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**“The Adaptation of Literature to the Musical
Stage: The Best of the Golden Age”**

by

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LAB

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Abstract - "The Adaptation of Literature to the Musical Stage: The Best of the Golden Age"

Musicals during the Golden Age of Broadway - the two decades between 1940 and 1960 - diverged from their reputation as spectacularly staged plays interrupted by song, and developed into fluid pieces of art which integrated words, music, and dance into cohesive storytelling entities. This deviation from tradition resulted in a body of work that was of such high quality that it continues in the present day to hold a distinct place in the history of American theatre as being innovative and entertaining. These innovations were most effectively portrayed when they were related to a strong book, as integration could not occur convincingly without a developed storyline. For some time, musical composers, like opera composers, had looked to other sources for inspiration. Whether it be from books, plays, short stories, or myths, adaptations were the norm of the theatre. But what challenges did composers face when adapting from a piece of literature? Was it necessary for the audience to be familiar with or at least aware of the literary source, or should the show stand on its own merit? Examined here are the adaptation into musicals of plays - specifically *Green Grow the Lilacs* into *Oklahoma!* and *Pygmalion* into *My Fair Lady* - and short stories - particularly "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" into *Guys and Dolls* and *Tales of the South Pacific* into *South Pacific*.

Addressed are the problems encountered by the composers/librettists during the adaptation process, specifically in choosing what elements of the source to emphasise or eliminate, and thus the general sweetening that occurred. Also discussed are the deepening of dramatic situations through music/song/dance and how this affected characterisation. Finally, the continued influence of these musicals on later generations of musical theatre composers is examined with passing comparisons given to contemporary examples.

Chapter 1

The musical theatre has come full circle since the early part of this century. Beginning its cycle as a bastion of pure spectacle, where a man named Ziegfeld dominated the scene, it then moved into a plateau of futile musical comedies that luckily was followed by some of the most innovative and memorable productions in American theatre history. The two decades between 1940 and 1960, the Golden Age of musical theatre, saw the development of a new style of musical that embraced change and varied the traditional practices, creating a cornerstone on which the modern Broadway world continues to build, if in somewhat haphazard fashion.

Traditional musical comedies of the twenties and thirties fitted into a standard mould that resulted in hundreds of predictable, unmemorable shows which occasionally produced a hit popular song. Generally, a musical would have a romantic couple, who endured setbacks and suffering, yet ended up together in the end, supported by a comedic couple whose sole purpose was to provide audiences with relief from the “serious” nature of the main story line. To assist these players, a singing and dancing chorus in lavish costumes would spontaneously burst forth into a song and dance spectacular that had no relevance to the plot: its pointless nature not objectionable, as the public at

this time expected the aforementioned traditions and were generally reluctant to accept any diversions from this model. Fortunately, as the musical theatre matured into an art form, audiences and critics alike grew more accepting of variance from the established style. At the height of the Golden Age, Howard Barnes, one time critic for the *Herald Tribune*, reviewed a show as being "...of rare enchantment. It is novel in texture and treatment, rich in dramatic substance, and eloquent in song, a musical play to be cherished." This review refers to *South Pacific*, but it could have been about any of the new style musicals that finally found their niche on Broadway.¹

The banality of musicals was interrupted for a brief moment with 1927's adaptation of Edna Ferber's *Showboat*, which proved a premonition of what was to come over a decade later. *Showboat*, a musical about the tragedies and loves of the people on a Mississippi River showboat, provided the first evidence of a new style of musical, where book, music, and dance work together to advance the plot, and gave a brief promise of the talent of Oscar Hammerstein II - a promise that would not be fulfilled until 1943, when he began his partnership with Richard Rodgers. Otto Harbach had taught Hammerstein early in his career that "a play must be a cohesive unity made up of component parts that work

¹ Suskin: 641

together,”² which in a musical context, means that words and music are integrated together to advance the plot. *Showboat*, which Hammerstein adapted with Jerome Kern, demonstrated that tradition did not have to be followed to create entertainment: serious subject matter, multiple storylines, and limited dancing were just a few of the novelties Hammerstein brought to the forefront with this project. Unfortunately, these improvements were ahead of their time, and generic musical comedies continued their domination - save a few exceptions - for at least another decade.

Hammerstein strove to create musical plays instead of musical comedies and was the first to successfully break away from the traditionally lighthearted fashion of musicals, though he was by no means the only man who sought to give more substance to the possibility of the musical.

After a successful music-theatre career in Europe, composer Kurt Weill came to the United States and abandoned his distinctively German style in favour of an immersion into the jazz and blues influenced American style. Inspired by a performance of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Weill realised that theatre in America, especially Broadway theatre, was approaching the type of integration of song and word that was being experimented with

² Kanter: 179

in Europe,³ and thus chose to work towards a form of American opera, essentially dramatic musical plays, on Broadway. Weill believed that Broadway was going to become to America what opera already was to Europe and wanted to contribute his part to this medium.⁴ Unlike his European work which juxtaposed exquisite melodies with sardonic words supplied by Brecht, Weill worked to integrate the words with his music to complement one another and enhance characterisation through song. His melodies were very reminiscent of George Gershwin's and had a definite evocative quality that proved to be influential to other artists: both his contemporaries and later generations. Cole Porter once said that "[he and other composers] couldn't write the way [they did] without Kurt Weill."⁵ His influence can also be heard in Frank Loesser's "Runyonland" from *Guys and Dolls*, which elicits the mayhem of Times Square using propulsive sequences of repeated notes, much like those favoured by Weill. Even his one-time collaborator, Alan Jay Lerner, whom he worked with on 1948's *Love Life*, utilised the Weill technique of switching tempos and styles within one song, evidenced by the song "This Is the Life" from the same show, in his and Fritz Loewe's work for Henry Higgins in 1956's *My Fair Lady*.

³ Jarman: 136.

⁴ "I'm a Stranger Here Myself"

⁵ *Ibid*

In the sleeve notes of his 1947 *Street Scene*, considered by many to be the embodiment of his goal for his Broadway career, Weill explained how in order to have a dramatic musical play, he wanted to get “the leading dramatists of [his] time interested in the problems of the musical theatre.”⁶ Weill enlisted established poets and playwrights, such as Langston Hughes, Moss Hart, and Elmer Rice, to collaborate, and coupled with his controlling every aspect of the musical side of a show from composition to orchestration, ensured that his creations were not only dramatically viable, but also refreshingly different.

By the time Weill began his serious pursuit of integration, Hammerstein had begun his fruitful partnership with Richard Rodgers - a partnership that became synonymous with the new style of musical plays, where words and music merged to form a cohesive work. Weill, who had been working towards this integration since his *Lady In the Dark* in 1941, resented the recognition this pair received for achieving success in an area he considered his own.⁷ But Rodgers and Hammerstein created timeless songs, while Weill’s melodies tended to sound of the 1930s, no matter what variety of song he created or just lacked the necessary melodic distinction. A comparison of the work of Weill and Rodgers and Hammerstein reveals two different forms

⁶ Scott: 292

⁷ Stempel: 324

of integration: Weill tended to make the operatic assumption of music's dominance, relying on the music, while Rodgers and Hammerstein's show a synthesis of dialogue, lyrics, music, and dance that advance the plot by furthering the story, a concept that was the culmination of ideas from both men's early careers.

Prior to teaming up with Hammerstein in 1943, Richard Rodgers' professional career as a composer was tied with his lyricist, Lorenz Hart, with whom he had created such memorable songs as "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered" and "Where or When." The team of Rodgers and Hart were known for their grasp of current trends in music, and their ability to incorporate them into their Broadway projects. Though they had the ability to capture urban sophistication in song, their shows tended to exemplify the standard musical comedy formula of plot construction. Only their work in 1940's *Pal Joey*, a witty show - far from the typical musical comedy - concerning the life of a rogue dancer and gigolo, did Rodgers and Hart stray from the norm and aim for the novelty of integration and sustained characterisation through song. Though the result was not as smooth as the later Rodgers and Hammerstein shows, *Pal Joey* still demonstrated a potential in the Rodgers and Hart partnership to create innovative integrated musical plays; however, this potential was never fully realised as Hart gave in to his addiction

to alcohol, and Rodgers was forced to take his musical talent to a new partner. Thus in 1943, the musical team of Rodgers and Hammerstein began and a new era in the theatre world emerged.

Rodgers' new partner could not have been more different from Hart when it came to style: both in craft and in life. Hammerstein's songs, while carefully and intelligently crafted, had an inherent simplicity unlike the witty sophistication of Hart's work. His genius lay in his ability to perfectly capture a character's personality through his lyrics: whether it be a simple-minded farm girl like Ado Annie in *Oklahoma!*, or a lovestruck French planter like Emile De Becque in *South Pacific*, Hammerstein always found the perfect lyric manner to define his characters. In this new partnership, Rodgers was able to discuss and develop melodies that suited the songs and the libretto, because, different from his earlier practice, the lyrics were now completed before he attempted to set them to music. Also different from Hart, Hammerstein wrote both the book *and* the lyrics, allowing him to set the scene and thus the context of each of his songs. Rodgers now had a steadfast, consistent partner whose verse allowed for a different style of music: no longer were 'modern,' jazzy melodies required for popularity. Rodgers' work with Hammerstein allowed him to improve the evocative nature of his music to ensure that the music and words worked

together to create an atmosphere that absorbed the audience.

Rodgers and Hammerstein paved the way for the breakthroughs made during this Golden Age of musical theatre. Because of their daring, composers abandoned the established formulas of plot construction: no longer did musicals have to have a leading romantic couple with a supporting humorous couple. In fact, the leading couple now were not always romantically linked, as the supporting couples - for now there could be more than one or none at all - were not the sole providers of comic leavening. The leads had their share of laughs, while the subordinate characters often existed in tragic circumstances. As complex choreography was no longer a necessity in a musical, choruses were downplayed: their purpose now being to comment on the action of the show or add to the ambience of the scene. All of these aspects acted together to spur the show forward.

These innovations were most effectively portrayed when they were related to a strong book, as integration could not occur convincingly without a developed storyline, so for some time, musical composers, like opera composers, had looked to other sources for inspiration. Whether it be from books, plays, short stories, or myths, adaptations were the norm of the theatre. But what challenges did composers face when adapting from a piece

of literature? Was it necessary for the audience to be familiar with or at least aware of the literary source, or should the show stand on its own merit? Here, I will examine the adaptation into musicals of plays - specifically *Green Grow the Lilacs* into *Oklahoma!* and *Pygmalion* into *My Fair Lady* - and short stories - particularly "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" into *Guys and Dolls* and *Tales of the South Pacific* into *South Pacific*. I will show the basic changes made from the original texts, as well as the innovations that each show contributed to the world of the musical theatre.

Chapter 2

In the late 1930s, the American Theatre Guild, after a string of recent failures, faced financial difficulties and needed to find a spark to light its path to recovery. The Guild's co-director, Teresa Helburn, who for some while had wanted to musicalise a play, felt that a musical would attract audiences and, thus, increase revenues. She wrote to George Bernard Shaw concerning the musicalisation of his play, *The Devil's Disciple*, but he swiftly rejected this idea¹ (See Chapter 5). With this rejection, Helburn decided to look to the Guild's repertoire. She looked no further than their 1931 season, when the Guild presented a cowboy play, with additional musical numbers featuring traditional folk songs.² This play, Lynn Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs*, had a simple storyline filled with bits of quaint charm. Though the play was not highly successful, running only 64 performances³ during its first presentation, Helburn believed that it could easily make the transition from play to musical. Helburn approached Richard Rodgers, who excitedly embraced the project, which was to become known as "Helburn's Folly," and approached his longtime partner, Lorenz Hart, about its prospects. With Hart, Rodgers had created such notable works as *Babes In Arms* (full of

¹ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 131-2

² Laufe: 58

³ Hyland : 278

conventionally rich tunes, many of which have since become standards, i.e. "My Funny Valentine") and *Pal Joey* (memorable, yet not in a traditional manner). At this time, they were working on a project entitled *By Jupiter!*, but were experiencing difficulties, namely Hart's rapidly escalating alcoholism. Rodgers knew that Hart's condition might not allow for the completion of their current project, let alone the possibility of looking at a new one, so he decided to make alternative plans.

