authentic music of Southeast Asian or Chinese origin. The "Asian" music across these three musicals contains a number of signifiers that are either stereotypical "stage Chinese" (like whole tone sequences and pentatonicism) or idiosyncratic compositional features (like modal inflections) whose origin is uncertain.[228] The construction of a Rodgers' "stage-Asian" idiom parallels the construction of the stage characters. Some characters, like Bloody Mary, Liat, and Lady Thiang (among others) are flat and unchanging, important only because of their effect on white characters in their orbit. Many of these characters are given a Pidgin English to speak, even when their characters, like King Mongkut, did not speak this kind of "broken" English in the original source material.[229] The native cultures of these characters are covered either not at all (*South Pacific*)[230] or in a very stereotyped and cursory way. In *The King and I*, the only cultural practice covered in depth is the (negative) institution of the harem. The Chinese Americans in *Flower Drum Song* are, in the words of contemporary reviewers, "unspeakably quaint" (Hodgens 1962) and "Oriental ornamented," and the depiction of Chinatown "purely theatrical" (Crowther 1961).

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[228] Much of this music is heavily reliant on vocal performance practice as well, a topic that needs a study of its own.
[229] See both Leonowens (1999) and Landon (2000).
[230] There is a ceremony on Bali Ha'i, but it is not related to the culture of the Tonikinese women who are not native to the island.

It is clear that none of these musicals was even a cursory examination of the real cultures of the characters involved, even though more detailed information was often present in the original sources. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* (1984), even limited by the perspective of its American author and the popular readership for which it was written, demonstrates a far more nuanced understanding of the French colonial situation on the island than the musical does. For example, we see Liat's struggle as a convent-educated Christian who is still not accepted by the French women on Bali Ha'i (Michener 1984, 202-203). Both Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam* (2000) and Leonowens' original *The English Governess and the Siamese Court* (1999) give information about Siamese/Thai religious and cultural practices, although both women wrote through the prism of Christianity, and Leonowens' observations were not always considered accurate by contemporaries.[231]

However, it is C. Y. Lee's book, *The Flower Drum Song* (1961), which contains a wealth of information about the Chinese cultural practices retained in San Francisco's Chinatown and about the drastic effects of a century of discrimination on contemporary Chinese Americans. C. Y. Lee was himself a recent Chinese immigrant who, after graduate school at Yale, moved to San Francisco and wrote a daily column for *Chinese World* (Shin and Lee 2004, 78). Both living and working in Chinatown, Lee was "intimately familiar" with the area (Lewis 2006, 25), a position which gave his book depth, realism, and inside knowledge. Rodgers, Hammerstein and Joe Fields (who wrote the libretto) had a valuable source of first-hand cultural information, not

[231] See Susan Morgan's "Introduction" to *The Romance of the Harem* for a discussion of Leonowens and her critics (Leonowens 1991, ix).

available with their two previous musicals. In addition, the book contained pointed social commentary on the situation of Chinese Americans provided by the character of Wang Ta's friend, Chang, whose advice is eventually the catalyst for Wang Ta's decision to marry May Li and run off to Los Angeles. Significantly, Chang never appears in the musical.

Even if Lee's book had not been as detailed as it was, *The Flower Drum Song* was an American story, with an American setting and a readily available American history. Wang Ta's inability to find work, even with a bachelor's degree in economics, reflected the long-standing and persistent discrimination Chinese Americans faced in employment (Pfaelzer 2008, 181, 191), especially on the West Coast where Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans frequently became victims of violence (Kwong and Miscevic 2005, 107). The lack of available Chinese women that Wang Ta experiences—a lack that drives him and many other Chinese American men to prostitutes or unsuitable mates—is directly traceable to a series of American laws: the Burlingame Treaty (1868), which denied naturalization to Chinese workers and was amended to suspend Chinese immigration (Kwong and Miscevic 2005, 58); the Page Act (1875) which technically barred immigration of Chinese prostitutes, but in practice prevented most Chinese women from immigrating (98); and the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) which barred the immigration of all Chinese nationals (107). In addition, Chinese men were denied family reunification (124) and were unable to marry white women due to miscegenation laws. This historical suppression of women in the Chinese community is what motivated the picture-bride phenomenon that appears in the musical.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's previous works were known to revolve around racism and human rights, and *The Flower Drum Song* was a book that lent itself to that kind of treatment. There was a contemporary angle as well in that the Magnuson Act (1943), which reopened Chinese immigration and allowed naturalization of Chinese immigrants, had been passed recently.[232] However, Rodgers, Hammerstein and Fields (1959) went with an approach that made it, in Lee's words, "funny and more commercial" (Shin and Lee 2004, 85). Hammerstein went so far as to describe the book as "a Chinese *Life With Father*" (Lewis 2006, 33), referring to a lighthearted television sitcom of the time. The first major musical about real Chinese Americans with a majority Asian American cast did not tell the story of Chinese America at all. *Flower Drum Song* can be seen as an acknowledgement of the new status of Chinese immigrants as part of the "great American social experiment;" yet, as one reviewer of the 1961 film points out:

> Don't get the idea, however, that the characters and comedy put forth in this fable of Chinese-Americans [sic] residing in San Francisco's Chinatown are in any way basically different from the characters and comedy that used to bloom in any number of plays about German or Swedish or Jewish immigrants coming from the old to the new country (via the comedy route) in years gone by (Crowther 1961).

Flower Drum Song presents Chinese Americans as the replica of the European immigrant, and not as their own community with their own, much more difficult, experience.

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[232] The treatment of Chinese Americans had become a major issue during World War II when the Chinese were allied with the United States against Imperial Japan, and Japan began highlighting the exclusion of the Chinese in America in their wartime propaganda. Franklin Roosevelt specifically asked Congress for a law undoing the Chinese Exclusion Act (Kwong and Miscevic 2005, 203). C. Y. Lee seems to have been part of the war effort, teaching Chinese at the Monterey School of Languages during the war (Shin and Lee 2004, 79).

In conclusion, none of the three musicals with Asian characters explores any of the cultures in depth. The constructed "stage-Asian" is considered sufficient to tell the story, even though these musicals definitely express an opinion on racism, human rights (including the right to marry by choice), and belonging. The separation between the "take-home message" of the musicals and their actual construction is glaring in these works.

The Nature of Assimilation in the Musicals

If the Asian cultures depicted in these musicals were not central to the understanding of the message, the general concept of intercultural contact and the issues it raised was. In each of the three musicals under discussion, there are encounters between people of different cultural backgrounds and the need for some sort of accommodation or change in behavior or belief systems. These encounters do not occur in political vacuums, and the politics of each situation play a great part in who must accommodate and who is not under obligation to do so. The clearest example is in *The King and I*, where the King, his harem, and his children must alter their behavior and beliefs to a Western standard, while Anna maintains her Western core values, customs, and external behaviors. Anna may diplomatically accommodate the King by sitting when he sits,[233] but she does not kneel prostrate like his subjects; she honors his position as royal sovereign in the British way, by curtseying. Anna's consistently Western (mostly American-style) music bears out her lack of change.[234]

[233] The King demands that his head always be higher than anyone else in his presence.
[234] Anna's music never incorporates orientalist features in the vocal line or in the accompaniment, unless Siamese characters are joining her in song, as in "Getting to Know You."

In *South Pacific*, however, the situation is reversed. The onus is on the main American characters to change: Nellie Forbush and Joe Cable must transform their internal belief systems about race at a deep level and must also prepare to change their previous goals and plans in the United States to fit in with their new situations. Of course, there is also some accommodation to the Americans from the island inhabitants: Bloody Mary, for example, has to become an adept saleswoman in English and must learn how to relate to the American military customers while avoiding the ramifications of the French colonizers' legal system. She tries to assure the Westernization (and safety) of her daughter Liat with a French convent education and a Western husband.[235]

In *Flower Drum Song*, the Chinese immigrants (and Chinese Americans) must accommodate, in various ways, an American society that refuses to accommodate them. Each of the Chinese American characters has a different way of negotiating their relationship with the nation surrounding their enclave, and while demonstrating some of the same patterns that we see in *The King and I*, there are interesting differences which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The changes that are required of Rodgers and Hammerstein's characters involve some external behavior, but primarily center on deeply internal changes in value systems. The outer shifts are sometimes temporary, like the "costuming" of the King and his harem in British clothing for a dinner party; sometimes, they are permanent, like bowing in front of the new Westernized king, Chulalongkorn, instead

[235] The only major character who does not have to make a cultural leap is Emile De Becque, a situation which reflects the French colonial control of the islands.

of kneeling prostrate. The inner changes, on the other hand, are always permanent: transcending one's racism (*South Pacific*), or giving up or challenging an odious cultural practice (*The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*). Usually in these musicals, the shifts are emblematic of internal transformations taking place and of the possible turmoil the transformational process might cause.

While each situation is politically different, the process of assimilation is presented in much the same way from show to show. In each musical, we have at least one adult character who, when encountering a new culture, experiences a "split self," in which the conflict between the old ways and the new plays out. In some of these cases, the split is so acute that when a decision cannot be made, one way or the other, there is stalemate, disintegration, and even death.

When Joe Cable falls in love with Liat in *South Pacific*, his center of gravity shifts: he is no longer the Joe Cable from a good Philadelphia family who is engaged to the well-to-do girl attending Bryn Mawr College. He is suddenly confronted with a split self: the old part that wants to return home to his "normal" life (where racial attitudes will not permit his marriage to Liat); and the new part that wants to stay on the island, marry Liat, and radically change his entire existence. Joe Cable's internal war is demonstrated musically in "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught," in which his triple time (3/4) melody works against a "duple" pitch alternation between tonic and fifth in the bass, creating a feeling of three against two.[236] This song is the last one Joe

[236] See page 144 of the *South Pacific* Vocal Score (Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Michener 1949). Cable's only other song, "Younger Than Springtime," demonstrates how strongly Liat has affected him, as her oscillating second appears strongly in the harmonic lines closest to his melody line. Joe's "split" can be musically traced to this moment of permeation.

sings before he dies in a military mission. His "split" never gets a chance to be resolved, at least in a way that will allow him to live.

In *The King and I*, King Mongkut also dies, destroyed by the struggle between his Siamese self and his Westernizing self. While more comfortable in his traditional ways, the desire for the new ways and his belief in the necessity of Westernization for his kingdom leads to the confusion he experiences in "A Puzzlement," as the split self plays out musically in the alternating major key and modal sections.

In *Flower Drum Song*, Wang Chi-yang and Madam Liang sing a similar musically alternating structure ("The Other Generation"), in which their perplexity plays out as a split. However, the really torn character is the older son, Wang Ta. When on a date with Linda Low, Wang Ta overtly expresses his feeling of being split between an American self and a Chinese self.[237] These "selves" are showcased in two entirely different love songs for two different women, "You Are Beautiful" (with orientalist markers) and "Like A God." Unlike Joe Cable or King Mongkut, Wang Ta does not have to die, but this does not make his struggle any less difficult.

However, all of these "exotic" musicals also contain a group of characters who are seemingly unaffected by the assimilation they are undergoing; these are the young children in each musical: Ngana and Jerome (*South Pacific*), Chulalongkorn (*The King and I*) and Wan San (*Flower Drum Song*).[238] Their music supports their assimilation: Ngana and Jerome's[239] French song, "Dîtes-Moi;" Chulalongkorn's music in "March

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[237] See Rodgers, Hammerstein, Fields, and Lee (1959, 37).
[238] Wang Ta describes his brother as "completely American" (Rodgers, Hammerstein, Fields, and Lee 1959, 37).
[239] In the film, Ngana and Jerome are in island dress, so there is a suggestion of bicultural or biracial tendencies.

of the Siamese Children;"[240] and Wan San's "I'll Be the Rock" (a very short tune inspired by rock-and-roll which brings down the wrath of his father).

This dichotomy of psychologically split adults and assimilated children very much reflects a generalized (or idealized) experience of European immigrants in the United States. The immigrant adults arrive, often settling in ethnic enclaves where the language of the old country is spoken and old cultural rules are still in play, though they might learn some English and adopt some new behaviors. The children, on the other hand, go to the American public school, learn English, become acculturated, and perhaps leave the enclave entirely in adulthood.[241] It is this American immigration model that becomes *the* model for intercultural contact in Rodgers and Hammerstein.

However, American cultural theorist, Andrea Most, makes the immigration model even more specific when she argues that it was the Jewish immigrant experience that informed the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals as well as the Broadway stage in general (Most 2004, 1-2). Dr. Most explains that:

> ...[F]irst- and second-generation American Jewish writers, composers, and performers used the theater to fashion their own identities as Americans. In the musical, they discovered a theatrical form particularly well-suited to representing the complexity of assimilation in America...the mid-century musical theater expressed both anxiety about difference and delight in the apparently limitless opportunities America afforded for self invention (Most 2004, 1).

Dr. Most singles out several Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, including *South Pacific* and *The King and I* for special mention, but her general theory encompasses a quarter-century of the Broadway musical.

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[240] Chulalongkorn's music is tonal with Western-style brass, like a military band.
[241] This is a highly idealized model and it will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Andrea Most: Jewish Assimilation and the Musical

Dr. Most sees the Broadway musical of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s as a Jewish American creation (Most 2004, 18) whose very structure and theatricality address the notion of assimilation as much as the content of the plays themselves. She starts with the notion of assimilation as acting:

> Jewish assimilation into the mainstream American culture in particular can be viewed as a largely theatrical venture. Since for Jews "otherness" was not part of their external identity, as it was for African- and Asian-Americans [sic], they could convincingly adopt alternate personas, playing the role of "American" (or "German" or "Russian") and passing as non-marginal subjects. Theater was, for Jews, both a metaphor for the presentation of self in everyday life and a cultural form in which they participated in large numbers (Most 2004, 13).

In her view, Jews have a "split consciousness," a "double mode of behavior" which separates "inner belief and outer identity" (13). In assimilation contexts, the outer identity strikes the pose, performing the assimilated persona, unhampered by physical markers (like skin color); the sense of difference is experienced internally.[242] Though Dr. Most does not describe the outer identity in terms of "passing" (as in *Show Boat*'s mixed-race Julie Dozier "passing" for white), the notion is closely akin, with Jews having a "sense of control over their contrasting modes of behavior in the internal...and external...worlds" (14).

If assimilation is a matter of an outer theatricality, then one's progress can be judged on how well one has learned visible outer behaviors. Most's interpretation of *The King and I* focuses on Anna Leonowens' role as the teacher of these outer behaviors: she teaches the children how to whistle when they feel afraid and how to

[242] Dr. Most points out that this pattern of living with double-consciousness also holds for the Irish and gay communities, and notes the involvement of both groups in the development of American musical theater (Most 2004, 14).

bow (instead of kneel) in front of their King (184, 189). The bowing in particular is "one of the most important conventions of the stage" (184) and underscores Anna's contributions as "theater director" (189), a role which becomes crucial during the dinner party that the King is giving for the British officials. Anna "makes the costumes, arranges the sets, secures the music, teach[es] the women proper gestures, language, and behavior....and even feeds the King cue lines so that he will appear well-informed on Western topics" (189). The musical's Anna—unlike her previous literary and dramatic incarnations—makes her way through life and its anxieties by "whistling a happy tune," a bit of self-stage-management that camouflages fear and, as Dr. Most points out, actually allows Anna to overcome her fear: "For when I fool the people I fear, I fool myself as well" (188). The "deception" (as Anna calls it) performed by the outer self is convincing enough to the inner self to change a deeply felt reaction. This means that the internal self is not immune to the playacting of the outer self, but is porous and affected in spite of the perceived control the person feels over the process. In fact, one could take this argument to its logical extreme, and assert that the internal self is actually an internalized self, created by outer performance, and that the "essential" self does not exist. What we experience as "essential" is really the sum of our past performances.

Andrea Most's model does not go that far: she makes it clear that, in the Jewish experience, the inner self is reserved for safe, personal, Jewish spaces while the outer self interacts with the world without (14). The inner self, in this construction, is more essential; the outer self is a protective camouflage. But that does not mean that

there cannot be spillover from the outer to the inner or that certain uncomfortable feelings, like fear, should not be transformed by outer performance.

What Andrea Most is arguing is that this struggle to define the self as essential or performed is what underlies the structure and content of musical theater:

> It occurred to me that the...tension—between performed and essential notions of self—was present in the musical theater in the division between story and song. Musical comedies, I came to realize, were narratives of a desperate Jewish desire to resist essentialized (or racialized) identity through the powerful language of theatricality (Most 2004, 10).

To Dr. Most, the singing moments in the musical are moments of reinvention, a rejection of the notion of the essentialized self and an affirmation of the ability of character to alter (10). The musical performances she is talking about here are those in which the characters sing songs that are not grounded in their characters but which allow them to take on another role. For example, in her example of the musical *Whoopie* (43), Dr. Most describes Henry Williams (played by Eddie Cantor) as a hypochondriac sent out for a cure to "the wild west." By helping a young woman escape an unwanted engagement, Henry ends up on the run. Pursued by cowboys, he avoids their wrath at various intervals by pretending to be a cook, a blackface minstrel, and an Indian (43). These disguises are all accompanied by songs, which reflect the character of the disguise, not Henry's hypochondriac self. Henry is a "theatrical character" who can "perpetually redefine [himself] by breaking into song" (31). This theatricality, both disguise and reinvention, is under the control of the character who "control[s] the boundaries of his performance" (43).

Andrea Most regards the songs of the musical as having what she calls “an assimilation effect:”

> We might call the result of the separation of elements in musical comedy an assimilation effect. The assimilation effect combines the self-consciousness provoked by the separation of elements on the musical stage with emotional response and communal celebration (Most 2004, 9).

The audience is actually aware that it is watching a character (and the actor playing that character) reinvent himself or herself and is emotionally drawn into this reinvention. The disjunct between the spoken and sung portions of the musical, often seen as failure of integration (McMillin 2006, 4) or as simply “camp” (Knapp 2005, 13), becomes the core signifier of the philosophical struggle that gives birth to the form.

However, Dr. Most makes it clear that the later “integrated” musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein are not nearly as powerful in this regard (Most 2004, 31). The psychological realism of the integrated form results in characters who are consistently themselves in the drama that unfolds. They do not usually strike other poses or play other roles. There are no asides to the audience or inside jokes, which the characters in the drama do not understand, but the audience does; in other words, later musicals do not have characters that “break the frame.” On-stage performance within the show by various characters can be a part of these musicals, such as in *South Pacific* when Nellie Forbush and Luther Billis do a gender-bending song-and-dance routine for the Marines. However, when Nellie Forbush sings “Honey Bun” on stage dressed as a sailor (while Billis mimes beside her in a grass skirt and coconut bra), she

is not reinventing her character.[243] The song serves no plot function for which Nellie would need to reinvent herself. Nellie does have a song connected with transformation, the children's song, "Dîtes-Moi," which she sings with the children and Emile once she has overcome the racism with which she was raised. With this song, Nellie musically "joins the family." The song, totally within the frame of the drama, has the force of a declaration.[244]

While *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song* all date from the period of the integrated, psychologically realistic musical, Andrea Most's ideas are still quite valuable because each of these musicals concerns characters who must assimilate across the boundaries of nation, race, and society. The very topic of these musicals is assimilation, and the songs Rodgers and Hammerstein write for these characters, as we have seen in Chapter Four, is an indication of how each character is handling the process or where that character exists on a scale of assimilation. All three of these musicals carry both hope and sadness about assimilation, as different characters handle the process in different ways.