Teresa Helburn, who was somewhat familiar with the Hart situation, suggested that Rodgers contact Oscar Hammerstein II, a lyricist known well in the theatre world, yet without much success in recent years. The future partners met for lunch where Rodgers asked Hammerstein to read *Green Grow the Lilacs*. Hammerstein did not need to read the play for he had already contemplated its adaptation. He had even approached one of his partners, Jerome Kern, about the project in 1931, but Kern felt that the play had an unfortunate third act that would cause any form of the play to fail, and rejected the idea. Hammerstein eagerly accepted the project, but he knew that Rodgers was bound to Hart. Hammerstein was familiar with Hart's condition, as the duo had called him in to help previously. Ever the gentleman, Hammerstein deferred forming a new partnership until Hart, in effect, gave permission or joined them. He told

Rodgers that if the time ever came when Hart could not function, he would be there.⁴

Soon after at Rodgers' insistence, Hart checked into New York's Doctors Hospital, a popular recovery site amongst the Broadway set. Rodgers realised that this was his partner's last chance to finish *By Jupiter!*, so to encourage Hart, Rodgers suggested that he utilise the piano that Cole Porter donated to the hospital when he was a patient there, but even this did not motivate Hart. By this time, the New York press had reported that Rodgers and Hart, along with Hammerstein, were working on the musicalisation of *Green Grow the Lilacs* for the Theatre Guild. Rodgers, who realised that he could not continue in his current situation, gave Hart an ultimatum, telling him that he would find another partner if Hart chose not to continue.⁵ Upon hearing this and about Hammerstein, Hart, who knew that he had been a burden to Rodgers, dissolved their once fruitful partnership. Though he felt that the new team of Rodgers and Hammerstein would be a success, his view of the musicalisation of *Green Grow the Lilacs* was just the opposite.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein era in the musical theatre thus began. Despite Hart's feelings on *Green Grow the Lilacs* as a musical, the new partnership attacked the project with gusto, and,

⁴ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 132-133

⁵ *Ibid*: 134

as it was their first project together, used it to establish their collaborative style. Unlike Hart who needed the melody for motivation, Hammerstein needed only to know what was expected of him and wrote the lyrics before Rodgers composed the music.⁶ This contributed to the belief that all Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals were an outlet for Hammerstein, who wrote both book and lyrics, to force his optimism on the world, as Rodgers had to fashion his music around the libretto and convey the tone of the situation in his melodies.⁷

What attracted Rodgers and Hammerstein to the musicalisation of this rather unsuccessful play? Unlike the average theatregoer, Rodgers and Hammerstein saw the play for what it was - a sympathetic study of the American Midwest and its dialect - characteristics directly resulting from the playwright's history.

Lynn Riggs, the son of a cowboy/farmer, was born in Indian Territory at the turn of the century and grew up among the pioneers of this area that soon became the state of Oklahoma. After exploring varied careers, he decided to attend the University of Oklahoma, where he began to write. Following his time at university, Riggs earned a Guggenheim Fellowship for talented young playwrights, and it was during his time as a

⁶ Rodgers: 220

⁷ Fordin: 191

Fellow in France that he wrote *Green Grow the Lilacs*,⁸ the tale of the joys and complications of country girl Laurey and her cowboy beau, Curly. Not only did Riggs set the play in Indian Territory, he also wrote in the vernacular of the frontier and added many traditional folk songs and cowboy ballads that he remembered from his youth. This provided a foundation for the tone of the play's musicalisation.

Essentially, *Green Grow the Lilacs* was already a musical in the traditional sense, as it contained at least ten musical numbers which consisted of American folk-songs. Like musicals in the early part of the century, the songs did not further the plot, but were simply songs for songs' sake that added to the atmosphere of the play, yet this was not the reason that Hammerstein undertook the project. He felt that *Green Grow the Lilacs* had "dramatic vitality" with strong character development and lyrical dialogue.⁹ Hammerstein believed that the spirited combination of lust and wholesomeness made for a fascinating musical.¹⁰ He knew that with this project he could break many musical theatre traditions, and hopefully, have a long-awaited success.

Green Grow the Lilacs impressed both Rodgers and Hammerstein, who worked to maintain the basic plot and

⁸ Riggs: 130

⁹ Fordin: 184

¹⁰ Hyland: 278

preserve the quaint atmosphere. In writing the libretto, Hammerstein conserved much of Riggs' dialogue, but the original text provided much more than this. Hammerstein need look no further than the original stage directions for inspiration.

When the duo began the project, they established a few goals. While *Green Grow the Lilacs* was a lively play, certain of its elements would not transfer well to the traditionally lighthearted stage of the musical theatre. For one thing, a man is murdered onstage at the end of the play in the middle of a somewhat dubious shivaree. Musical comedies had never dealt with this type of drama before as most serious aspects of a plot occurred offstage and were only mentioned in passing. Hammerstein decided to leave them in the show but lighten their darker characteristics, as they were important to the plot. He felt that since the entire play had a bright, upbeat theme, he could insert these darker elements without shocking the audience.¹¹ Though Hammerstein kept the more sombre points of Riggs' play, he did make logical changes in the ending. Part of the reason for the lacklustre success of *Green Grow the Lilacs*, was the fact that Curly is arrested and taken to jail on his wedding night. A few days later, he escapes from jail to return to his bride and is allowed to remain there before he stands trial. In the musical, Hammerstein condensed the ending and pleased himself and the

¹¹ Fordin: 189

audience by giving the hero an immediate trial and acquittal, so he can enjoy his time as a newly married man.

Though Hammerstein was willing to break traditions, he knew that in order for a musical to be successful it must in some way follow a basic outline. Laurey and Curly comprised the necessary romantic leads. Jeeter, whom Hammerstein changed to Jud to avoid any confusion with the character of the same name in Jack Kirkland's *Tobacco Road*,¹² furnished the villain who could thwart their attachment. But, where was the subplot to provide the lighter moments? Hammerstein chose to evolve the characters of Ado Annie and the peddler, Ali Hakim, as well as add the character of Will Parker.¹³ Ado Annie went from being what Riggs called a "stupid-looking farm girl" with no romantic entanglements to an attention-drawing girl with too many. Will Parker, mentioned in Scene 3 of *Green Grow the Lilacs*, becomes Annie's desperate beau. Ali Hakim is an outlet for comic relief, yet serves as a link between plot and subplot. He inadvertently supplies Jud with the knife that takes his life.

From the very first scene of the musical, Hammerstein upholds his objective of maintaining as much of Riggs' work as possible. He has his hero, Curly, begin singing offstage unaccompanied, while the curtain opens to reveal Aunt Eller

¹² Mordden, *Rodgers & Hammerstein*: 33

¹³ Bordman: 535

churning butter - a musical beginning without a loud chorus number with dancing girls, though not unheard of at this point, was still unusual. Hammerstein replaces a cowboy ballad with "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," inspired by Riggs' stage directions. Riggs sets the scene by describing a "radiant summer morning" where the images of "men, cattle in the meadow, blades of young corn, and streams,...give off a visible golden emanation...that is partly a trick of the imagination...that may pass away." Hammerstein's lyrics tell of "a bright, golden haze on the meadow" where the "cattle are standing like statues."^a He combines Riggs' descriptions with observations of mornings on his own farm.¹⁴ Rodgers' melody conveys the beauty of both Riggs' and Hammerstein's descriptions. He has Curly enter on a waltz evoking the slow ramble of a man riding his horse and enjoying his surroundings. Rodgers uses violins to create natural sounds, such as birds singing and insects buzzing, so the audience can sense that the "sounds of the earth are like music." Rodgers and Hammerstein establish Curly as a purveyor of song: he sings more than any other character and inspires those around him to sing as well. Laurey, like Curly before her, enters singing "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," which links the two characters from the start.

¹⁴ Fordin: 187

Curly's musical influence continues with "The Surrey With the Fringe On Top," which quickly follows the first number. In this song, Hammerstein uses Riggs' account of Curly's surrey as a direct basis for his lyrics. In fact, most of Curly's dialogue from this part of Scene 1 is now in lyric form. By changing dialogue to lyrics, especially those in an upbeat number, Hammerstein speeds up the action in the play and makes the scene more memorable.¹⁵ By establishing a 'clip-clop' rhythm in the bass line to signify horses accompanied by staccato eighth notes in the treble to show the surrey's wheels going over the bumpy country road, Rodgers helps the audience to feel that they are in the surrey.¹⁶ Hammerstein has Curly utilise the persuasion of song to draw Aunt Eller and Laurey into his tale to the point that they sing as well.

These were not the only songs Hammerstein used to convince the audience of Curly's persuasive lyrical capacity. In the musical's Act I: Scene 2, Hammerstein elaborates on Curly's line in Scene 4 of *Green Grow the Lilacs* where he tells Jud that "folks ud all gether around and sing" at Jud's funeral. With "Pore Jud is Daid," Hammerstein paints a visual picture of Jud's funeral that is only touched on by Riggs. Rodgers' dirge-like music adds to the scene with its serious undertones, and the audience is left to

¹⁵ Engel : 171

¹⁶ Fordin: 192

wonder if Curly is only “suggesting” that Jud hang himself: Curly knows the power of song is hypnotic. By the end of “Pore Jud Is Daid,” Curly has reeled Jud in: as the original stage direction state, Jud is “too emotionally exalted by the spirit of Curly’s singing to be analytical...[and] takes up a refrain of his own.” Curly again has used his talent to inspire others to disregard external reality and join in his musical world.

Hammerstein laboured to stay true to the spirit of Riggs’ play. Through these songs, he utilised the playwright’s words, but for the remaining songs, Hammerstein used his own imagination to construct songs to deepen the characterisation of Riggs’ creations.

Since the Ado Annie/Will Parker/Ali Hakim subplot developed from few mentions in the play, Hammerstein used songs to define their characterisation and define key moments in their storyline. He gives each character their own number that shares their outlook with the audience.

Will Parker is mentioned once in *Green Grow the Lilacs* as a star roper. Hammerstein expands this by having him return from Kansas City where he won \$50 in the roping contest at the fair. Originally, Will was to sing a number called “When Ah Go Out Walkin’ With Mah Baby,” a cakewalk in the tradition of American black-culture songs, but Rodgers and Hammerstein felt that the

style of the number dated the show, so they replaced it with the equally up tempo, yet more modern number "Kansas City," where Will tells of all the wonders - simple things that are normally taken for granted - of a "big" city. Because Will is a product of his environment, "Kansas City" demonstrates his innocence. He returns to Indian Territory with one thing on his mind - using his prize to get his girl, Ado Annie.

"Kansas City," a number that does not happen until half-way through the first scene, gives the audience the first chorus number of the show. Rodgers demonstrates what's new in Kansas City by using different styles of music to allow for various dances, such as two-stepping to a western flavoured tune and tap-dancing to a syncopated ragtime.

Ado Annie, who, thanks to Hammerstein, has become an attractive farm girl, tells Laurey how she is a "Girl Who Cain't Say No." Her naiveté comes through as she sings of her feelings when men talk to her "purty." She comes across as simple-minded, even while singing about her feminine wiles. "I Cain't Say No" reveals why she is in such a quandary as to which boy to pick. Unlike Laurey, who is confused by her inexplicable fascination with the darkly magnetic Jud, though she sincerely loves Curly, Annie knows that Will loves her, but her heart can only handle whichever boy she is with, thus, she fancies herself in love with

the smooth-talking peddler.

The peddler, Ali Hakim, uses Annie as his girl of the moment and has no serious feelings for her. When his amorous talk is misconstrued by Annie and her father, he finds himself caught in a trap of his own making. In "It's A Scandal! It's An Outrage!," Ali elaborates on his philosophy and gains the sympathy of the male chorus. This number expands the comic possibilities of the peddler more than Riggs ever did, because Hammerstein makes the audience empathise with him, despite knowing that he will never be able to overcome his natural tendency towards unfortunate, romantic predicaments, thus making the revelation of his "shotgun" wedding to Gertie Cummins all the more humorous.

Since Rodgers and Hammerstein used songs to develop the subplot, they also used a song to complete it. In "All er Nuthin," Annie and Will are finally together, but they have not changed. Will lists the things that he is willing to do and the things he thinks Annie should do. Annie admits that she has not been the best girl, but that she wants to be with Will. However, in the end when the audience thinks that she has reformed, she tells Will that if he "comes home at three..., there's no use waiting up for her." With an upbeat, almost childlike melody for the subplot's songs, Rodgers perfectly captures the spirit of innocence found in

Will, Annie, and Ali.

The songs of Laurey, Curly, and Jud also develop their characters and expediate the plot.

"Many A New Day" masks Laurey's jealousy towards Curly and the Cummins girl. Singing as a stubborn girl who is putting up a show of strength, she pretends not to care about Curly by singing about carrying on with her everyday routine. Laurey does not consider herself a silly, romantic girl, though she knows that when it comes to Curly, she is. The words that she sings to mock foolish girls who "weep in their tea" and sigh express her true desires. Rodgers and Hammerstein's use of repetition reinforces her confused feelings. Instead of composing the music in the standard AABA style where the melody is established, then repeated, then a countermelody introduced, then the original melody again repeated, Rodgers created a song written in one musical idea - one 'A' section.¹⁷ Laurey is stubborn, so she has to tell herself over and over that there will be other men, though she knows that she wants only Curly.

Her determination to resist Curly is again displayed in their duet, "People Will Say We're In Love." Both are too stubborn to admit their feelings for each other. Though they give each other a paradoxical list of don'ts for the other to follow, in their hearts, they both know that the list is of 'do's. Rodgers and Hammerstein

¹⁷ Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein: 35

created a love song not in the overt sense, but in the sentimental sense. Never do the lovers officially say that they are in love. They sing that “the neighbours gossip all day behind their doors” about their relationship. Not until the reprise of this song in the second act, do they agree to “let people say they’re in love.”