Acculturation, Assimilation, and Absorption

Andrea Most's interpretation of the American musical draws on a theoretical construction of assimilation as an active process, in which the person assimilating has agency and exerts a certain amount of control over when and how assimilative behaviors are performed. This perspective is a result of more recent scholarship about assimilation in various contexts, especially in regard to Jewish assimilation in the

[243] This routine, however, provides support for a queer reading of Mary Martin, the first Nellie Forbush. See Wolf (2002).
[244] This device was already a part of Michener's story of Nellie ("Our Heroine") (Michener 1984, 143).

United States and Europe (Frankel 1992, 27). It contrasts with the prevailing view—common during the first half of the twentieth century—of assimilation as a process, which once begun, was not necessarily in the control of the individual (5). According to this prevailing view, assimilation would eventually transform every aspect of a person to an outside norm, and, in the case of the Jews, would lead to the eventual disintegration of the community (5).

This fear of absorption[245] was a crucial anxiety underlying the Jewish assimilation experiences in Europe. Political emancipation, which dated from the late eighteenth century,[246] meant legal rights and entrée into the middle class,[247] but it was also perceived as "trad[ing] in age-old beliefs in exchange for civil equality and social acceptance" (11). One of the beliefs being exchanged was the idea of the Jews as a nation: emancipation meant becoming strictly a religious group with unquestioned allegiance to the nation-state (11). As a result, the prevailing theory of many Jewish historians from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century involved an inverse relationship between Jewish political liberty and the identity and cohesiveness of the Jewish community: Jewish history was couched as a struggle between those forces that pulled Jews away from the community (emancipation, political rights) and those forces that pulled Jews toward the community (oppression, discrimination) (10).

This view of assimilation, in which the assimilating person or group has no agency in the process once begun, was situated in a particular time and place in

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[245] Finestein (1992) defines absorption as "loss of transmissible distinctiveness" (38).
[246] Assimilation in Britain actually started almost a century earlier and occurred more gradually (Finestein 1992, 39).
[247] This was primarily for city-dwelling Jews (Hyman 1992, 119). Hyman points out that rural Jews were much slower to assimilate.

twentieth century Jewish (and American) history. Modern scholarship has been developing more nuanced models, in which "acculturation is no longer seen as leading to assimilation" and in which agency is acknowledged in the assimilation process (Frankel 1992, 31). Terms like *acculturation*, for example, acknowledge that a person or group can make some cultural accommodation (in language, clothing, or other outer behavior) without the risk of total absorption (Finestein 1992, 38). The very act of investigating assimilation and discovering its nuances is part of controlling the process as well.

However, the notion of assimilation that would have directly influenced Rodgers and Hammerstein would have been the older idea of assimilation as eventual absorption, with any given individual or community not exercising much agency over the process once it was begun, either by choice or necessity. This kind of assimilation is not just about acculturating by changing external behaviors, but about internal ideological changes that could pull individuals away from their communities. The experience of American immigrants also involved a process of internal ideological changes as well as external acculturation in a process that could draw individual immigrants from their cultural enclaves into an American middle-class lifestyle, highly influenced by Anglo or Northern European norms. As in the case of assimilating Jews in Europe, American immigrants were required to give up their allegiances to nations outside of the American state and express loyalty to their new land. As assimilated Jews[248] who lived with several generations of their families in

[248] Both Rodgers and Hammerstein were second-generation Americans on their fathers' sides and non-religious Jews. Rodgers' grandfather, Morris Rogozinky, immigrated from Russia in 1860 (Secrest 2001, 16), and Rodgers' father, William, Anglicized the family name while he was in medical school

one home,[249] Rodgers and Hammerstein would have been quite aware of the melting pot and their place in it.

The Melting Pot and Assimilation in America

At the time of the American Revolution, there were enough Dutch, English, Scots, Scots-Irish, Irish, German, French Huguenot, and Jewish[250] settlers, among others (Goodfriend 1992, 4-5), that British ancestry did not become the basis for the construction of American citizenship (Vought 2004, 1). At this time all European[251] colonists, regardless of background, were needed to defeat the British, and citizenship became a matter of "adherence to [the revolutionaries'] republican ideology" (1). Despite this political construction of citizenship, a "Founding Father" like Benjamin Franklin could bitterly complain about the numerous Germans who had settled in his colony of Pennsylvania:

> Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them...? (Schlossman 1983, 182).

This disjunct between the ideal of political freedom and the desire for Anglo cultural dominance has been a feature of the United States from the beginning. It describes

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(17). Hammerstein's grandfather, opera impresario Oscar Hammerstein I, arrived from Germany in 1865 as a teenager (Fordin 1995, 5). Rodgers describes his Jewish identification as "socioethnic" and not religious (Rodgers 2002, 4). Hammerstein's mother was an Episcopalian and baptized her children in that religion, although there was never regular church attendance (Fordin 1995, 16). The family "entered a temple only when someone had died" (16). Hammerstein's penchant for social causes seems to have come from his mother, who was heavily involved with working for women's suffrage and family planning (10).

[249] Rodgers' maternal immigrant grandparents and great-uncle lived with them during his childhood (Rodgers 2002, 5-6); Hammerstein's Scottish-born maternal grandparents lived with them and were supported by Oscar's father (Fordin 1995, 11).

[250] The first Jews arrived in America in 1654, coming as refugees from the Dutch stronghold in Brazil which had fallen into the hands of the Portuguese: after taking power, the Portuguese brought the Inquisition and expelled the Jews (Faber 2008, 22).

[251] Black slaves and American Indians were not citizens. It took until 1868 for African Americans to become citizens (as a result of the Fourteenth Amendment), and until 1924 for all American Indians to become citizens.

why a country that considered itself a place of asylum for the world (Vought 2004, 1) could also sponsor racial and ethnic immigration quotas, literacy tests, and selective mandatory identity cards,[252] and allow (or turn a blind eye to) rabid intolerance, discrimination in housing and employment, and lynchings.[253] To be certain, there were economic abuses by corporations looking for cheap labor, and then, as now, this created resentment between immigrants and previous inhabitants.[254] But the basic disjunct between providing asylum and demanding assimilation became the basis of what was known as the melting pot.

The actual term *melting pot* was first applied to the American assimilation experience in 1908 by a British-Jewish immigrant and playwright, Israel Zangwill, although "melting" imagery actually appeared as early as 1782 in the writings of French immigrant Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, who saw America as a place where "individuals of all races were melted into a new race of men" (Gleason 1964, 22).[255] The source of Zangwill's melting pot image is the nineteenth-century blast furnace (Vought 2004, x), where iron ore is purified and then combined with small amounts of carbon (and other metals) to produce steel, a thousand times stronger than

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[252] The Chinese were the first immigrants required to carry identity cards by the provisions of the Geary Act (1892). Called the "Dog Tag Law," it was based on the practice of making freed blacks carry identification to prove they were not slaves (Pfaelzer 2008, 291). Arizona's recent law (2010) has a long history.

[253] Los Angeles was the location of the largest mass lynching in California when sixteen Chinese men and one Chinese woman were lynched (and two were knifed) in 1871 (Pfaelzer 2008, 49). Twenty years later, eleven Italian immigrants were lynched in New Orleans during a period of increased xenophobia, the result of an economic downturn (Vought 2004, 13).

[254] For example, in 1865, when white workers constructing the Central Pacific Railroad line threatened to strike for higher wages, the railroad company responded by importing Chinese workers. When the white workers refused to work alongside the cheaper Chinese workers, the railroad then began to hire only Chinese workers, who "were coerced into accepting conditions worse than those given white workers and prevented from seeking recourse" (Kwong and Miscevic 2005, 53).

[255] Gleason gives a number of nineteenth-century references to the American immigration experience as "melting" (Gleason 1964, 23).

pure iron. An exact application of the metaphor depicts the American as an amalgam, not someone assimilated to a pre-existing model, but this is not usually the interpretation that is understood by the term.[256] In his play, *The Melting-Pot*, Zangwill sticks closely to this metaphor, although he stresses the purification process far more than amalgamation. His protagonist believes that "immigrants are to cast off their inherited attitudes, loyalties and prejudices" and that "the European past is to have no hold at all upon the immigrant in America" (Gleason 1964, 26). What happens after one casts off the psychic iron ore[257] is left to God, who is "making the American" in this "crucible" (26), "fusing" immigrants into an American "superman" (27). The process was ongoing, which makes Zangwill's melting pot generational in the sense that the result is "in the process of becoming" (27).