Laurey’s pivotal song comes with “Out of My Dreams,” which focuses on Laurey’s romantic confusion, for she wants to go to the box social with Curly, though she has already agreed to ride with Jud. Jud’s dark nature frightens, yet intrigues Laurey, and she has a premonition that if he does not get to take her to the box social, he will go after the man standing in his way - Curly. At the beginning of the show, Curly entered on a waltz which was soon picked up by Laurey, thus coupling the pair in song from the start. In “Out of My Dreams,” Rodgers again chose this style to show that Curly, the man whose arms Laurey wants to be in, was entering her dream. Hammerstein utilises the ‘Elixir of Egypt,’ a smelling salts potion, that the peddler sold Laurey to help her make up her mind, to justify her drifting off into a dream-filled sleep. Rodgers and Hammerstein created a revolutionary way to show the fulfilment of her wishes by creating a dream ballet entitled “Laurey Makes Up Her Mind,” choreographed by Agnes de Mille, which allowed the plot to continue without any dialogue. By using dream dancers to represent the leads, de Mille created a

sense of foreboding. The audience sees the dream Laurey and Curly happy at the beginning, but after Curly leaves, the mood changes. As Laurey prepares for their wedding, her friends approach her with sad looks on what is supposed to be a joyous occasion. When the time comes for the ceremony, the Jud-figure enters and lifts a shocked Laurey's veil. Jud is soon diverted by three dance-hall girls, whom Laurey recognises as being from the postcards on Jud's wall. De Mille convinced Rodgers and Hammerstein that even 'good' young girls dream of sex, so she included these dancers to reflect Laurey's fascination with the darker side of humanity. Curly reenters, and the two men fight. Realising that Jud is invincible, Laurey begs for mercy for Curly. Jud will only be merciful if Laurey comes with him. Laurey decides to spare Curly and go with Jud. The dream ballet concludes Act I, ending when the real Jud awakens Laurey, who reluctantly leaves with him as a dejected Curly looks on. The audience goes to intermission with no clear indications as to what the heroine's inclinations are, and whether the hero and heroine will end up together.

This was the first ever use of a fully integrated ballet to advance the plot,¹⁸ though ballet had been used before in a musical, namely "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" from Rodgers and Hart's 1937 *On Your Toes*. In that show, the ballet was an integral

¹⁸ Larkin: 273

part of the plot as its own entity: the storyline concerned the production of the ballet, not its story. In fact, the ballet's premise had no relevance to the plot of *On Your Toes*. The *Oklahoma!* dream ballet provides a crucial part of the show, as Laurey's hopes and fears are displayed. Rodgers manipulates many of the songs from the first act and creates a piece of ballet music that contains everything from an ominous marriage tune to the seductive music of dance hall girls, so that even without words the audience knows what the characters are feeling. While having a large-scale ballet contributed to the tone of the piece, its primary importance was functional - to advance the drama.

Interestingly, the actual idea for the story of the dream ballet was de Mille's, though the concept of continuing the plot through dance was Rodgers and Hammerstein's. Originally, Hammerstein, who felt the ending of the first act had to be "bright" to ensure that the audience went to the interval with a content feeling, created a circus-themed idea where Aunt Eller rode in a surrey with diamond wheels, while Laurey was the trapeze artist and Curly the ring master.¹⁹ This saccharine idea was not a surprising suggestion from Hammerstein, who once said that it was his natural inclination to emphasise the good in life.²⁰ De Mille, who knew that this idea would greatly take away from

¹⁹ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 141

²⁰Green, S., *World of Musical Comedy*: 271

the integrated nature of the show, as it had no relevance to the plot, quickly dismissed it and helped the partners create a ballet that furthered the action of the plot while revealing Laurey's desires and fears.

In both the play and the musical, the characters of Laurey and Curly are fully developed. The same cannot be said of Jud Fry. In *Green Grow the Lilacs*, Jeeter is evil, but no reasons are given as to why. Hammerstein realised that Jeeter, now Jud, had to have a reason why he hated Curly. The fact that they both love Laurey is one. However, with "Lonely Room," Jud reveals that he is lonely and proud. Riggs never revealed that pride was this villain's greatest weakness, so Hammerstein made Jud human to the point that the audience commiserates with him,²¹ yet never loses its distaste for him. In "Lonely Room," Rodgers begins the melody with dissonant chords to show Jud's inner conflict and then varies the tempo to reflect the scope of his moods.

With these songs, Hammerstein provides characters' motivations but nothing about what influences are due to their surroundings. *Oklahoma!* is an essentially wholesome musical about life on the plains, and nothing reflects this ambience more than "The Farmer and the Cowman" and "Oklahoma."

Hammerstein replaces the traditional square dance at the

²¹ Engel: 104

beginning of Riggs' Scene 4 with "The Farmer and the Cowman." The citizens of Indian Territory, where the play takes place, consist mainly of those who worked the land and those who rode across it with their cattle. They know that their land is about to become a state - an event that will only happen if, as Riggs and Hammerstein both say, they "stick" together. For the first part of the number, both sides jokingly admonish each other's faults; however, this friendly chiding soon escalates into a free-for-all, which brings the music to a halt. This melee is quelched only by a gunshot from Aunt Eller, who uses the gun as a conductor's baton to "encourage" a frightened farmer to resume the square dance-style melody and end their impasse by allowing, in Hammerstein's words, the "cowboys to dance with the farmers' daughters" and the "the farmers to dance with the cowboys' gals." Rodgers and Hammerstein use this song to foreshadow Curly's change from a life on the range to life on the farm.

Despite the plethora of quality songs in the musicalisation of *Green Grow the Lilacs*, the number that most captured the excitement that the show generated is the rousing "Oklahoma." Teresa Helburn felt that since the play/musical was about a group of simple people who lived off the land, there should be a song about it and suggested that Rodgers and Hammerstein write one. Hammerstein took this to heart and wrote about a land that

provided not only “carrots and pertaters,” but also “pasture for the cattle.” He wrote about the state that these “territory folks” were now a part of and the simple joys that they could continue to enjoy. Hammerstein originally wrote “Oklahoma” as a solo for Curly to sing to Laurey, explaining their new life as a married couple in a “brand new state.” Even after the song was changed to a full choral number, Hammerstein began its introduction by discussing Curly’s “startin’ as a farmer with a brand new wife” to parallel their marriage with the new statehood. To complement Hammerstein’s lyrics, Rodgers begins the chorus of the song with rapidly crescendoing rising octaves which, once reaching their apex, immediately descend. As the chorus holds out the ‘O’ in Oklahoma and then proceeds to sing how “the wind comes sweeping down the plain,” the audience can feel this sudden burst of air. Hammerstein felt that the message of this song so perfectly denoted the essence of the original play, the musical should be called “Oklahoma.” Rodgers and Helburn, among others, quickly vetoed this idea. They sensed that “Oklahoma” would conjure up images of the dust bowl and the Depression experienced by the Okies from Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*.²² Hammerstein accepted this for a time.

With all of the songs in place, the musical was now ready to begin production, but, due to Hammerstein’s recent lack of success

²² Fordin: 141-143

and the fact that no major stars were cast as leads, funding became a problem. Rodgers and Hammerstein started the penthouse circuit, playing for socialites with big budgets, yet were unsuccessful: however, they soon managed to get money from producer Max Gordon, Harry Cohn of Columbia Pictures, and playwright, S.N. Behrman,²³ and the musical was ready to premiere.

On March 11, 1943, *Away We Go!*,^b as it was originally called, previewed in New Haven's Shubert Theatre.²⁴ Due to bad weather and little advance press, it was not a sell-out. The musical was well received by those attending, but some Broadway insiders in attendance felt that it would not work. One of the most famous legends of Broadway concerned Michael Todd, famed Broadway producer, who walked out before the first half of the performance was over - it turned out he was going to bail a friend out of jail, but rumour had him leaving in frustration - allegedly saying, "No gags, no girls, no chance,"²⁵ with reference to Rodgers and Hammerstein's break with the traditional norms of the musical theatre. This unkind rumour reached Helburn, who disregarded it, because she was sure they had a hit. Even the less demanding members of the audience that night fell in love

²³Fordin: 144

²⁴*Ibid*: 199

²⁵ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 144

with the simple lyrics and catchy tunes. Early on in New Haven, Hammerstein realised that though his song "Oklahoma" went over well, it was lacking something. He decided to change the number from a solo to a full chorus number. After doing so, the tune became an instant hit, and Hammerstein finally coerced his partners into renaming the show *Oklahoma!* Before moving to Boston for an even more successful preview, Rodgers and Hammerstein replaced a duet between Laurey and Curly called "Boys and Girls Like You and Me" with a reprise of "People Will Say We're In Love."

Oklahoma! opened on Broadway March 31, 1943, to a less than full audience due to inclement weather, strong competition, and persistent rumours about its novelty. . However, this was the last performance of the show's original run where that was the case. The show produced nearly unanimously positive reviews. Though a few critics chided the authors for breaking away from the norm, most felt that the show represented the future of musical theatre. Columnist Walter Winchell, who first received Todd's supposed quote and chose not to print it immediately, decided to print it to show how wrong everyone was about the show.²⁶ *Oklahoma!* played for 2,243 performances on Broadway, followed by an equally successful 51 week tour of the United States. The show then moved to London's Drury Lane Theatre

²⁶ Hyland: 286

where it ran for 1,511 performances. *Oklahoma!* provided Hammerstein with not only a well-deserved success, but also a new, innovative partnership.

What made a musical about simple folk on the prairie so appealing to the public? At the time of its run, the world was embroiled in World War II, and the public needed an escape. With this adaptation of traditionally-flavoured material, Hammerstein described an innocent world where justice prevails and the good guy wins in the end - the fantasy of millions of people whose lives would never return to the way they were. And, crucially, the fantasy was given cohesion and solidity. *Oklahoma!* served as a reminder of the innocence of things past and a precursor of the future. Unlike the idealised reality that movies of this time tried to create, *Oklahoma!*'s attraction lay in a genuine lyrical power - the warm feelings it created for its audience could be easily taken away from the theatre and relived- either as a memory or on an LP. This show continued the shift in all areas of the arts from metropolitan coldness and impoliteness to earthy warmth and values,²⁷ as when given the choice, Americans were reading authors like Steinbeck and viewing art by Benton. *Oklahoma!* added to the public's chance for a diversion from the harsh reality of war.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were not only lauded by the

²⁷ Furia: 189

public for allowing them a return to simplicity, but also by the Pulitzer Prize committee, who felt that Rodgers and Hammerstein effectively captured the spirit of a slice of American history. The Pulitzer, which recognises significant contributions to American life through various media, was originally to be awarded to Rodgers alone for music, but he would not accept it without an acknowledgement of Hammerstein; thus the committee awarded the pair a special citation.

Hammerstein's skills at adapting from one medium to another improved with *Oklahoma!*. He had adapted before, namely the creation of *Showboat* in 1927, with Jerome Kern. However, by adapting *Green Grow the Lilacs*, he found an ideal story for his talents. Hammerstein, who enjoyed using dialects and colloquialisms, proved to be an expert at writing uncomplicated lyrics that closely resembled dialogue and sounded as if they were the sincere feelings of the character singing.²⁸ He knew where to leave words as written and when to turn them into lyrics, for he, like Riggs, considered himself a poet.^c He felt that a poet's job was "to find the right word in the right place...with the highest quality of beauty." Hammerstein believed his job as a lyricist was "to find this word" but also ensure that it "is clear when sung and not too difficult for the singer to sing on

²⁸ Green, S., *World of Musical Comedy*: 271

the note which he hits when he sings it.”²⁹

Hammerstein stayed true to his belief. He, along with Rodgers, turned a forgettable play into a memorable musical. One can no longer see *Green Grow the Lilacs*, should one have the chance, without wishing for the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs. Riggs tried to force his poetic beliefs on Broadway for some time, but to no avail, and he all but disappeared from the theatre world. Poetry is more easily conveyed in the musical realm than the dramatic - a point which Rodgers and Hammerstein’s adaptation proved. They took the poet’s play and made it their own.