Zangwill's play was primarily directed towards the Jewish community in New York. His protagonist is a young Russian-Jewish immigrant who is to marry a Russian-Christian immigrant woman; however, he discovers that her father directed the infamous massacre that killed his family back in Russia. His decision to marry her, despite everything, was designed to promote total assimilation, and the message "was not well received by American Jews" (Gleason 1964, 27). What is crucial here is that assimilation is a psychic and ideological process in *The Melting-Pot*, not just acculturation by changing a type of clothing or learning a new language. The new immigrant must cast aside old beliefs and allegiances in order to become American. This conviction still carries a great deal of weight in controversies over immigration in

[256] Vought notes this as well as the connection of the amalgam idea to the Darwinian concept of "mixed strain...hardier than pure breeds" (Vought 2004, xi).
[257] Or as Kwong and Miscevic put it, after the immigrant is "cleaned of their foreign ways" (Kwong and Miscevic 2005, 102).

the United States today. For example, current resentment of Mexican American immigrants who wave the Mexican flag during protests or ethnic celebrations in Southern California can be directly traced to the melting pot ideal of "casting off" old allegiances. In the view of many Americans—themselves descendents of immigrants for whom assimilation meant a "stripping away" of the past—these new immigrants are not "playing by the rules."

The Melting-Pot was a Romantic and idealistic play, not social policy, but its opening-night audience included President Theodore Roosevelt (Gleason 1964, 24), and the melting pot eventually became the dominant image in American political discourse on immigration in the twentieth century (Vought 2004, xvi). As such, it greatly affected dramas surrounding immigration in American life and was easily projected onto such hegemonic projects as Westernizing Asia.

Assimilation: Casting Off Inherited Attitudes and Prejudices

Forty years after Zangwill's play, *South Pacific* constructs assimilation as a casting off of inherited attitudes and prejudices, and the motivation is romantic love and marriage. For Nellie Forbush to marry Emile, she must shed her racist ideas about the biracial children that she will be raising once she is married. For Joe Cable to marry Liat, he must also cast aside his racist attitudes, which he was "carefully taught." The musical's big lesson is that these attitudes are learned, not inborn or essential, and that they can be jettisoned by choice. Nellie and Joe are able to challenge their past beliefs precisely for this reason. Characters can change and cultural lessons can be unlearned.

However, this kind of assimilation is a lonely and difficult process, and involves letting go of community. Nellie's mother in Arkansas, for example, disapproves of her relationship with a non-American, which we find out when Nellie reads a letter from her mother to Joe Cable. This is before Mrs. Forbush (or Nellie herself) knows about the racial background of the man's children. For Nellie to stay on the island, she must not only challenge her own beliefs, but also leave her Little Rock community behind, both geographically and ideologically. Joe Cable's family is clearly racist enough that they will never accept the marriage of their son to Liat. In addition, Joe has a serious girlfriend at home whom he intended to marry before meeting Liat. Cable must jettison his family, his fiancée and everything he has ever known, and has no one to help him through the process; Nellie at least has Emile as a Western intermediary. In Michener's book (1984), we see Cable's loneliness as he unwittingly begins to separate from his past: he cannot write easily to his mother and cannot start a letter to his fiancée at all (Michener 1984, 196). The last song Cable sings before he goes off on his mission is the conflicted "You Have to Be Carefully Taught." His death prevents him from getting his "Dîtes-Moi" moment (as Nellie has), which would have indicated his achieved assimilation.

Assimilation as the casting off of inherited attitudes is something we also see in *The King and I.* In this musical, Mongkut has inherited the institution of the harem, and it is the desire to retain this institution that is the major issue preventing the King's assimilation. The musical conflict over the harem emerges in the sung introduction to "Song of the King," in which Mongkut sings his raised fourth scale degree when asserting the correctness of polygamy; Anna replies with the diatonic fourth when

asserting the Western ideal of monogamy. These dueling fourths illustrate the "sticking point" of the harem, and precede a modal song in which the King further extemporizes on polygamy. Anna responds to the King's song with her Western view in "Shall We Dance," which is followed by the capture and (almost) whipping of Tuptim, the runaway concubine.

The musical features and the sequence of the actions make it clear that the King's assimilation is tragically limited by this attachment to a tradition that denies women basic human rights. His inability to assimilate has nothing to do with his language skills (he speaks better English than any of his court), nor with his education (he has studied much about Western culture), nor with any other outer behavior. His great success at impressing the British with his Westernized self at the dinner party means nothing if he cannot cast off his inherited attitudes in regard to the harem. Because of his inability to assimilate internally, he dies, leaving his son to take over.

These two musicals portray an almost heroic view of assimilation, which reflects, in many ways, the mood and sentiment in Zangwill's *The Melting-Pot*. Assimilation becomes a deliberate and difficult reinvention—something to be achieved, not something which happens by internalizing outer changes in dress, food or language. Other characters can change externals without making an internal leap: Bloody Mary learns some English and wears a G.I. chain with the Marine emblem (Michener 1984, 170);[258] and Lady Thiang learns English well and dons Western dress for the dinner party, but neither woman can be said to be truly assimilating. Their

[258] In the film, she is portrayed wearing a green American military jacket.

ideologies remain static and they undergo no great changes, even though they can acculturate in small ways.[259]

Even the behaviors of whistling and bowing in *The King and I*, which Andrea Most considers assimilated, may not really be internalized by most of the children. These behaviors still have to be stage-managed. The children whistle at the King's deathbed only at Anna's prompting and they bow when Chulalongkorn, well trained by Anna, tells them to do so. Anna may be able to consciously "strike the pose" to hide her fear by whistling, but neither the King, the wives, nor the children have that same kind of agency: they always need Anna's help, and continue to need her help after the King's death.

The one exception to this group is Tuptim, whose music makes the case for her internalized Western values (see Chapter Four). Tuptim does not need Anna's help to change her values: from the beginning, she does not accept the harem and runs off to meet in secret with her lover (and later to escape with him) without any prompting from Anna. Anna's contribution is the book she gives Tuptim, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which allows Tuptim to put her convictions into a Western philosophical framework. Yet even Tuptim's end is uncertain in the musical. She is not whipped by the King (thanks to Anna's outburst), but she has been returned to the harem. At his father's death, Chulalongkorn inherits responsibility for the harem, but the musical gives no direct answer as to what the young crown prince will do. However, Anna's continued stay does bode well for Tuptim if she is still alive.

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[259] In the American immigration model, these women are reminiscent of the mothers who stayed home in the enclave while their husbands went to work and their children went to school.

The King and I is an unusual musical in that neither of the two main couples has a happy ending. The King dies, and the song that plays at his death bed is "Something Wonderful," Lady Thiang's song for him. While it almost begs to be sung at the end, Anna does not sing it. The secondary relationship of Tuptim and Lun Tha has also been thwarted. The lack of marriages at the end leaves assimilation an unanswered question, at best, and a failed project at worst.

Flower Drum Song **and the Case for Community**

Flower Drum Song begins, in many ways, mirroring the issues of intercultural contact in the previous two musicals. There are characters in the process of adapting to a new society, and some of these demonstrate splits between the old and new ways, which play out musically. There are traditional external behaviors in food, clothing and language, and there is an acculturating influence, in this case Madam Liang's citizenship teacher. Finally, these issues of assimilation emerge in the usual areas of marriage and childrearing. However, *Flower Drum Song* demonstrates a quite different perspective on assimilation, despite the themes in the original source material.

Wang Ta is the main "split character" and his search for a wife results in the choice between an assimilated Chinese American, Linda Low, and a recent Chinese immigrant, Mei Li. There is a third choice, Helen Chao, but Wang Ta never takes her seriously and sings no song to her. Wang Ta's two solos, "Like A God" and "You Are Beautiful" reflect musically his American self and his Chinese self, respectively. "Like A God" contains none of the orientalist features that Rodgers typically uses, and it is a powerful song with machismo and sexuality which Wang Ta sings to Linda. "You Are

Beautiful" is filled with typical orientalist features and is quiet, romantic, and restrained. This is the song Wang Ta sings to Mei Li.

At first, Wang Ta asks Linda Low to marry him and she agrees, but upon learning that she is a stripper (thanks to the machinations of Sammy Fong), Wang Ta rejects her. He eventually realizes his feelings for Mei Li, who has been living at his house with her father. But Mei Li, believing Wang Ta does not love her, honors the contract she came to Chinatown to fulfill: to marry Sammy Fong as his mail-order bride. She unhappily but obediently goes through with the wedding plans, but, in a twist worthy of Gilbert and Sullivan, she discovers (by watching television) that her illegal status negates the bridal contract. She announces her status at the wedding, freeing herself and Sammy to marry the people they really want, Wang Ta and Linda Low, respectively. One could interpret Mei Li's challenging of the wedding contract as an assimilative act, something that makes her more American than Chinese. She was, after all, "the submissive one" (Lewis 2006, 85) whose filial devotion and obedience obliged her to go through with the marriage, which was not arranged by her, but by her father and Sammy Fong's mother through an agent. Challenging the contract arranged by her father would have been contrary to Mei Li's training, and in this way, her act is symbolic of her new American thinking. Linda Low, for example, would never have even considered an arranged marriage. Yet, unlike Joe Cable, Nellie Forbush or King Mongkut, Mei Li is not isolated by the challenge of assimilation: everyone ends up approving of her act. Even the very traditional Dr. Li and Wang Chi-yang are happy that Mei Li spoke up, welcoming her marriage to Wang Ta. Needless to say, Sammy and Linda are thrilled, and they are able to marry each other, assuaging

Sammy's mother with Linda's American citizenship. So, did Mei Li really have that challenging assimilating moment, or was she merely finding a way to do what everyone wanted, including herself?

Flower Drum Song is a musical comedy and not a "musical play" (as were the other two "exotic" musicals), so the assimilation process does not have to be as tragic or heart-wrenching. However, Mei Li's music indicates that (at most) she is at the very beginning of the process of assimilation. Her music never changes from its stage-Asian sound: her musical features, including raised fourths, raised thirds, and pentatonicism, clearly signify China in Rodgers' musical language. Her song types are unique in both the musical itself and the Rodgers and Hammerstein corpus. The structure of "A Hundred Million Miracles" is taken from a flower drum song in Lee's book (1961), and "I Am Going To Like It Here" is a pantoum. These are Mei Li's only two songs, with the exception of a few lines she sings with Sammy Fong in "Don't Marry Me," a Broadway song in structure and sound, with certain stereotypical orientalist features (like dissonant seconds) in the accompaniment. Mei Li tries hard to fit in with Sammy's sophisticated sonic world here, but her vocal timbre does not change and Sammy easily dominates the song.

If Mei Li were truly assimilated, one would expect a change in her music at some point.[260] However, Mei Li's final music is "A Hundred Million Miracles" which is played at her wedding and is sung by the entire cast and chorus at the end of the show. The musical crucially does not end on "Chop Suey," the song about

[260] David Henry Hwang, who foregrounds Mei Li's assimilation, has her sing a reprise of "I Enjoy Being A Girl" in his rewrite of the musical (see Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003, 49).

assimilation, which includes a few of Rodgers' orientalist musical features inside a boisterous Broadway song-and-dance number. There is no "Dîtes-Moi" moment (as there was in *South Pacific*) to represent joining a new family by casting off old ways. There is not even a "Something Wonderful" moment (as there was in *The King and I*) to celebrate the attempt at assimilation of "a man who tries." Musically, there has been no assimilation at all: Mei Li remains Chinese. Interestingly, so does the community. Even Sammy, Linda, and Wang San sing along with the older generation at the end. So what has happened?

One scholar posits a theory. In her assessment of *Flower Drum Song*, Christina Klein argues that Mei Li has both assimilated and kept her Chinese culture:

> A different and more historically grounded reading would be that what the film values in Mei Li is precisely her Chineseness, her strong marks of ethnicity...Although Mei Li adopts numerous Americanisms—she picks up some slang and learns how to kiss from watching TV—she never loses all her conventional markers of Chineseness...She is the heroine because she holds assimilation in balance with ethnicity. Mei Li offers an example of what literary critic Frank Chin has described as "dual identity:" her consciousness contains both Chinese and American elements (Klein 2003, 240).

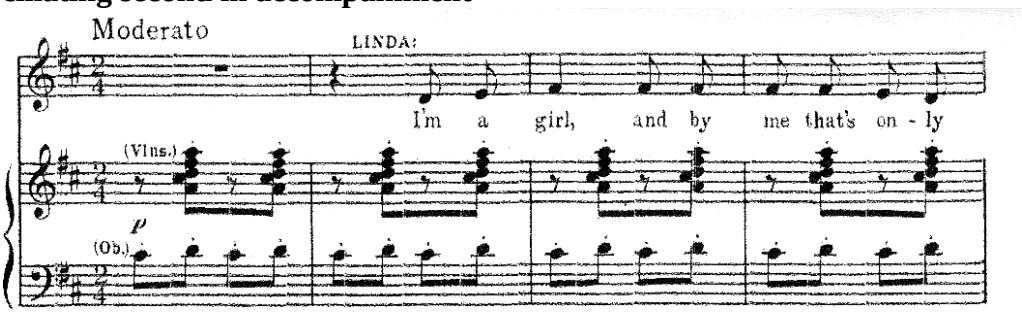
A musical analysis does not bear out Klein's assertions. I would argue that Mei Li has not sufficiently progressed in the assimilation process to truly have a dual consciousness, and Rodgers' music supports the view that Mei Li is still primarily and overwhelmingly Chinese. The person who really seems to be holding ethnicity and assimilation in balance is Wang Ta. He has both Chinese and American "halves" and, by marrying Mei Li, he keeps his Chinese half intact and strengthened. Wang Ta's music supports this reading of dual identity.

Klein also assesses Linda Low, an assimilated character, as not having any Chinese features at all:

> The problem with Linda Low is that she is too assimilated, she is too "white," she has lost any significant ties to China. Her romance with Wang Ta collapses because she does not adhere to what the show has defined as traditional Chinese values: she offends his family with her materialism, her explicit sexuality, and her lack of family ties, all of which come together in her job as nightclub stripper (Klein 2003, 240).

While Linda is definitely sexually liberated (in contrast to Mei Li, the mail-order bride), her music does not bear out the reading of total whiteness. In Linda's anthem, "I Enjoy Being A Girl," the vocal introduction contains dissonant seconds in the harmonic accompaniment and a staccato oscillating second motif in the bass line throughout the first eighteen measures. This is followed by six measures containing a repeated open fifth pattern [D–A] in the bass and ninth chords in the accompaniment. The effect of these first twenty-four measures is decidedly orientalist. In measure twenty-five, Linda musically breaks free with a time signature change and harmonic movement to the dominant seventh chord. The accompaniment to the chorus, however, maintains an orientalist feel in the A-section, with accented chords containing dissonant ninths (in the top line) which alternate with tonic and dominant bass notes.

Illustration 15. Introduction to "I Enjoy Being A Girl" with added ninths and oscillating second in accompaniment



Linda's music indicates that while she is assimilated in attitudes (indicated by the Western diatonic harmony and vocal line), she still has a connection to her Chineseness. This musical analysis makes it impossible to read Linda Low as "too white," despite Klein's contention. Linda may be in conflict with her culture, and her melody line does feel slightly stilted by the orientalist musical style of the accompaniment, especially in the introductory verse. However, Linda lives and works in Chinatown and she eventually marries within the community. Her eventual husband, Sammy Fong, is not only Chinese American, but his mother has important connections to the Family Association within Chinatown.[261] Linda may be the prodigal daughter in Chinatown, but she still belongs there.

The problem is not that Linda lacks Chineseness or community ties, but that her attitudes are assimilated enough to be a threat to Wang Ta's delicate balance between his Chinese values and his American values. We know from Wang Chi-yang's missing song, "My Best Love,"[262] that Wang Ta is a romantic like his father. He is also, according to C. Y. Lee, "not really a playboy" and wants to find "a real

[261] See Rodgers, Hammerstein, Fields, and Lee (1959, 114).
[262] This song was reinserted in the 2003 remake of the musical (Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003, 73).

love interest" (Shin and Lee 2004, 87). Wang Ta's seriousness and romanticism are musically linked to his Chinese self in "You Are Beautiful." Wang Ta is a character who needs to solve the problem of his split self, but is looking for the validation of his sincere and romantic character, which he eventually finds in a traditional Chinese woman, not by jumping across the psychological abyss of assimilation.

A look at the novel is instructive here. Wang Ta's love interests in the novel are not concurrent as they are in the musical, where Linda, Helen, and Mei Li are all present in the same timeframe. Wang Ta actually has four girlfriends in the novel, all of whom are ethnically Chinese: Mary (a college student), Linda, Helen, and May Li. Mary comes from outside Chinatown (Stockton) where her father owns a supermarket (Lee 1961, 18); Linda, who lives in Chinatown, says she is a singer but is described as a "playgirl" and "golddigger" (32); Helen is a seamstress, also in Chinatown; and May Li, a Chinese national, has lived in Los Angeles for three months before she and her father come to San Francisco.

Wang Ta's choices are greatly restricted by the six-to-one ratio of men to women in Chinatown (18), but he is clearly looking for a wife. He first proposes to Mary, who calls him Lawrence, his American name of choice, but Mary is already engaged and is going out with "Lawrence" for entertainment (20). After this heartbreak, he meets Linda and proposes to her soon after (50); she tells him she will marry him after she asks her "brother," but Wang Ta quickly realizes that her "brother" is another one of her many boyfriends and he leaves (61). Helen, whom Wang Ta considers only a friend, actually proposes to him; she is more traditionally Chinese than the previous two women and cooks traditional food for Wang Ta (95),

but he does not find her attractive. The last girlfriend is May Li, a recent immigrant, whom he eventually marries. The trajectory of these women is from the most assimilated to the least assimilated.[263] Wang Ta's search for a wife in the novel *The Flower Drum Song* is a return to the traditional self, which ironically gives him the strength and confidence to finally leave home and be independent. When he leaves with May Li and her father for Los Angeles, he can finally live in the American world outside Chinatown, even if it means being a grocery clerk with an economics degree. The result of Wang Ta's unexpected departure is that his father finally begins to move into the American world outside of Chinatown, something his sister-in-law has been urging for a long time. In fact, Wang Chi-yang's final act in the novel is a visit to an American hospital to see what can be done about his persistent cough (256).[264]

The novel is actually about assimilation to more Americanized values, and for Wang Ta it is about gaining the courage: to leave his father's house, a stifling environment which remains statically Chinese; and to become an independent adult, even in an American society that does not fully accept him. Wang Ta's choice is both courageous and vitally necessary for him to claim his full adulthood. The novel, then, follows the familiar pattern in which assimilation creates a rupture in both family and community.

In the musical, however, Wang Ta's marriage does not bring separation from his father or from the community. In fact, Wang Ta's marriage to a traditional young

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[263] This is not due to Wang Ta's own choice: he would have married any one of these women (except Helen).

[264] The novel is more heavily focused on the father, Wang Chi-yang, and his decreasing control over his sons as he tries to maintain traditional ways.

woman from the old country garners the easy approval of his father[265] and seals his relationship with the community. With the final strains of "A Hundred Million Miracles" the entire community—from the least to the most assimilated—celebrates its cohesiveness and heritage.