Oklahoma!, while being traditional in the sense of plot construction, brought a newness to the theatre with its integration of song and dance into the plot. Yet, this folk tale with its inherent simplicity was deceptive: the audience was subtly drawn into the sentimental tale before ever realising that the onstage events were ground-breaking. The standard conventions of the theatre were never missed. When the chorus girls appear partially through the first act clothed in the traditional calicoes and ruffles of that era, it fits the moment in the story and does not call attention to itself. When new players assume the roles of Laurey, Curly, and Jud for the ballet sequence, the show moves to a new level - that of the subconscious desires and fears of Laurey:

²⁹ Ewen: 203

while the audience is appreciating the artistic merits of de Mille's choreography, they are witnessing something that no other musical audience had ever before - the inner motivations of the characters expressed through dance. This tightly-written 'integrated' show fused obvious elements from both Rodgers and Hammerstein's earlier work into an entity whose components were inseparable, thus assuring both critical and popular success. Not only were almost all of the songs instantly memorable, but more importantly, their expressiveness made them effective storytelling devices: advancing the plot, while creating dramatic situations within themselves. When Hammerstein replaces Riggs' dialogue to evoke the team of horse "a-creepin' at a slow clip-clop," the music slows to a pace that draws Laurey and Aunt Eller's (as well as the audience's) imaginations into the experience. Riggs' folk-songs were replaced with Hammerstein's own that were equally nostalgic, yet purposeful. The second act did have its share of reprises, but the title number was saved until late in the show and finally coupled the individuals with their land - the land that shaped their past as a territory and will shape their future as a state. Hammerstein had integrated the sweep of historical social change into his work before with 1927's *Showboat*, yet in that instance, the Edna Ferber original provided a guideline. In the transformation of this sometimes tedious play

into *Oklahoma!*, the new partnership gave evidence that they did not need strong source material to create an artistically memorable work. Rodgers and Hammerstein's subsequent shows fulfilled the promise that was sparked by this first work.

Notes

- a: After observing his cattle one hot day, Hammerstein wrote the following poem:

The breeze steps aside
To let the day pass
The cows on the hill
Are as still as the grass.

From this unsophisticated poem came the memorable line "All the cattle are standing like statues." (Fordin:188)

- b: This was taken from the traditional square dance call "and away we go."
- c: Lynn Riggs once said that in order "for a playwright to be any good, he must also be a poet - and use whatever he has of a poet's equipment to see more clearly and to reveal more eloquently than ever before." (*Green Grow the Lilacs* Introduction: 131)

Chapter 3

With *Oklahoma!*, the musical team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II launched their dominance of the Broadway world by forging what became the new traditional guidelines that other musicals sought to follow. Although old-style, frivolous musicals with songs and big numbers that were there just to *be there* still occurred, they seemed out of place and childish compared with the integrated Rodgers and Hammerstein shows. Attending a Broadway musical now meant an evening of 'serious' entertainment with integrated songs and dances furthering the plot and involving the minds of the audience. This integrated musical style became an art form. To continue their winning artistic formula, Rodgers and Hammerstein next adapted Ferenc Molnar's 1909 *Liliom* into *Carousel* in 1945. Both adaptations proved to be commercially and critically successful, and *Oklahoma!* was still running even when *Carousel* finally closed. Following these two winning adaptations, the ambitious duo developed an idea of Hammerstein's into a totally conceptual musical entitled *Allegro* (1947), concerning the life of one man from before his birth until his thirties. To tell the story, Hammerstein chose to disregard convention and utilise a stream of consciousness technique with a Greek chorus to comment on the action. Audiences, who considered Rodgers and Hammerstein

to be masters of the mainstream, were not ready for these innovations, and the show broke even due only to advance ticket sales. Not to be deterred, the duo decided that for their next project they would return to the winning formula that they had helped create: an integrated show with an effective balance between drama and music.

Meanwhile, Broadway director Joshua Logan and producer Leland Hayward had been discussing a collection of short stories concerning life on the American occupied islands of the South Pacific during World War II. The pair believed the stories to have potential, so the pair made an informal producers' agreement with the author, James Michener, to acquire the rights to his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Tales of the South Pacific*.¹ Hayward, who did not want any outsiders to come in and take over the project,² suggested that they keep their new acquisition secret until they decided how to put the stories to their best use. Then, Logan bumped into Richard Rodgers at a party, and their discussion turned to their current projects. Upon hearing that Rodgers and Hammerstein had not chosen their next project, Logan mentioned "Fo' Dolla'," the most promising of Michener's tales, which he felt would make a wonderful musical. "Fo' Dolla'" revolves around an ill-fated love affair involving an American Marine and a

¹ Fordin:259

² Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein: 112

Polynesian girl, and Logan sensed that its exotic and romantic qualities could best be expressed on the musical stage. Rodgers took note of this, but soon put it out of his mind.³

Upon hearing of Logan's slip, Hayward was upset. He knew that if Rodgers and Hammerstein became involved, they would try to control the project and, probably, not give him and Logan any credit for finding the stories. He told Logan that he would regret this mistake. Despite this warning, Logan decided to pursue the pair to musicalise *Tales*.

Logan called Rodgers to refresh his memory about "Fo' Dolla'" and to discuss the possibility of collaboration. Upon reading the stories, Rodgers and Hammerstein saw many of the same possibilities that Logan and Hayward recognised and consented to take on the endeavour on the condition that they act as co-producers and retain 51% of the property.⁴ Rodgers had had difficulty with producers in the past, notably George S. Kaufman while working on *I'd Rather Be Right*. Rodgers felt that producers did not have the artistic vision or knowledge to create a musical and had decided that he would never let another person tell him how he should work.⁵ Despite their misgivings, Logan and Hayward, realising that they were likely to get a hit show with

³ Rodgers: 258

⁴ Fordin: 260

⁵ Mordden, **Rodgers and Hammerstein**: 112

Rodgers and Hammerstein at the helm, agreed to their terms as they were returning to what they did best - an adaptation. Their two biggest successes up to that time, *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, had both been inspired by other pieces of literature, though this was to be their first prose-based adaptation.

Tales of the South Pacific recounts Michener's observations of the interaction between men and women of different races and backgrounds on American occupied islands during wartime. Michener acted as a Navy Publications Officer for the forty-nine islands that comprised the Solomon Islands.⁶ His extensive island travel provided ample free time to see how basic human nature adapted to the doubly unnatural situation of war amid exotic surroundings. He made friends with his military peers, as well as natives and French planters. He listened to their stories and made notes of them. As he prepared to leave the South Pacific, the Navy made him the Naval Historian for the region. In addition to his purely factual history, he forged his observations into a book of short stories. These tales detailed the monotony and exacting nature of daily military life in both battle and calm. They also conveyed how the beauty of the islands provided a serenity and peace during conflict. Most importantly, it demonstrated how two unfamiliar cultures interacted with one

⁶ Hayes: 61

another.⁷

In the souvenir program for the musical, Michener wrote how "none of the incidents in the book are true, but they could have occurred."⁸ He based all characters on people he had met during his stay in the South Pacific. The events he portrays are reminiscent of those he either witnessed or heard about. *Tales of the South Pacific* reads as a truthful account of a man's encounters during his wartime travels. He even links fact with fiction by making *Tales'* narrator a Naval Historian.⁹ Never does the reader realise that the stories are the figment of the author's imagination. Through his vivid descriptions and realistic dialogue, Michener creates an impressive, realistic view of island life.

Tales of the South Pacific, though furnishing many plot opportunities, provided many basic structural problems as no single character linked all of the stories and many characters appeared sporadically throughout the nineteen stories. Also, the tales generally were character sketches and tended not to reach a climax individually or as a set. Rodgers and Hammerstein resisted the urge to insert a dream ballet into the show, as they had done successfully in *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, though the exotic locale and stories of "ideal" love might suggest one. In fact, there was

⁷ Hayes: 67

⁸ Laufe: 123

⁹ Hayes: 61

no logical place for any choreography. When the pair began this project, the only aspect of the stories that made their adaptation easier was the ample number of seabees and nurses for a chorus.¹⁰ They had to decide which stories they were going to focus on, as well as how to link them all together.

Upon reading *Tales of the South Pacific*, Hammerstein agreed with Logan that the story "Fo' Dolla'," telling of a romance between an American lieutenant and a Tonkinese girl arranged by her mother¹¹, should be the main focus of the musical. However, after further consideration, Rodgers and Hammerstein realised that it seemed a variation of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, so Hammerstein delved back into *Tales* to find another possible central plot. He found that "Our Heroine," the story of Arkansas nurse Nellie Forbush and her affair with French plantation owner Emile De Becque, ran parallel to "Fo' Dolla'."¹² Both stories focused on characters who were forced to analyse their prejudices due to their feelings. He linked the two stories by having the lieutenant, Cable, and De Becque go on a mission together to provide American pilots with information on Japanese troop movements. Michener obscurely mentions in "Our Heroine" that at one point in the past, "...De Becque and a young sea captain went to, all the

¹⁰ Fordin: 261

¹¹ Bordman: 567

¹² Fordin: 261

islands..."¹³ By having Cable become the young sea captain, the stories are cohesively joined, yet retain the basic framework of Michener's respective tales, while providing a dramatic outcome.

Rodgers and Hammerstein realised that they were dealing with two relatively serious storylines. While each had humorous details, neither provided the comic relief necessary for a musical comedy. Hammerstein looked no further than "A Boar's Tooth" to remedy this situation. In this story, Michener describes Luther Billis, a rather enterprising Navy seabee who wants to go to an off-limits island to witness a native ceremony, but he cannot get there without an officer to check out a boat. Hammerstein turns Cable into the needed officer, additionally coupling the stories. For the essential comic elements, Hammerstein used Bloody Mary, the mother from "Fo' Dolla'," as an adversary to Billis in Act I: Scene 3. To better interweave all of the stories, Hammerstein makes Billis an admirer of Nellie's, comically willing to do even the most menial tasks for her. Towards the end of the show, he also provides a comic diversionary action to help Cable and De Becque land on the island to begin their mission.

Rodgers and Hammerstein had helped vary the tradition that a musical should have a leading couple, whose romance was the basis of the plot, and a subordinate couple, whose comedic exploits constituted the subplot. In *South Pacific*, as the musical

¹³ Michener: 123

came to be known, Rodgers and Hammerstein created one central couple offset by one tragic couple and a single comic character. Nellie and De Becque comprise the leading couple, whose romantic story provides both comedic and dramatic moments. Liat and Lieutenant Cable form the secondary tragic couple. Cable loves Liat, but he gives in to his prejudicial thoughts and cannot marry her. In the end, the couple are permanently separated as Joe is killed on his mission with De Becque. To counteract this poignancy, Luther Billis provides pure comedy throughout the show - in the beginning as an adversary to Bloody Mary, and then on his own. Rodgers and Hammerstein's decision to have two subplots - a dominant dramatic one and a minor comic one - balanced the show and allowed for logical plot integration, fully developed storylines, and an overall richness and variety.

With these basic decisions made, Hammerstein began the arduous task of turning Michener's book of short stories into the book of a musical. While lyric writing came easily to Hammerstein, he often found book writing bothersome. *South Pacific* was proving especially tedious with its distinct 'military components. Hammerstein disliked the military, and because of this was ignorant of its ways.¹⁴ He decided to ask for assistance from the show's director, Joshua Logan. Logan, who had both military and adaptation experience, revealed himself to be an

¹⁴ Fordin: 262

ideal complement to Hammerstein. Using a dictaphone, the pair easily conceived dialogue that included proper military terms and slang. For his contributions, Logan, rightfully, expected co-author credit and royalties. Rodgers and Hammerstein knew this, but it was against their business philosophy to share their billing. Hammerstein felt that it would harm his reputation to let the public know that he had to seek assistance.¹⁵ In the end, Logan's contribution was too significant to be ignored. He was given co-author status, but he only collected a director's compensation. Logan agreed with Hayward's earlier forebodings. However, he had a personal stake in the project. He accepted Rodgers and Hammerstein's control and decided to savour any success that the show received. He also later directed the movie version' of the show in 1958.

The writing process was well on its way. Due to Rodgers and Hammerstein's success, they had the rare privilege of establishing the optimal cast for this project. In the early stages of casting, the partners realised they might have a problem casting Emile De Becque, who was described by Michener as being in his "middle forties" and looking "particularly French."¹⁶ While Broadway had its share of talented men, few fitted this description. In fact, having a middle-aged leading man, was a

¹⁵ Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*: 116

¹⁶ Michener: 122-123

rarity. Luckily, the duo received a call from the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera. They had recently signed Ezio Pinza, a former basso for New York's Metropolitan Opera, but now found that they did not have a project for him. They hoped that Rodgers and Hammerstein could use the prestigious star and buy out his contract. Pinza, whose voice was strong, but beginning to weaken, wanted a project with a lighter workload and felt a musical would best suit his talents. The partners realised that Pinza would make a perfect French planter, with his European looks and romantic voice, and agreed to sign him.

To provide Pinza's leading lady, Rodgers and Hammerstein immediately thought of Mary Martin, who at the time was playing in *Annie Get Your Gun*, a show produced by the team. They knew that this Texan could easily project Nellie's homespun personality. When approached about starring opposite Pinza, Martin laughingly asked if "they wanted two basses."¹⁷ She was worried about competing with the opera star. After Rodgers and Hammerstein promised that she would never sing in competition with Pinza, she agreed to be their Nellie. Minor Broadway stars Juanita Hall and Betta St. John, as Bloody Mary and Liat respectively, rounded out the cast. The remainder of the cast vacancies were filled through auditions.