The only person not involved in the celebration is Helen Chao, whose music contains no connection to the Chinese community (see Chapter Four). Helen is the brooding outsider, much like Jud Fry in *Oklahoma!*. Andrea Most interprets Jud Fry as the Jewish Other in the musical, the negative side of the theatrical and comic Ali Hakim, the Persian peddler (the more acceptable Jewish Other) (Most 2004, 116).[266] Jud Fry and Helen have similar qualities: they are both considered repulsive by the opposite sex, and the plays they make for their love interests are perceived as threatening.[267] They are also given some of the most vocally demanding music to sing: Jud's "Lonely Room" is operatic in scope (Most 2004, 116), and Helen's "Love Look Away" has been compared to the Menotti aria, "Steal Me, Sweet Thief," which was Arabella Hong's audition piece for the role (Lewis 2006, 42). Both Jud and Helen have to die (or fade away) for the marriages at the end of the musicals to happen. Jud is killed after trying to burn Curly and Laurey to death. Helen disappears from the musical, having killed herself, although her suicide is not actually acknowledged outright. Both deaths are violent and unnatural.

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[265] The libretto does give a nod to the notion of Wang Ta's independence. When Wang Ta says he will gladly marry Mei Li, Wang Chi-yang says, "You will do this without my consent?" When Wang Ta replies in the affirmative, his father says, "Then I will give my consent" (Rodgers, Hammerstein and Fields 1959, 141). However, there is no doubt that Wang Chi-Yang will approve the marriage.

[266] According to Dr. Most, Hakim is able to gain acceptance from the white American community in Oklahoma by being "theatrical" and unthreatening, while Jud represents "the embodiment of the dark qualities Ali fears that others will find in him" (Most 2004, 116).

[267] In the Boston try-outs, Helen aggressively grabs Wang Ta and begs him to marry her. This scene was removed before the New York premiere because of audience reaction (Lewis 2006, 68).

If, as Dr. Most asserts, Jud is the negative side of the Jewish Other in a white world, Helen could be the reverse: the too-assimilated (white) Jewish woman whose ethnic markers are totally gone from her music. This would make *Flower Drum Song* a very interesting statement. Following Dr. Most's theory, we might talk about *Flower Drum Song* as a return to Jewish community in a post-war world where the events of Nazi Germany have shaken confidence in the European assimilation model and assimilation as a whole. The final scene of *Flower Drum Song* includes every character whose music contains some connection to the community. Even assimilated children, like Wang San, are a part of this final community statement. This younger son's rendition of "The Other Generation" connects him, if only by frustration, with his community. All of the characters who demonstrate their affiliation with the community through their music are welcome, regardless of how they are negotiating assimilatory behaviors in the outside world. They all belong. It would not be too far-fetched, following Dr. Most's framework, to compare Rodgers and Hammerstein's Chinatown to the state of Israel, where all who identify as Jews and connect to the Jewish community are welcome.

Conclusion

This chapter is the culmination of all the work that preceded it. After investigating Rodgers' compositional style, supporting a reading of his music as orientalist, and identifying orientalist musical markers in the corpus as a whole, I used these markers to analyze the songs of Asian or Asian American characters and interpret their musical dramatization. Finally, in this chapter, I demonstrated how historical notions of Jewish assimilation and the American melting pot ideal intersect

in these musicals, and how the musical features themselves express ideologies on assimilation. Following the distribution of musical features (as opposed to relying on the book or libretto) leads to an unusual conclusion for *Flower Drum Song*, but one that has support from the musical features themselves, and from the alterations made to C. Y. Lee's novel in the Hammerstein/Fields stage play. In terms of American immigration, *Flower Drum Song* may be considered the first appearance of "the salad bowl" ideal, in which the assimilated members of the community still retain membership and identifying markers of ethnic heritage. This ideal, in turn, has an ideological connection to failure of the assimilation project in Europe, which culminated with Nazi Germany. The relative success of the American assimilation project for many immigrant groups did not immunize it from the post-war philosophical shift. Musicals in the 1950s had already begun to show the cracks in the melting pot, and musicals like *West Side Story* demonstrated the violent results of demarcation along ethnic lines caused by immigration.[268] Of course, to observant critics, the melting pot was always a myth:

> The comparison of America to a "melting-pot" has long been a standard cliché. It expresses the well-known fact that our population includes elements of many different racial strains and former nationalities. This comparison is, after all, not particularly apt. For if the various elements were really fused together, as the metaphor implies, then all of us would have all of these strains in our make-up, proportionately to the number of inhabitants represented by each. Of course such is by no means the case. Immigrants of some nationalities have been rather easily and thoroughly assimilated, but others have kept pretty much to themselves in well-defined communities. Some have hardly entered into the "fusion" [sic] even to the extent of a catalytic reagent (Foley 1945, 277).

[268] Technically, Puerto Ricans are American by birth, but even their status as citizens did not prevent their treatment as the Other on the mainland.

The musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein dramatize assimilation as a courageous and difficult process. This is connected to the fact that the melting pot model underlying the rhetoric on assimilation was not really achievable, at least not in the short term. Like a religious tenet, the melting pot was an ideal held up as a standard, but the actual truth of the matter was always more murky and complicated. *Flower Drum Song* acknowledges the murkiness and is a small beginning on the road to a more realistic view of the American experience.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

Introduction

When I first began looking at the research on Broadway musicals, I was struck by the difference in the scholarly perspectives between those in musicology circles and those outside of music. I was concerned that most musicologists were applying traditional methods of historiography and score analysis without acknowledging the political and social import of the musical depictions of characters, unless forced to by the plot of the musicals, and even then quite gingerly. The main concerns of most musicologists were focused on how a musical should be analyzed (like an opera or not) and on the building of a canon of great works and great composers. I have discussed this at length in Chapter One. I was also, and am still, concerned that so much of the focus is on the composers and not on composer/lyricist teams. I am guilty of a composer-oriented approach myself in this study, although my goal was to specifically examine musical features that often get overlooked in studies outside music in favor of lyrics and libretto. However, I ultimately agree with Stephen Banfield that in the case of a Broadway song's tune and text, "The appearance of one without the other severely limits the degree to which the aesthetic or structural experience of the whole can be communicated" (Banfield 1996, 139).

While the focus of musicologists was on traditional score analysis and the creation of histories and biographies, the focus of the critical theorist was almost entirely on the non-musical elements: the song lyrics, the libretto, the costuming, the dance, the camera shots (in film musicals) and the back story of the musical itself. All

of these elements are crucial to the understanding of the power relations both within the drama and around the cultural practice of creating and producing musicals. However, the actual musical material—the pitches, durations, instrumentation and the like—also carry political meaning. Much of the cultural and critical research is being done by humanities scholars who do not directly address the music, and often seem not to have a sense of the song forms that are used in the musicals. Andrea Most, for example, describes Jud Fry's "Lonely Room" as operatic (Most 2004, 116), but does not explain the structure of the song itself nor the features that would make it operatic.

This divide between traditional musicologists and humanities scholars seemed to me to be an artifact of the low status of the Broadway musical in academics, especially in music departments—a status that allowed only recently for an emergence of scholarship on musicals. Musicologists informed by critical theory were already doing critical semiotic analyses of classical music scores: scholars like Susan McClary (2002) and Jann Pasler (2000), among many others, had been investigating the politics of the music itself in Western operas[269] and symphonies. New musicologists were also analyzing popular music, from Led Zeppelin to Madonna to Queen Latifah. The Broadway musical, however, seemed to have gotten lost between the classical and the popular. As music, the Broadway musical was considered derivative, and even Joseph Swain had to question whether or not the musical deserved the kind of scholarly attention he was giving to it (Swain 1990, 7). On the other hand, the songs themselves had not been popular music in many decades, and did not capture the interest of popular music scholars.

[269] There is a wealth of work on operas like *Aida* and *Madama Butterfly*.

Yet classic Broadway musicals had not disappeared; they had only changed venue. In dinner theaters, civic and community theaters, light opera companies, high schools and colleges, classic musicals live on. From Broadway revivals to sixth-grade choral concerts, the music itself continues to be performed. As Swain so rightly puts it, "the American musical theater is a living tradition," and he points out that the musicals "live on despite cutting, orchestration simplified down to a single upright piano, and singing that ranges from the unbearable to the operatic" (13).[270]

The Broadway musical has recently garnered attention from musicologists informed by critical theory, like Raymond Knapp, whose book on musicals, *The American Musical and the Formation of American Identity* (2005), combines the politics of musicals with the actual song forms and "notes on the page." His book, organized thematically, covers many musicals, and, as such, can only touch upon certain songs. The songs from musicals like *Show Boat*, for example, get more detailed analyses and interpretations. Knapp's analysis of "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" translates musical features into both characterization and politics.

"Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man" is introduced when Magnolia asks Julie (a biracial woman passing as white) to sing it. Julie begins with the Tin Pan Alley style chorus instead of with the verse, which is set up like a twelve-bar blues, and only when a suspicious Queenie asks her if she knows the whole song does Julie start with the (introductory) verse. Knapp believes that Julie starts with the Tin Pan Alley chorus

[270] In fact, Broadway musicals seem to be a perfect form to test the durability of melody in many types of performances and under many different conditions.

(musically marked white) to "bypass [the song's] most obviously 'colored' part, consistent with her attempt to pass more generally as white" (Knapp 2005, 192).

This is a convincing interpretation, but there are other ways to interpret Julie's beginning with the chorus. As Wood points out, the chorus is the part of the song that "remains intact from sketch to sheet music to vocal score" and it was, during the time of *Show Boat*, "the emotional center of the song" (Wood 2000, 15). In other words, Julie's starting with the chorus (and not the verse) might reflect the role of the chorus as the emotional center of the song or reflect its structural properties of stability and memorability for the characters as well as the audience. To start a song with its most recognizable part is not unusual for a person asked to sing it on the spot. This is not to negate Knapp's analysis, but to point out that there are other possibilities. There are no references in this section of the book to Kern's or Hammerstein's intentions in regard to having Julie start with the chorus.

Song interpretation, especially when dealing with sensitive political issues, requires a great deal of care, and my own comfort level demanded that I do more than just pick out features and interpret them as I saw them. I liked Graham Wood's approach (2000) of analysis across many songs and scores to find patterns and regularities. I also appreciated Knapp's desire to connect musical features to political ideologies playing out in the musicals (2005). I decided that my own study should be thoroughly grounded in musical scores and that my object of study should be a corpus of musicals, and not a single musical or set of songs. I also decided to gather as much information on the composer's musical style as possible, and as much information on

the histories of the musicals involved as I could find. I then decided to let the pattern of the musical features guide my interpretations as much as possible.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to connect an analysis of individual musical features with the large-scale politics of the depiction of the "Other" in three Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. I was looking specifically at the depiction of Asian and Asian American characters in *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *Flower Drum Song*. My assumption at the outset was that there would be some consistency in Richard Rodgers' approach, and that the depiction of Asian characters would demonstrate some specific musical differences from that of non-Asian characters. Underlying these assumptions was my understanding of Rodgers as a musical dramatist with a goal of Wagnerian integration in his musicals (McMillin 2006, 4-5). I expected Rodgers' music for the characters to reflect their dramatic situations and conflicts.

These assumptions were borne out by a study of the scores. Rodgers does musically dramatize his Asian characters with markers of difference in a consistent manner from musical to musical. Many of Rodgers' "orientalist" markers match those commonly used by Western composers, such as open fifths, pentatonicism, dissonant seconds and other similar features. Rodgers' use of Lydian (or raised fourth) inflection was unexpected, but it fits a general Western pattern of assigning Middle Eastern and Asian characters modes outside of the major and minor scales. Rodgers also makes use of certain stereotypical instrumentation,[271] like oboes, flutes, wood blocks, and so forth, which were all previously mentioned in the orientalist literature. Sometimes, the

[271] These choices may also be due to Rodgers' orchestrator, Robert Russell Bennett.

instrumentation makes a direct political point related to a character, as in the shift from soft woodwinds to loud brass at the entrance of the eventually assimilated Prince Chulalongkorn in “March of the Siamese Children” (*The King and I*).

Rodgers is quite consistent in his choice of features and their uses. Although certain musical features emerge first with *The King and I* (modal inflections, in particular), the overall pattern of using scales and modes outside Western major/minor scales is consistent. Certain specific features, like the oscillating and dissonant seconds, remain consistent markers throughout the three musicals. In terms of dramatic content, the use of orientalist features develops with the complexity of the characterization. In *South Pacific*, the Tonkinese women are dramatized in a fairly static manner, without emotional or dramatic arcs. The difference between “Bali Ha’i” and “Happy Talk” is not function: both songs are “sales pitches” that echo the needs of the customer, Joe Cable. The content of the “product” being sold—sex with Liat in “Bali Ha’i” and marriage with her in “Happy Talk”—causes the variation in harmonic features, like the presence of whole tone chords and the stress on diminished chords (resolving up) in “Bali Ha’i.” Structural features used in both songs, including simple scalar phrases (related to the short linguistic phrases), are actually quite similar.

In *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song*, some of the Asian or Asian American characters do have central, dramatic roles, and these are related specifically to assimilation. Rodgers consistently uses the alternation between orientalist and Western musical features to indicate issues connected to Western assimilation. The use of these features clarifies the nature of the characters and allows for readings that might better specify the political intent behind the musicals. The King’s struggle

between a Western and an Eastern self in "A Puzzlement" is directly related to assimilation. Wang Ta's two songs, one with orientalist features and one without, demonstrate his choice between complete assimilation and retaining a connection to the community.

Finally, song forms—like the prayer to Buddha ("Finale Act I" in *The King and I*), the flower drum song ("A Hundred Million Miracles" in *Flower Drum Song*), and the pantoum ("I Am Going To Like It Here" in *Flower Drum Song*)—are used to create a sense of Otherness. When a song in one of these shows does not contain a typical Broadway chorus structure (AABA, from Tin Pan Alley) or other recognizable Western form (e.g., strophic song or chorus/refrain), the structure marks a character as not assimilated. On the other hand, a character like Wang Ta, who is somewhat assimilated, may have orientalist features in a regular Broadway chorus structure (AABA) as he does in "You Are Beautiful."

Rodgers also demonstrates specific dramatic conflicts with musical features and with song forms. In *The King and I,* Anna's diatonic fourth battles with King Mongkut's raised (Lydian-inflected) fourth over the harem in "Song of the King;" the harem women's diatonic fourth (sung as they are dressing in British clothing for the dinner party) fights with the raised (Lydian-inflected) fourth in the accompaniment of "Western People Funny," indicating another East-West conflict. Because the King and the harem are trying to fit British norms, Gilbert-and-Sullivan-style patter song style is invoked in "Western People Funny" and in "A Puzzlement." These songs display cultural conflict musically as the harem and the King try to force themselves into British ways. Other conflicting musical features appear in the songs of Linda Low ("I

Enjoy Being A Girl") and Sammy Fong ("Don't Marry Me") as tension is demonstrated between the Western-style melodies and harmonies with the presence of distinctly orientalist features in the accompaniment.

Rodgers is also sensitive to location of his orientalist features. The vocal line represents the core self of the person, while the accompaniment often represents what is external to the character. In "I Whistle A Happy Tune," the oscillating second of the Other appears (modified) in the distant bass line, while the same feature occurs in the music of Joe Cable and Wang Ta more prominently, and, in Joe Cable's music, in the interior harmony (closer to the vocal line), indicating a penetration of these characters by the Asian women they wish to marry.

The results of my score analysis are a step forward in understanding how Rodgers uses orientalist features dramatically and to depict the larger struggles related to assimilation. Looking at a corpus, as opposed to a single score or a handful of songs, allowed me to see larger patterns and relate his compositional ideas to Andrea Most's theories on the Broadway musical and assimilation.

Vocal Performance Practice and Other Features for Further Study

In any study, there are limitations on what can be covered and, sometimes, interesting topics emerge that cannot be treated with the care they deserve. One such topic is vocal performance practice and Rodgers' hands-on approach to it. As a dramatist, Rodgers noted what he wanted on the score, but indications are that much of the vocal performance we see in these musicals is a result of his coaching of singers during rehearsals. Lewis (2006) points out, for example, that Rodgers was very specific about timbres and note durations, and he spent a great deal of time with

singers like Pat Suzuki (53-54) and Arabella Hong (61, 70) to get the exact sound he wanted. With Suzuki, Rodgers rehearsed exact phrasing and delivery of the words; with Arabella Hong's "Love Look Away," Rodgers worked on getting a musical theater sound as opposed to an operatic or jazz sound from her (70). This was apparently typical for Rodgers: Wilk, for example, describes how Rodgers got the vocally trained Celeste Holm to sing with "a loud, unedited sound, like a farm girl" in *Oklahoma!* (Wilk 1999, 67).

Vocal performance is a crucial part of characterization, and, in the depiction of Asian characters, the performance practice can be the difference between something that "sounds Asian" and something that does not. A good example of this is "Happy Talk" from *South Pacific*. The song itself is a cut time, dance piece whose chorus is reminiscent of Tin Pan Alley songs from the twenties,[272] but Juanita Hall's soft, warbling style and her articulation of pitches in a detached (almost staccato) manner creates a faux-Asian sound. Nine years later, in *Flower Drum Song*, Hall's voice is loud, even raucous, in "Chop Suey," with straight-tone singing in much of the piece. Here, she is playing the assimilated Madam Liang, not the Tonkinese native, Bloody Mary, and the shifts in vocal timbre and pronunciation are marked. It is especially interesting to see how Hall sings the short stepwise phrases in the internal verses of each song,[273] which are somewhat similar in musical structure and topic. The differences in timbre, loudness, and delivery do more to mark the character's Otherness than the orientalist features in the accompaniment of either song.

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[272] In fact, the title song written for *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (1967), a musical film about 1920s-era flappers, is remarkably similar to "Happy Talk."

[273] For example, the phrases "Talk about the moon..." ("Happy Talk") and "Stars are drifting overhead" ("Chop Suey").

More time is needed to analyze and discuss performance practices of various singers and to research Rodgers' input into their performances. Of particular interest, considering the musical depiction of assimilation, is Andrea Most's description of Yul Brynner's vocal depiction of the King at the end of "A Puzzlement" where:

> [T]he final prayer to Buddha...sounds remarkably like davening (Jewish chanting); and if one listens closely to Yul Brynner's rendition of the song on the soundtrack, one hears cadences strikingly similar to those of Tevye's plea, "If I Were a Rich Man," which echoes Jewish niggun (traditional melody) (Most 2004, 192).

Vocal performance practice, then, appears to be a potentially fruitful area of inquiry. Musical theater is a singer's medium, so it is no surprise that vocal performance practice should be important. Rodgers' role and the specificity with which he coached singers is definitely a topic for further research.