Rodgers and Hammerstein soon found that the perfect cast

¹⁷ Fordin: 261-262

meant a less than perfect budget. With the salaries of the two leads alone, the show would face financial difficulties. The team met with Martin and Pinza and persuaded them to take cuts in their salaries.¹⁸ This was unheard of in the theatre world. Martin and Pinza realised that they would probably never have the opportunity again to work together, let alone together in a Rodgers and Hammerstein show. They acknowledged the musical team's reputation by agreeing to cut their earnings. Martin and Pinza were obviously confident in the show's future success.

With the stories and structure sorted and the cast in place, Rodgers and Hammerstein began the song-writing process. As usual with their adaptations, some inspiration came directly from the original text, but this was not the sole basis for the lyrics. For the first time in their careers, Rodgers and Hammerstein had a show with big name stars. This fact enabled them to tailor the songs to the actors.

Mary Martin was one of the duo's favourite talents, though this was her first actual project written by the team. Martin was not a typical Rodgers and Hammerstein star, in that she was a "belter" instead of a lyric voice.¹⁹ Her Southern charm and innocence were perfect for Nellie Forbush. Upon casting her, Rodgers realised that he would have to alter his music away from

¹⁸ Rodgers: 260

¹⁹ Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*: 108

the lyric soprano range of his previous work. He could keep the melodies upbeat and playful to give the audience a sense of Nellie's personality. Hammerstein could create lyrics that conveyed the optimism of the simple girl from Little Rock and her heady feelings of love. In the end, the words and music evoked a vision of unaffected innocence perfect for Nellie and Martin.

For their male lead, the team had to create songs that not only showed the differences between De Becque and Nellie, but also showcased the talents of Pinza. De Becque is older and more worldly than Nellie. His songs had to be more serious in nature. The partners also realised that due to Pinza's heavily accented English, the best way for him to communicate his character's emotions would be through songs. While Nellie's songs do convey her emotions, she has plentiful dialogue to further convey her character.

Rodgers and Hammerstein shaped the first scene in a way that highlighted the differences between the two leading characters and built to an early dramatic climax. The show opens with two French Polynesian children, who are later revealed to be De Becque's, singing the very brief "Dites-Moi." As the children exit, Nellie and De Becque, who are obviously fond of each other, but have yet to tell each other this fact, enter chatting nervously. Rodgers and Hammerstein then have Nellie share her outlook on

life in "A Cockeyed Optimist," leading both to think about a possible life together in "Twin Soliloquies." The scene builds to the dramatic "Some Enchanted Evening," which not only shows motivation for the romance (there has been love at first sight), but also provides insight into the romantic heart of the Frenchman. "Some Enchanted Evening," though a major romantic statement, is written in brief fragments to demonstrate the intensity of his feelings.

Rodgers and Hammerstein designed this first scene to intensify as it progressed. The scene begins with the simplicity of the children's song, soon followed by Nellie's jovial number, for Nellie alone is American and uncomplicated. Nellie and De Becque together, however, are a complicated pair as demonstrated by their thoughts in their soliloquies. It takes De Becque's big ballad to persuade Nellie that what they are both feeling is special, and, most of all, acceptable. The scene is fashioned in a way to provide characterisation for both characters as individuals and together as a couple.

While Nellie tends to be impressionable, she is strong enough to make her own place in the world. Nellie's first song, "A Cockeyed Optimist," tells how she is "stuck like a dope with with a thing called hope," thus explaining why she is willing to undertake a romance that she knows is not practical. She

believes in her heart that everything will turn out well in the end.

Having given De Becque the incentive to woo Nellie, Rodgers and Hammerstein needed a way to reveal what the two characters were thinking. They also felt that a romantic duet between the couple that conveyed the uncertainty the lovers were feeling was warranted. In their two previous shows, *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, Rodgers and Hammerstein composed love songs - "People Will Say We're In Love" in the former, "If I Loved You" in the latter - where the romantic leads imply their feelings without actually saying "I love you." For *South Pacific*, they first composed a song entitled "Bright Canary Yellow," where the lovers sang of the way their romance had affected their outlook on life.²⁰ This did not fit the mood of that particular moment in the script, so it was discarded in favour of "Loneliness of Evening," where Nellie sings of the loneliness of sunrise, and De Becque sings of the loneliness of sunset. This song remained in the show until its pre-Broadway tryout in New Haven.²⁰ The team felt that this song did not convey the proper tone they wanted - it highlighted Nellie and De Beque's isolation more than it explained their feelings. They wished for a song that would reveal Nellie's uncertain curiosity and De Becque's hesitance. They abandoned "Loneliness" for a number directly inspired by

²⁰ Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*: 115

Michener's prose. In "Twin Soliloquies," the team maintained their agreement not to have Martin and Pinza sing competitively and composed a duet, but not in the standard form. The aptly named song consists basically of two alternating soliloquies. The couple never sing together, while telling of their similar feelings. Rodgers and Hammerstein utilised this together-yet-separate style of duet for various reprises throughout the show. Though effective, the team could not resist combining the two diverse voices. In a reprise of "Cockeyed Optimist" in Act I: Scene 13, Rodgers and Hammerstein broke their promise to Martin by having their leads harmonise, according to the original stage directions, in a "Sweet Adeline" fashion, proving that Martin could compete with Pinza for at least a short time.

Michener's descriptive work allowed Hammerstein to directly translate it into lyrics. In Michener, Nellie ponders her feelings for the planter by thinking, "...I shall marry this man. This shall be my life from now on. This hillside shall be my home...." At the same time, de Becque says to himself, " This is what I have been waiting for....Whoever thought a fresh smiling girl like this would climb up my hill?...."²¹ Through the couple's "Twin Soliloquies," Hammerstein transmits their feelings of apprehension and future promise in their romance. Nellie sings:

²¹ Michener: 130

Wonder how I'd feel,
Living on a hillside,
Looking on an ocean,
Beautiful and still.

For Emile, Hammerstein writes:

This is what I need,
This is what I've longed for,
Someone young and smiling
Climbing up my hill!

Rodgers composed a slow and hesitant melody, reflective of the lyrics, which picks up as the characters reveal their nervousness. The song builds to an orchestral climax showing that their romance is still unresolved and unspoken and giving De Becque the incentive to make his feelings known.

Sensing that Nellie's feelings are similar to his own, De Becque sings "Some Enchanted Evening," the song that comes to symbolise their relationship and serves as a linking romantic theme. It is musically reprised at the end of Act I when Nellie flees after meeting De Becque's Polynesian children and, at the end of the show when the couple are reunited. The lyrics provide the audience with a glimpse of the couple's first meeting. They "saw each other across a crowded room, and somehow they knew" that they would end up together, even though their romance defies logic. They come from two different backgrounds. However, their instincts tell them that their love will overcome all

obstacles in their path.

Rodgers created a dramatic melody with short phrases, for "Some Enchanted Evening," which allowed Pinza to utilise his now restricted vocal range and convey the romantic nature of his French planter. The melody goes neither too high or too low and develops De Becque as a rather imposing man, with a soft heart.

After realising that she really does not know De Becque very well, thanks to her superior officers' enquiries and a letter from her mother in Arkansas, Nellie decides to end her romance. In "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair," Nellie sings how she is going to "rub him outa the roll call and drum him outa [her] dreams." This song was inspired by Martin, who had recently cut her hair short. While she was washing her hair one day, she thought that it would be fun to have Nellie wash hers onstage. She told her husband her idea, and he responded that she should not tell Rodgers and Hammerstein, or they would make her do it. Martin kept this notion to herself, but the same cannot be said of her husband. Needless to say, Martin ended up washing her hair onstage 1,886 times.²²

During "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Outa My Hair, " Nellie makes a superficial attempt to convince herself that her romance is over. She thinks she has succeeded until De Becque, who is confused after overhearing the song, questions Nellie about it.

²² Fordin: 268

She cannot admit that she is thinking of ending their relationship. She uses the embarrassing situation to get to know De Becque better. After their discussion, she realises that she is truly in love with the Frenchman and accepts his proposal.

After a brief reprise of "Some Enchanted Evening," Nellie is left alone to ponder her happy frame of mind. In "I'm In Love With A Wonderful Guy," Hammerstein shows how a somewhat naive girl reacts to being truly in love with someone. The song acts as a release: Nellie no longer has to harbour any doubts about her relationship. She is in love and is not ashamed to admit it. To enhance the audience's view of Nellie as a typical American girl, Hammerstein has her describe herself as being "corny as Kansas in August" and "normal as blueberry pie." Though Nellie was experiencing the exotic South Pacific miles away from Little Rock, she could never leave its simplicity and her all-American values behind.

The romance progresses nicely until Nellie is confronted with the fact that De Becque has had a relationship with a woman of colour, evidenced by his children. Though in love, Nellie cannot suppress her prejudices that easily. She flees from De Becque.

De Becque does not understand how people have minds so closed. After Nellie officially tells her planter that she cannot marry him, Michener writes that "he had tears in his eyes."²³ He

²³ Michener: 140

did not know how he was going to live without his love. In "This Nearly Was Mine," Hammerstein explains the heartache that de Becque feels. He tells how he had the girl of his dreams, but "This promise of Paradise, this *nearly* was mine." He was close to having his dreams fulfilled, but "now [he's] alone, still dreaming of Paradise." The team realised that they could use this song to reiterate de Becque's motivation for going on the mission with Cable.²⁴ Rodgers had found a melancholy waltz in his reserves that captured the loss that motivates De Becque to risk his life.

The relationship between this unlikely couple, though developing quickly, shows an underlying sense of maturity. Whereas Liat and Cable's relationship is based on purely physical attraction, Nellie and De Becque take the time to get to know each other. Nellie and De Becque are comfortable with each other, in spite of their differences. Since they took the time to get to know each other - the show opens with the initial stage of their mutual attraction having passed - Nellie is able to overcome her narrow, provincial background and take over the care of De Becque's children when she is unsure about his safety. When he returns from his mission, he finds Nellie ready to embark on a life together.

While the central plot of *South Pacific* evolved principally from "Our Heroine," the subplot found its basis in two other

²⁴ Fordin: 279

Michener stories. "A Boar's Tooth" provided a characterisation for Luther Billis. "Fo' Dolla" furnished the tragic story of Liat and Cable. Instead of expanding this story - after all it was the original basis for the musical - Rodgers and Hammerstein compacted it for a quick resolution. The audience witnesses Nellie's struggle to overcome her background, despite initial misgivings. Cable finds an intense, romantic love, but sacrifices it to his prejudice. When Mary mentions that he and Liat will have beautiful babies, Joe does not hesitate to say he cannot marry the girl. He does not mentally struggle over this decision. Once the decision is made, he goes off on the mission with De Becque and dies. Though tragic, this can be seen as one of Hammerstein's bittersweet endings in that prejudice is neither easily transcended, nor condoned.

When Hammerstein adapted literature into musicals, he took negative situations in the base material and put a positive spin on them in the stage version. He did this in *Oklahoma!*, when he allowed the hero, Curly, to spend his wedding night with his bride, even though he had accidentally killed a man. The base material for the musical, *Green Grow the Lilacs*, called for Curly to be jailed. Hammerstein continued to alter the tone of the source material with his work in *South Pacific*, especially in relation to the seabees. Life in the South Pacific was lonely for enlisted men.

In "Our Heroine," Michener describes how there were "thousands of men for every white woman." With this disproportion, "vague and terrible things would occur."²⁵ Michener detailed attacks on nurses by enlisted men. He believed that "out [in the South Pacific] good people seem to get better and bad people get worse." In "Fo' Dolla'," Michener goes on to describe how "...sensible men shoved back into unassailable corners of their souls thoughts that otherwise would have surged and wracked them."²⁶ The enlisted men that Michener observed during the war became introspective and rarely commiserated with their fellow soldier. The Hammerstein view of enlisted men was much rosier. He eliminated the attacks on the nurses and the self-imposed censorship. He conveyed the frustration and loneliness of the men in the humorous number, "There is Nothing Like a Dame." Hammerstein begins by listing the things that these men are privileged to have during this time of war. They have "sunlight on the sand and moonlight on the sea." They even receive "letters doused wit' poifume," yet the men are miserable because they "ain't got dames." The only females on the island are the nurses who are strictly off-limits to the enlisted men. This fact causes the men to feel "lonely" and "blue." This song of commiserating shows the audience how frustrating it can be to be isolated on a

²⁵ Michener: 121

²⁶ *Ibid*: 177

South Pacific island. These men will not be able to physically relieve their sexual frustrations, so they sing to release their pent up anxiety. The only outlet for them to possibly have a relationship with a woman is the island of Bali Ha'i, where the French planters placed their daughters to protect them from the lustful servicemen. This too is off-limits. Only officers can requisition a boat to go to the island.

Bali Ha'i is an integral part of *South Pacific*. It represents the inherent mystery of the islands, as well as forbidden pleasures to the enlisted men. The island serves as a magnet to officers, too. When Bloody Mary describes its mystical powers in the song "Bali Ha'i," Cable finds himself inexplicably drawn to the island.