Another topic which I have left largely untouched is the motif of the repeated pitch, especially in *The King and I*, which Knapp describes as a "child-oriented and a primitivist repeated-note motive that will reappear throughout the show as part of its 'oriental' musical profile" (Knapp 2005, 265). He isolates this feature at the end of Anna's lines in "I Whistle A Happy Tune" and describes it as "domesticat[ing] tropes of orientalist music" (265). One also hears this repeated pitch motif in the King's introductory verse to "A Puzzlement" and in his "one-two-three" footwork orchestrated in brass by Robert Russell Bennett[274] in "Shall We Dance." Knapp also relates this to the dactyl foot in "March of the Siamese Children," in which two pitches are repeated (265).

[274] This footwork, an accented three-note repeated motif (on the dominant scale degree during the dance) is very prominent and relates dramatically to the King learning his dance steps.

Up to this point, I have not given much attention to repeated pitches since, as was demonstrated in Chapter Two, melodic repetition is a part of Rodgers' compositional style. However, the motif which Knapp has isolated is a rhythmic/repeated-pitch cell which is articulated strictly on the beat, with each pitch played in a detached fashion from the others, giving an almost staccato effect. All of these features together create a characteristic sound which acts as a characteristic motif. The real characteristics that set this motif apart are the accent pattern and the detached way in which the notes are articulated instrumentally and vocally. One can compare, for example, the repeated pitches in Nellie Forbush's "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-a My Hair"—which occur in the first three phrases of the four-phrase blues-inspired swing theme—to King Mongkut's repeated pitches in "A Puzzlement." While Nellie sings a lot of repeated pitches, one would never mistake this for an orientalist motif due to the swing beat and the general connectedness of the pitches in her vocal rendition. Yet, Nellie's phrase "I'm gonna wash that man right out-a my hair" and King Mongkut's phrase "There are times I almost think I am not sure of what I absolutely know" have very similar pitch contours: a short stepwise ascent, followed by mostly repeated pitches, and ending with an ascending leap followed by a descent. It is rhythmic and accent pattern with a certain articulation that makes the difference in how these repeated pitches are perceived. This rhythmic pattern with detached articulation should be considered an orientalist feature of Rodgers, even without a repeated pitch, since it well describes Juanita Hall's rendition of Bloody Mary's "Happy Talk," described earlier in this section.

However, in *The King and I* and in *Flower Drum Song's* "A Hundred Million Miracles,"[275] this rhythm/articulation pattern definitely appears with repeated pitches. There is something almost percussive about the pattern with the repeated notes, and it definitely has a separate and distinct identity. Because of its appearance in *Flower Drum Song*, and because of the prominence of the song in which it appears,[276] it cannot be considered accidental or an afterthought, and this repeated-pitch/rhythmic cell is connected with the same motif in *The King and I*. Knapp describes this motif in *The King and I* only, and interprets it as representing Anna's "patronizing" attitude toward Siam, since it first appears in her vocal line. I do not think that the motif is that psychologically or politically complicated: it seems to be acting simply as a marker of Asian-ness without the perspective of a Western character. Anna may be ending her musical phrases with repeated pitches in "I Whistle A Happy Tune" (without the characteristic orientalist articulation) as a reference to the scary (Asian) world outside. Once she gets to know this world and its people, she actually dances a polka which includes that same motif (that had previously depicted her fear) repeated every phrase or so.

One more comment on this motif: it can certainly be described as primitivist, and its connection with drumming in *Flower Drum Song* (the motif immediately precedes the playing of the "oriental drum" in the score) supports that view. However, there also seems to be a connection to Hammerstein's elliptical Pidgin English, which suggests a repeated pitch with awkward (not smooth) articulation. This Pidgin English

[275] The last three notes of the phrase, "mi-ra-cles," comprise the pattern with repeated pitches.
[276] The musical begins and ends on "A Hundred Million Miracles" and it also acts as the wedding march music.

lacks grammatical features like articles, which makes it somewhat telegraphic, but it also seems to represent a lack of English language prosody, that is, native English stress patterns and speech contours. Either way, the motif demonstrates difference with a number of factors playing into its perception as "Oriental" or stage-Asian.

Connected to the idea of primitivism is the representation of Asians as "childlike," which Knapp also mentions (2005, 265). Rodgers has been accused of creating childlike characterizations of Asians, especially Asian women, in his music. Liat in *South Pacific* and Mei Li in *Flower Drum Song* certainly fit that description. Miyoshi Umeki's childlike vocal performance of Mei Li's music, for example, is consistent from the original 1958 cast recording of the stage musical (Rodgers, Hammerstein, Fields, Umeki, Blyden, Hall, et al. 1999) through the 1961 film (Lee, Fields, and Hammerstein 2006). However, other Asian characters are not necessarily treated musically as childlike. Tuptim, for example, has the most difficult and least childlike music in *The King and I* with "I Have Dreamed," and even her pentatonic "Lord and Master" is ironic and insightful, with the need for real vocal power. Lady Thiang, who sings the "theme song" of *The King and I*, "Something Wonderful," is characterized as having wisdom and wit (especially in "Western People Funny") and is the persuasive and influential go-between as Anna and the King have their spats. In terms of simplicity, Anna's music is far more limited in range and vocal power than either "Something Wonderful" or "I Have Dreamed." In *Flower Drum Song*, Pat Suzuki's original rendition of "I Enjoy Being A Girl" was strong and assertive, and her voice on the original cast recording was a powerful show voice. Madam Liang's (Juanita Hall's) "Chop Suey" was raucous enough in live performance to "give the

stage a good shake" (Atkinson 1958a, 44). *Flower Drum Song* has two non-singing characters: Sammy Fong's mother, who does not come across in any way childlike, and Dr. Li, whose restrained and peaceful character might be interpreted as childlike.

Much of how one interprets *childlike* is dependent upon vocal practice, stage-Asian speech, and physical mannerisms. These are mostly deliberately planned by the dramatizers (composer, lyricist, director), although not always. Mei Li's stiffness and lack of dance movement, for example, was connected to the actress' own lack of coordination, and Lewis describes in detail how choreographer Gene Kelly tried repeatedly to get Miyoshi Umeki to dance or even move in a coordinated way (Lewis 2006, 54). Eventually Kelly just told her to stand there, "don't move...[a]nd hold the drum" (54). An accidental lack of physical ability led to a different stereotyped doll-like kind of characterization. One also wonders how King Mongkut's music would have sounded had Yul Brynner been a better singer, or if Anna's music would have sounded so simplistic and uncomplicated had Gertrude Lawrence's voice not been so limited due to age and illness (Secrest 2001, 310).

There is a very good argument that Rodgers and Hammerstein often portrayed Asian characters, especially young women, as childlike and passive. But there is some variety in the strength, power and wisdom of Rodgers and Hammerstein's stage-Asians, and a more detailed look indicates some difference within the overall paradigm. Most of the Asian characters (except for the assimilated Asian Americans in *Flower Drum Song*) are limited by Oscar Hammerstein II's use of Pidgin English, in the same way as his African American characters in *Show Boat* are limited by the stage-dialect he gives them. "Ol' Man River" might have been (and might be) less

offensive without it. But getting beyond the unfortunate Pidgin English, one can see deeper characterizations in some of Rodgers' more sophisticated music.

Nonetheless, the overall stage-Asian depiction serves to reinforce many negative stereotypes, and these stereotypes continue in the entertainment industry, especially for Asian females. Korean American comic, Margaret Cho, for example, talks about the failure of her 1994 ABC sit-com, "All American Girl," in her stand-up comedy DVD, *I'm The One That I Want* (Cho 2001). One of Cho's major problems occurred when television executives told her that she was not "Asian enough" or was not "testing" Asian (Cho 2001). The production company actually hired a consultant to teach Cho how to appear more "Asian." Cho's scathing rendition of this consultant ("Margaret, use chopsticks, and when you're done eating, you can put them in your hair") underscores the rage of an Asian American asked to play a stage-Asian, the product of the American entertainment industry itself.

When regarded in this light, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Asian-themed musicals are every bit as offensive as *Show Boat* is to African Americans, and for the same reason: the characters are created to be stereotypes to a white, middle class, American audience. They are not authentic representations, and the even the assimilation experience in *Flower Drum Song* is not representative of the actual historical experience of Chinese Americans.

The question as to whether these types of ethnically/racially marked musicals should actually be performed is a serious one, and it extends to many of the songs themselves, which, like "Ol' Man River" are littered with "dialect." Yet these musicals are a part of American entertainment history, some of them even aspiring to art, if not

quite arriving there. David Henry Hwang offers a partial solution, rewriting the libretto of *Flower Drum Song* (Hwang, Rodgers, and Hammerstein 2003) to be more representative of the Asian American experience while making use of the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs and music.

However, in the end, these shows were a product of a particular time in history and of a particular immigrant experience. Scholars of musicals need to acknowledge how the "notes on the page" and their associated performance practices relate to the stereotypes that take on a life of their own, "dominating and restructuring" (Said 2003, 3) the image of people who are not representing themselves but being represented. The would-be composer of musicals can learn a great deal about how to dramatize—and not dramatize—by studying the scores of classic musicals. The voice teacher or choral director needs to understand the backgrounds of these songs before assigning them to students, and must be cognizant of how certain lyrics or elements of musical structure can be offensive. Choosing to perform these musicals, or songs from these musicals, is a judgment call, but all elements, from the smallest motif to the largest political context, need to be part of the educational process surrounding the Broadway musical.

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