Michener describes Bali Ha'i as "a jewel of the vast ocean. It was small...It had majestic cliffs facing the open sea. It had a jagged hill to give it character. It was green like something ever youthful...Like most lovely things, one had to seek it out and even to know what one was seeking before it could be found."²⁷ After reading Michener's description of the island both Rodgers and Hammerstein knew they wanted to include a song about it, with a melody that would describe its curious mystique. Bali Ha'i represents an ideal, peaceful world, where people's hopes and dreams easily comes true. Hammerstein, the eternal optimist,

²⁷ Michener: 179

incorporates this belief by saying that on Bali Ha'i:

Your own special hopes,
Your own special dreams
Bloom on de hillside
And shine in de streams.

When Rodgers saw the completed lyric, he wrote the song in five minutes.²⁸ Upon hearing the beauty of this completed melody, the set designer, Jo Mielziner, drew his vision of the island. He originally drew the island as a strict recreation of Michener's description, but he felt that his rendering did not lend itself to the inherent mystery created by Rodgers and Hammerstein. He decided to blur the top of the jagged hill to create a level of clouds to shroud its summit in mist. This utterly captured the spirit of "Bali Ha'i," so much so, that Hammerstein added an extra verse. He wrote how the island's "head stuck out from a low-flying cloud."²⁹ This team effort helped to make "Bali Ha'i" a hauntingly suggestive number.

"Bali Ha'i" encompassed the spirit of *South Pacific*. It showed how beauty helped to create optimism in war-scarred men. The first three notes of the song became a recurring musical theme throughout the show, beginning with the overture. From the start, the audience knows that *South Pacific* will draw it into a magical, exotic world.

²⁸ Rodgers: 262

²⁹ Fordin: 268

When Cable is unsuccessful in his first attempt to get De Becque to go on the mission, he finds himself with some free time. He cannot resist the pull of Bali Ha'i, so he and Billis venture to the island. Billis, an enlisted man, wants to see the Boar's Tooth ceremony, as well as the native girls that accompany it. He thinks this is his chance to relieve some of his frustration. Cable remains uncertain as to why the island calls to him. Upon arriving at the island, Mary sees to it that he finds out.

Mary takes Cable to her hut and introduces him to her daughter, Liat. Liat is the reason Joe has been encouraged to come to Bali Ha'i. He is immediately drawn to her, and they consummate their improbable relationship. Cable finds himself amazed at the depth of his feelings for Liat. In "Younger Than Springtime," Hammerstein captures the elation and intense physical love Cable feels when he is with his new love. Cable sings how when he touches her hand "[his] arms grow strong." Rodgers had originally written the tune for *Allegro*, but "My Wife," as it was then entitled, was aborted from the show. Rodgers had forgotten about the melody, until his family brought it up during a visit by Hammerstein. The duo agreed that the melody evoked the wonder of first love, so the lyrics were rewritten to create "Younger Than Springtime."³⁰ Unlike "Some Enchanted Evening," "Younger Than Springtime" is written in long,

³⁰ Rodgers: 261

sweeping phrases accentuating the ardent physical elation of Cable. While De Becque's feelings were intense, they were essentially domestic - based on genial companionship - as well as sexual attraction. Cable's feelings are unfamiliar and not founded on anything but pleasure, thus explaining why his ballad is more lyrical, than dramatic.

Hammerstein continued to use song to reveal the childlike quality of the romance between Liat and Cable. Though they are immediately intimate, the rest of their relationship is quite infantile. In "Happy Talk," Mary sings "if you don't have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true." Singing in Pidgin English, Mary tells of the happy, carefree life Cable will have if he remains on the island and marries Liat. Most native mothers at this time would rather their daughters became G.I. brides and returned to America. Mary, as the champion of Bali Ha'i and its wonders, feels that Cable and Liat are best left to revel in their pleasures. Perhaps she knows that their relationship could not be sustained in the outside world. During the song, the two lovers maintain a childlike state of mind. They think of no other person when they are together. "Happy Talk" captures this innocent world that is shattered when Cable confesses that he could never marry Liat.

According to Mordden, to Rodgers and Hammerstein the

south Pacific represents “a moral testing ground that challenges the bourgeois American prejudices.”³¹ During the show, both Cable and Nellie must face their prejudices. While Nellie originally feels she cannot marry De Becque because he once loved a woman of another colour, in the end, she conquers her revulsion and succumbs to love. Cable, however, cannot disregard his upbringing. As an educated, upper middle class white man, he could never ignore propriety and marry the girl he loves. He knows that it is morally not right, but he still finds it difficult to change his ways. In “Carefully Taught,” Joe tries to explain to De Becque how racism is not a natural tendency, but a taught one. He sings how “you’ve got to be taught to be afraid of people...whose skin is a different shade.”

“Carefully Taught”’s subject matter sparked controversy, even though the song was not written as social commentary. Rodgers and Hammerstein believed they needed a song allowing a frustrated Cable to denounce the upbringing that prevents his relationship with Liat, while at the same time staying under its influence³² Nellie had already spurned her upbringing in Act I: Scene 8 by shouting how “[life in the South Pacific is] all so different from LITTLE ROCK!” At this time in American history, race relations were a major point of contention with schools and

³¹ Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*: 114

³² Rodgers: 261

public places still segregated. Rodgers and Hammerstein knew that this was morally unjust, and "Carefully Taught," though not officially a message song, conveyed their beliefs. Many critics felt that a serious song like this had no place in a romantic show,³³ and during the show's tour, some Southern states called for the number to be dropped altogether. In spite of all the disagreement about the song, it remained a vital part of the show in every performance. Rodgers and Hammerstein explained a vital part of Cable's character and, by defining its sources, kept the racism theme in the foreground without indulging in simple 'protest.' Cable, who let his prejudice ruin his happiness, dies on his mission with De Becque, thus paying the ultimate price for this mistake.

In addition to conveying a serious message, *South Pacific* went against other traditions that Rodgers and Hammerstein had developed in their past work. Generally, a character would never have two songs in a row. Usually, the order of songs altered between the different characters and song styles. For instance, a male solo is followed by a female solo that is followed by a duet which is followed by a choral number. In *South Pacific*, the partners varied this and gave Nellie "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair," almost immediately followed by "I'm In Love With A Wonderful Guy."

³³ Bordman: 568

With *South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein created their first diegetic, show-within-a-show, number. At the Thanksgiving show, Nellie wears a sailor outfit and sings of the wonders of her “Honey Bun,” played by Billis dressed as a Polynesian lady. A picture of Martin as a young girl in a baggy men’s sailor shirt with an equally big necktie inspired the song. Joshua Logan saw this picture that had been given to Hammerstein and commented that Martin had “come a long way, but [she] was still a baggy-pants comedian at heart.”³⁴ All of the other songs in the show either advance the plot or provide characterisation. With “Honey Bun,” Rodgers and Hammerstein proved they could write a comic, novelty number, in addition to those artistically integrated into the plot.

Another modification from their earlier shows was the show’s lack of choreography. Since *South Pacific* was a show set in the wartime south Pacific, big production numbers or ballets were unnecessary and would look out of place. Instead of bringing in a professional choreographer, director Josh Logan added it to his duties. Logan proved to be an expert at coordinating simple numbers that looked as if they were spontaneous. Besides choreographing numbers, Logan devised a means of changing scenes by dissolving one into the next. As a group left the stage, a new group entered, while at the same time any pertinent props

³⁴ Fordin: 269

were brought in.³⁵ This allowed the show to run smoothly with no unnecessary blackouts to take away from the story. This was especially beneficial for a show comprised of various strands.

South Pacific held its pre-Broadway try-out in New Haven, Connecticut. The response from the public was overwhelmingly positive. Only minor changes were made during this time. "I'm In Love With a Wonderful Guy" was restaged, and the text was trimmed. De Becque's second act solo became "This Nearly Was Mine," and two songs were eliminated.^b These changes made, the show proceeded to Broadway.³⁶

For the first time in their careers, Rodgers and Hammerstein were sure that they had a hit. When *South Pacific* opened on Broadway on April 7, 1949, it was an instant success. With *South Pacific*, the duo finally won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. The committee gave the award to Logan, Hammerstein, and Rodgers, the first composer ever to be included. The Pulitzer committee gave the duo a Special Citation for their work in *Oklahoma*. They deserved the prize, as they had put together two highly acceptable visions of Americans at home and abroad, without entirely airbrushing away the occasional misfit and deficiency. As well as power, there was honesty in their work that appealed to a mass audience without pandering to them.

³⁵ Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*: 118

³⁶*Ibid.*: 117-8

With this adaptation of *Tales of the South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein created yet another successful musical reflecting their essentially optimistic view of the world. They took these gritty tales of life in wartime and created an artificial reality, which nonetheless resembled that basic grittiness. Michener details the despair and loneliness of the disillusioned soldiers and weary natives in the south Pacific, despite their beautiful surroundings. They have no relief from the monotony. In Michener, the characters become introspective. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*, unlike Michener's, has the capacity for magic and romance, though ordinary needs, frustrations, and anxieties are not forgotten. The partners conveyed how the exotic nature of the surroundings made people openly confront their feelings, instead of turning inside themselves. They expanded the sense of fun that played only a minor role in Michener. That is one of the reasons that Rodgers and Hammerstein were a successful partnership. They could take literary material full of serious overtones, keep a sense of those overtones, and adapt them into diverting, often humorous pieces of musical theatre.

South Pacific helped the team build momentum for their domination of the musical in the 1950s. They continued to tackle 'difficult' material with their next project, *The King and I*, based on Margaret Landon's *Anna and the King of Siam*, which

concerned the story of a Western woman battling for basic human dignity and against unthinking male domination in the Far East. Rodgers and Hammerstein could find good in any situation. They had the ability to take on controversial issues, while at the same time not alienating their public. They could adapt serious pieces of literature, whether it be plays, short stories, or novels, into artistic musical plays that have endured through the years - unlike some of their base materials - thus demonstrating that they were building to last.

Notes

- a: Though the song was discarded from the show, Hammerstein liked the phrase "bright canary yellow" so much that he incorporated it into the lyrics of "A Cockeyed Optimist."
- b: These two numbers were "Loneliness of Evening" and "My Girl Back Home," the latter of which was reinstated for the *South Pacific* movie directed by Josh Logan.

Chapter 4

The vitality of the New York scene has always provided fodder for the world's imagination. Every evening Times Square, the virtual heart of Broadway^a, comes to life. Hucksters take advantage of green tourists; gamblers check their horses; and, casual observers flood in to observe the scene. One observer, in particular, focused his literary efforts on this eclectic piece of Americana. This man, Damon Runyon, became synonymous with the jargon and colourful characters of the Broadway world.

Runyon, a native Kansan, did not first experience New York until he was 26 years old. The Pueblo, Colorado newspaper on which he worked sent him to the city to cover a convention.¹ In New York, he found his home.

Runyon began his New York writing career as a sportswriter for the *American*, a daily paper. He proved a unique analyst of sports such as baseball and boxing. Instead of chronicling the action play-by-play as did his peers in the press box, Runyon chose human interest angles to portray the events. He often arrived early at venues to discover the proper aspect for his day's contribution. While working at the *American*, Runyon met Aloysius "Tad" Dorgan, a sportswriter with a penchant for the vernacular of the boxing world and the unsavoury types that

¹ The Guys and Dolls Book: 8

surrounded it. Until meeting Dorgan, Runyon considered himself to be an amateur expert on the language of New York. Now, with Dorgan's influence, Runyon became the vernacular's most recognised proponent.²

Runyon loved action, and with his inquisitive nature, he always found himself in the middle of it. He knew where to look for stories. By spending time at such notorious underworld hangouts as Lindy's amongst the seamier side of New York, Runyon was privy to occurrences and acquaintances that few experienced. For instance, Runyon was among the few journalists of the time that could claim Al Capone as a friend.

This knack for information benefited his newspaper career but not his pocketbook, though he was one of the higher paid journalists in New York. He soon began transforming his observations into works of fiction that romanticised the Broadway scene for the world. When he turned to professional fiction writing in order to support himself and his estranged wife, the "Demon," as he was known in writing circles, chose to write his Broadway tales in the jargon of the locale. Runyon's characters were reminiscent of his acquaintances. All were worldly-wise, yet simple. The author conveyed their conversations and his commentary in the present tense with no use of contractions.

² Clark: 45

This stylised yet simple syntax was colourful and immediately recognisable. Though Runyon's characters lived in the hustle and bustle of New York, they were laid-back individuals. They did not speak in the contracted form because they did not need to. They controlled their own world and set their own pace. Runyon created thugs with their own vocabulary. Only in the world of small time gamblers and horseplayers could a 'Betsy' be a gun and a 'G note' a \$1000 bill. This colourful use of the language of Broadway became synonymous with Runyon. His stories inspired movies, and in 1950, the musical *Guys and Dolls*, the name taken from Runyon's first collection of Broadway tales.

The notion to bring Runyon's Broadway to the musical stage belonged to Ernest Martin, a former television executive, and Cy Feuer, the former head of Republic Pictures' music department.³ They decided on Runyon's story, "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown." But the translation of Runyon's story to the stage was not to be easy. Martin and Feuer had secured Frank Loesser to write the lyrics and music, but they approached seven librettists before deciding that Jo Swerling, a Hollywood script-writer, would write the libretto.

Martin and Feuer's original desire for *Guys and Dolls* was to emulate *South Pacific*, but only, it would seem, up to a point.⁴

³ Lerner, *The Musical Theatre*: 178

⁴ Burrows: 143

That remarkably successful show had re-proportioned the conventional serious couple/comedic couple structure, yet the plot of "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" was to be developed around a serious couple, to which, in good old-fashioned style, a comedic couple would be added. The producers believed that the potential of *Guys and Dolls* lay in a rerun of *South Pacific's* ill-assorted love affair. Swerling constructed his libretto in this essentially romantic manner, and Loesser composed songs around it.

Upon seeing Swerling's finished first act, Martin and Feuer realised that they had changed their minds as to the show's concept. They were now looking to make *Guys and Dolls* a musical comedy, though they had raised money for the project with the original first act and Loesser's songs.⁵ Luckily, the songs proved to be the true attraction for the backers.

Swerling's libretto had not emphasised comedy, and comedy was now to be central. Loesser agreed with the producers' view that the current libretto was unsatisfactory, though he continued to interweave his score around it. He demanded that it be rewritten to suit his music.⁶ Martin and Feuer convinced Abe Burrows, a radio scriptwriter and old friend whom they had approached originally for the project, to take over from Swerling.

⁵ Burrows: 144

⁶ Mordden, *Broadway Babies*: 230

Swerling's name remained on the final product due to contractual obligations.⁷

By the time Burrows started the project, Loesser had completed the score around the rejected draft. Burrows decided to utilise Loesser's songs to guide his libretto. He wrote scenes that fused into these songs to create a "very stylised fable of Broadway."⁸ Burrows counted himself a Runyon fan. His desire for the libretto was to make it as true to Runyon as possible. He included characters from other Runyon stories, and he attempted to emulate the speech of Runyon's low-lives. Before Burrows became associated with *Guys and Dolls*, he met Runyon at The Stork Club. At this meeting, Runyon expressed admiration for Burrows' use of the vernacular on his radio show.⁹ With his work on this musical, Burrows did his best to repay the compliment by mimicking the master of the jargon. Along with Loesser, Burrows helped create a highly Runyonesque atmosphere.

"The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" relates the story of gambler Obediah "Sky" Masterson, and his scheme to win mission worker, Sarah Brown. Runyon spins the tale in his usual manner - strictly written in historic present tense with subtle nuances that distance us from the material even as they reflect the

⁷ Green, S., *World of Musical Comedy*: 266

⁸ Hirschak: 115

⁹ Burrows: 138

language of New York's streetwise citizens in a highly stylised way.¹⁰

Runyon spent time at the Metropole Bar with the sports editor of the Morning Telegraph, Bat Masterson. Runyon truly admired Masterson. His fearlessness and tenacity served as inspiration for "Sky" Masterson. Runyon worked to mimic his tone in all of his writings.¹¹ It was at this bar that Runyon first encountered many of the characters that added spice to his stories, for the Metropole provided refuge for bookies and gamblers and allowed Runyon an opportunity to note their eccentric speech patterns.

Abba Dabba Berman, a numbers racketeer, was another acquaintance of Runyon's who helped inspire the author. From Berman, Runyon learned that there were no sure things.¹² He conveyed this fact in "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" in the lesson that Sky's father imparts to him concerning a man 'with a pack of cards with an unbroken seal and a jack of spades that shoots cider. Sky's father tells him not to bet with this man because he will get an ear full of cider if he does. The author felt that his own father, a noted rascal, would have shared a similar yarn, if given the chance. Runyon portrays Sky as

¹⁰ Howell: liner notes

¹¹ Clark: 45-46

¹² *Ibid*: 179

cautious, like the author himself. Both were detached observers who floated from one location to the next in search of action. Sky accepts an incautious bet, and ends up romantically involved. Though Runyon was curious, he remained suspicious of other people. He preferred to be an observer rather than participant.

In order to expand this short story into *Guys and Dolls*, Burrows refined the plot by making minor additions and enlarging existing details. They decided to develop two main couples. In addition to Sky and Sarah, the duo took Nathan Detroit, the gambler with the crap game where Sarah wins Sky in the story, and provided him with Miss Adelaide, a nightclub performer with a perennial cold. For pure comedy, they established that Nathan and Adelaide had been engaged for fourteen years. Instead of having a true subplot, they utilised the precedent established by *South Pacific* and had two balanced main themes containing both comedic and dramatic moments, with plentiful support from colourful minor characters taken straight from Runyon's story.

Whereas the creation of the Rodgers and Hammerstein shows already discussed had been a matter of speeding up, or boiling down, the original material, in *Guys and Dolls* the opposite was the case. "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" provided no more than a compact story with a strongly-defined atmosphere, which

needed to be built up into a large-scale structure which preserved the essential Runyonesque tone. The result was certainly 'integrated' in its way; but the diversity of characterisation and variety of situation led to the end-product depending less on the sense of an ongoing 'line' than on an experience of rich individual set-pieces in both dialogue and music. The effect is that of a cornucopia. Nathan and Adelaide provide a comedic, yet stable thread that ties the show together, while allowing for a parallel development in the storyline of Sky and Sarah. Within these continuities, the characteristic pleasures are those of intensely-experienced individual scenes and exchanges. Some detailed scrutiny of this diversity is therefore necessary, along with an examination of how well the all-important tone is sustained.

The exposition of the two romances provides a significant part of the musical. The audience witnesses Sarah and Sky's relationship from start to finish, while it is told all it needs to know about the ongoing relationship between Nathan and Adelaide.

The plots of both "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" and *Guys and Dolls* revolve around the relationship of Sky Masterson and Sister Sarah Brown. Though this thread binds the original work to its adaptation, the handling of the romance is much different.

In "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," Sky sees Sister Sarah on the street and is "a goner." He is immediately attracted to her and her "one-hundred- percent eyes." He begins monitoring the Save-A-Soul Mission to find that it is usually free of sinners. He spends his time either donating money to the mission or thinking of ways to fill it. When he is observing Nathan Detroit's crap game, a fellow gambler states that he "cannot win a bet to save [his] soul." This inspires Sky to bet his peers' money against their souls. If he wins, they join Sarah's mission. If he loses, he pays them cash. Sky's plan is not successful, as one of his fellow risk-takers has "special" dice. Before Sky can use the gun in his pocket to remedy the dice situation, Sarah interrupts the game. Having heard about Sky's plan to fill her mission, she disrupts the game, putting a stop to this immoral way of converting souls. She turns the tables on Sky and bets him money against *his* soul. Sky takes the bet, and hands Sarah the "special" dice. Sarah thus wins Sky's soul to accompany his heart, which she already has. She also, inadvertently, prevents Sky from murdering his associate.

In "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," Runyon builds the plot to its logical conclusion. Sky is smitten by Sarah at first glance. Sarah is friendly towards Sky until she finds out that he is a gambler. Her chilly behaviour upsets Sky but does not put her out of his mind. When Sarah disrupts the crap game, her

affection for Sky, though masked in anger, becomes apparent. Thus, Runyon develops the romance between the mission doll and the gambler in the traditional boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-gets-girl fashion.

The origins of Sky's affection toward Sarah are not as straightforward in *Guys and Dolls*.

The experienced theatregoer of the time knew that standard musical comedies had two couples, one for the lead romantic plot, another for the comedic subplot. The audience is introduced to Nathan and Adelaide, the comedic couple, in Act I: Scene 1. It is also separately introduced to Sarah Brown and Sky Masterson as disparate ingredients in this diverse world of Broadway. It is not until the very end of Act I: Scene 1 that any connection between Sarah and Sky is made. Nathan, in an effort to gain the \$1000 that he needs for his crap game, bets Sky that he cannot take a certain doll to Havana. Nathan's designating Sarah is the first indication that she and Sky are to be the romantic couple, though the treatment of the 'romance' promises to be that of intrigue, or even of comedy. Sky does not immediately fall for Sarah. Instead, he feels that she will be a supreme challenge.

Their first meeting occurs in Act I: Scene 2, at the Save-A-Soul Mission. Sky puts on his humblest persona to convince

Sarah and her uncle that he has reformed. Sarah treats Sky as if he were just another gambler. No obvious attraction is evident at the start.

When Uncle Arvide leaves the pair alone, Sky begins his subtle attempt to convince Sarah to go to Havana with him. He approaches this task from every angle. He begins by asking general questions about herself. Has she ever gone anywhere without her uncle? Has she ever wanted to travel? Her affirmative replies encourage Sky to carry on with his plan. He tells Sarah that he needs “private lessons” over dinner to conquer his sin. On receiving a negative response, he decides to play his trump card. Noticing a biblical quote mistakenly labelled as being from Proverbs instead of Isaiah, Sky shows his knowledge by bringing this fact to Sarah’s attention. The irony of this situation is not lost on Sarah. Instead of believing him, she checks in the “Good Book” to find that the gambler is correct. He explains by telling her that he and the Gideon Bible have been in every hotel room in the country.

Sarah begins to realise that Sky is too smooth to be at the mission of his own free will. After Sarah poses a few pointed questions to the gambler, Sky decides to try another option. Having noticed that the mission is perennially unsuccessful at attracting sinners, he, in effect, bets Sarah that he will fill her

mission for the big prayer meeting, if she agrees to go to dinner with him. This tactic reflects Sky's plans to fill the mission from the original story. Sarah is still not receptive to the dinner idea. Sky, not used to being turned down, wonders if Sarah simply hates men. She tells him that she does not hate anyone. Curious, Sky wonders what kind of guy Sarah prefers. Her specific preference is that he not be a gambler. In "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," Runyon made Sarah the relative of gamblers who were ruined by their addiction.¹³ She has personal reasons for not liking gamblers, though this point is never raised in the musical. Her conviction is based on principle, a conveniently abstract thing.

Sarah and Sky then begin their first song together, "I'll Know." Sarah sings how her man will have "strong moral fibre" and "wisdom in his head." Her description is mocked by Sky as being too much like a "Scarsdale Galahad." He does not feel that this kind of perfection exists. She continues with her description, only to be stopped by Sky. He is frustrated. Could it be that he is upset that she sings of a man opposite in attributes to himself? He remains true to his gambler's heart by singing that he will leave his romance to "chance and chemistry." Despite their differences, the couple agree that they will know when their

¹³ Runyon:18

“love comes along.” To further lure Sarah and help him win his bet, Sky passionately kisses her. A confusingly responsive Sarah appears mesmerised. This spell is broken when she slaps Sky, who leaves but vows to return so she “can take a crack at [his] other cheek”. Sarah then reiterates that her romance will not be “fly-by-night,”^b though the audience by now realises that she is hardly in any position to hold forth about emotions. Sarah sings that “she’ll know” when she is in love, because the man will be a pure, ideal man. However, she does not recognise that she is in love with Sky, the opposite of all she describes. By establishing this sense of irony from the start of the Sky/Sarah relationship, Loesser followed Runyon’s love of this literary mode. Runyon perfected his ironic nature in his Broadway tales, his mastery coming from his observations of the chaotic worlds of his fellow sportswriters and the underworld of New York.¹⁴ Irony is a major component of the writer’s stories. Loesser and his librettists included ironic shades in *Guys and Dolls*, but they are not as pervasive as Runyon’s.

Sky begins following the mission band, much to Sarah’s chagrin. Upon returning to the mission one day, they find General Cartwright, head of Save-A-Soul Mission, awaiting their return. She says that she must close the mission. Of course, Sky

¹⁴ Clark: 49

overhears this and subtly reminds Sarah of his marker. Sarah, in desperation, tells the General that she can guarantee “one dozen genuine sinners” at the next prayer meeting, knowing that she has to join Sky for dinner in Cuba.

After arriving in Havana, Sarah plays tourist. When they have seen the various attractions, they stop for a drink. Sky orders “Dulce de Leches”, milkshakes with Bacardi, for both of them. Sarah, a novice drinker, finds that she enjoys this added ingredient, though she does not fully comprehend what it is, and proceeds to have many of the milkshakes. She soon is quite drunk, much to the amusement of Sky, who has never seen her with her guard down. A sexy Cuban dancer takes Sky to the dance floor, which causes Sarah to find her own partner for dancing. Sarah, who by this time has reached emotional clarity due to the alcohol, allows her jealousy to escalate into a bar fight from which she and Sky escape. Still tipsy and free of her inhibitions, she kisses Sky. Concerned about his charge, he asks her if she is all right. Sarah responds by singing the comical, “If I Were a Bell,” in which she sings that “if she were a duck, she’d quack” or “if she were a bell, she’d ring.” Loesser reflects her naiveté with regard to romance and alcohol by using childlike metaphors such as these. She also sings of the “chemistry lesson [she’s] learning,” a direct message to Sky that she has had a

change of heart. Sky observes her erratic behaviour and finds it alarmingly amusing.

When Sarah tells him that she does not want to leave, he realises that he must confess the reason that she is there in the first place. He wants to be a gentleman, in the honour-among-thieves vein. His confession provokes Sarah's anger. He wants to do what is best for her, even though, at that moment, that is the furthest thing from what she wants. Sky genuinely cares what happens to her, thus revealing the true depth of his feelings for her.

Upon returning to New York, the now mellow couple observe the sights and sounds of the early morning. In "My Time of Day," Sky tells how "his time of day is the dark time, a couple of deals before dawn." Loesser, who also considered the night to be his time, uses chromatics to evoke the darker tone that demonstrates Sky's soul. During this song, Sky admits that Sarah is "the only doll [he's] ever wanted to share [his private time] with." He then confesses his most intimate secret - his name, Obediah - to the woman he loves. The chromatics lead into the more orthodox structure of "I've Never Been in Love Before,"¹⁵ the show's requisite love song. The couple sing of how "strange and strong" their new love is. However, the romantic mood is

¹⁵ Swain: 158

shattered in a comedic way when it turns out that Nathan's crap game was operating in the mission while Sarah was in Havana, and the mission band, at Sky's suggestion, was out on an all-night crusade. Though Sky had nothing to do with the game's location, he knows he must persuade Sarah of his innocence. She does not believe him.

While Sarah and Sky's relationship is developing, Nathan and Adelaide's lives and romance are experiencing difficulty. Nathan needs \$1000 to secure a location for his crap game. "The Oldest Established Permanent Floating Crap Game in New York" details the importance of his game in the minds of his fellow gamblers. In the style of an old college alma matter song with bits of barbershop quartet harmony, the gamblers describe a worried Nathan Detroit and his crap game. They sing how Nathan can "arrange that you go broke in quiet and peace." This song found its origins in a Runyon account of his experience taking a friend throughout New York on a scavenger hunt for a crap game.¹⁶ By using block-singing and driving rhythms, Loesser utilised "The Oldest Established ..." to detail the kind of pressure that makes Nathan bet Sky \$1000.

Meanwhile, Adelaide thinks that Nathan has given up his crap game. In Act I: Scene 4, after one of her performances,

¹⁶ Green, B. *Let's Face the Music*: 149

Nathan comes to Adelaide's dressing room to find her reading a book that her doctor gave her to help her understand her cold. Originally, Adelaide was intended to be a stripper who catches cold for the obvious reason.¹⁷ Loesser decided that was too risqué for the times and made her a nightclub performer who believes that her cold is "on account of [her] dancing with hardly any clothes on." Her doctor, however, feels that her cold is due to her emotional frustration. Nathan tries to calm her worries by telling her that they will get married - eventually. This does not appease Adelaide, because her mother believes that they are already married. This makes Nathan nervous. He tells her that maybe they are not ready to be married. Though Adelaide has it all planned, Nathan is wary of the necessary blood test. He mentions that the city has already "closed [his] crap game" and now they want to "open [his] veins." This quip reminds his fiancée of the game, but Nathan says that he has given it up. This is dispelled when a fellow performer berates Nathan because her date cancelled due to the crap game. This angers Adelaide, who no longer believes what Nathan tells her. (Their relationship continues, however, because the couple essentially cannot live without each other. They have been engaged for fourteen years and have forgiven many faults throughout that time. Thus, in

¹⁷ Green, S., *World of Musical Comedy*: 266

some ways they are already married.) After his departure, Loesser provides her an outlet to sing of her misery. In "Adelaide's Lament," she reads the manual explaining that "...from waiting around for that plain little band of gold, a person can develop a cold." She complains that every time they try to get married his gambling gets in the way. In the world of Damon Runyon, dolls often found themselves second to their gamblers' profession. Runyon, though not a gambler, often spent more time gaining information for stories than with his family.

Nathan's cronies know that Adelaide is mad at their boss. When they cannot find him, they realise that he is probably trying to get back in her good graces. These gamblers, Benny Southstreet and Nicely-Nicely Johnson, feel that they can resist the "worldwide weakness" of love. In the show's title number, "Guys and Dolls," they sing of the ancient problem befalling men - women. Loesser, staying true to the gambler lingo, has the duo explain their peers', in this case Nathan's, odd behaviour by singing that "it's a probable twelve to seven that the guy's only doing it for some doll."

In order to explain why a group of men all have red carnations in their lapels and to prevent the police from finding out about the crap game, Nathan's friends tell Lieutenant Brannigan that they are throwing him a bachelor dinner. A

surprised Adelaide happens to overhear this lie, but Nathan decides to acquiesce. Nathan and Adelaide are to elope.

At the beginning of Act II, Sky and Sarah are still apart, and Nathan and Adelaide are still together. On the night of the elopement, Nicely-Nicely Johnson is sent to tell Adelaide that Nathan will not be eloping. His crap game has run over time. Sky intercepts this message and conveys it to her himself. He tells her that it is “no good” when “dolls get mixed up with guys like [him and Nathan].” He tells her he is leaving for Las Vegas, but before he goes he searches for Nathan. She mopes by singing her “Second Lament.”

Meanwhile, Sarah is trying to push Sky out of her head by focusing on the prayer meeting. Her uncle, Arvide, notices her distraction. He knew from the beginning that Sky came to the mission only to pick up Sarah. However, he was surprised that she was “stuck on him.” Though she is adamant that her love “will not be a gambler,” Sarah listens as Arvide urges her to follow her heart in “More I Cannot Wish You.” He wishes that she “find [her] true love” and “the strong arms to carry [her] away.” This scene is interrupted by Sky, who comes to tell them that he cannot fulfil his end of the bet. Sarah feels that they are even, since the mission was full of sinners the night they went to Havana. Appealing to the gambler’s sense of honour, Arvide tells

Sky that he will “tell the whole town [that he is] a welcher” if he does not pay off his marker. He knows that Sky needs a reason to return to the mission.

Nicely-Nicely Johnson takes Sky to the sewer, the only location Nathan could find to continue his crap game. At this point in the musical, the plot returns to the situation found in “The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown.” Sky decides to roll his fellow gamblers for their souls. He pays cash, if he loses. They go to the prayer meeting, if he wins. Sky knows that he has a lot riding on this roll of the dice. He knows that if he fills the mission, Sarah will think better of him. He sings “Luck Be A Lady” as his prayer to fortune. Loesser has Sky asking luck to be a lady by describing what a lady will not do. Sky sings that “a lady doesn’t wander all over the room...or...flirt with strangers.” He prays that luck will be with him this one time because he has “bet his life on this roll.” With this song, Loesser covered a subject matter very relevant for gamblers, yet not particularly appropriate for a Runyon inspired work.^c Runyon did not trust luck. He put more faith in skill and cleverness.

Unlike the short story, Sarah does not discover the crap game and roll Sky for his soul, nor does Sky almost kill a fellow gambler. In the musical, Sky punches Big Jule and commandeers his gun in order to help Nathan regain control of his crap game.

The violence associated with Runyon's hoodlums needed to be glossed over for a musical comedy: though an actual gun appears on the stage it looks unlikely to be used.

The audience realises that Sky has won at the start of Act II: Scene 4, when a few gamblers, including Nathan Detroit, complain about their evening plans. Adelaide comes in prepared to elope. When Nathan tells her that he cannot elope this evening because he has to go to a prayer meeting, she again does not believe him. She begins to sing what turns into his "Sue Me," which gives some of the reasons why they have been engaged for fourteen years. She tells how Nathan "promises her this, and promises her that" but then "he's off to the races again." In an semi-operatic style¹⁸, reminiscent of recitative, Adelaide lists reasons why she should not love him. Each list and accusation is followed by Nathan's apologetic plea. Loesser uses a quick pace for the high-strung Adelaide. For Nathan, the man who is so in love he is willing to beg for his fiancée, Loesser uses short phrases and simple intervals, so Adelaide, who has been betrayed once too often, will accept what her love is saying and recognise it as sincere. To emphasise the sincerity of Nathan's "I love you," the composer uses a solid, long note for each word. "Sue Me" is Nathan's only featured song. Though he only sings in small doses,

¹⁸ Green, S., *World of Musical Comedy*: 266

his character's attitude is effectively portrayed. Loesser's main reason for developing the song in this manner, was due to the fact that the original actor who played Nathan, Sam Levene, could not sing, though he was perfect for the part in every other way.

In the next scene, the gamblers are brought to the mission by Sky. Sky, who is leaving for the West that night, appoints Nathan as his deputy. Sky cannot remain. He is afraid of commitment - afraid of changing his ways. When he leaves, Sarah finds herself distraught. After one of the gamblers tells the reason why they are there, she confesses that the whole meeting was a result of gambling. General Cartwright finds this amazing, but intriguing as well. She allows the gamblers to continue giving testimonies. Nicely-Nicely Johnson finds that he is experiencing something new. In the gospel style number, "Sit Down You're Rockin' the Boat," Loesser uses the question/response style found in Negro spirituals. Nicely is the preacher. His fellow gamblers and the mission workers are his choir. The song acts as a metaphor for what Nicely is, in effect, doing. By singing of his conversion in a room full of his fellow sinners, he is "rockin' the boat." "Sit Down.." showcases a different type of salvation music from that found earlier in the show in "Follow the Fold." This show-stopping number also shows Loesser's talent for writing big numbers and reinventing traditional Salvationist music.

After the prayer meeting, Sarah and Adelaide find that they are both depressed about losing their loves. They realise that they love their men, despite their gambling ways. In "Marry the Man Today," they sing that they should "marry the man today and change his ways tomorrow," though the audience doubts the reality of the latter. They exit to find Nathan and Sky.

In the final scene, the two couples are together. Sarah and Sky have already been married and both work at the mission. The overwhelming good in Sarah finally won over Sky. Nathan and Adelaide are suppose to be getting married , but Nathan forgot to book a place to have the ceremony. Arvide tells him that he can marry them in the mission. . Nathan sneezes and begins having "psychosomatic" symptoms of his own. Nathan and Sky have turned respectable, and they did it for some doll.

When composing songs, Loesser followed the maxim: "character not event."¹⁹ He knew that characters are what make a story. The events happen to the characters, and it is their reactions that further the plot. Loesser put himself into the characters for which he was writing. With his body of work for *Guys and Dolls*, he worked to ensure the proper tone for each character, while at the same time showing the diversity of his talent. For the many gamblers and horseplayers throughout the

¹⁹ Brahms: 28

musical, Loesser created a standardised character. Though each has a unique name straight from Runyon, each represents Loesser's view of what a gambler should be. Each gambler, besides Nathan and Sky, is interchangeable.

The first three numbers of the show effectively establish all aspects of the Broadway atmosphere and demonstrate Loesser's dictum. The overture, "Runyonland," is as bustling and energetic as Times Square itself. In his music, Loesser captures the sound of car horns and the bedlam of crowds as they move on the pavement. First Call, the trumpet call used to call horses to the gates at the races, introduces the first character song, "Fugue for Tinhorns." Originally, the show began with the "Three Cornered Tune," where Sister Sarah Brown tells of her dislike of Broadway.²⁰ This was soon replaced. Since "Fugue" has no relevance in the plot, except to characterise the lives of horseplayers, it was placed at the beginning of the show. It creates a sense of organisation that flows throughout the show. Loesser's melodies are generally neat and symmetrical. In this opening number, Nicely-Nicely Johnson, Benny Southstreet, and Rusty Charlie are given simple counterpoint to expound their views about picking horses, allowing Loesser to establish in a very few minutes, an obsessive way of life and his own firm

²⁰ Green, B. *Let's Face the Music*: 147

artistic control. This number also demonstrates the subordination of these individual characters to the general mood of the show.

This number is immediately followed by the entrance of the mission band playing a hymn of the traditional sort, "Follow the Fold." "Follow the Fold" gives a first glimpse of Sister Sarah Brown and allows her to chastise many of the gamblers who remain on the scene. Here is the 'right' to save the 'wrong.'

Loesser effectively sets the tone for the story and shows his musical versatility with these three numbers. At the same time, he remains true to his motto regarding character. With these three diverse numbers, Loesser shows how situations effect the way people go about life. The hustle and bustle of New York causes the people in "Runyonland" to try and make some quick money. The horseplayers all repeatedly insist that they are experts at picking horses, because of whom they have talked to or what they have read. Sarah Brown feels that the sinners should "put down the bottle" and "follow the fold." Only Sarah Brown would say that "[she'll] say no more" if the sinners on Times Square will listen to her, for this is her angle on getting sinners into her mission. Though she is conditioned into believing that her way is the only way, yet she knows that she must say what her audience wants to hear in order to attract them to the mission, so she can tell them what *she* wants them to hear.

These first three numbers also plant the idea in the audience's head that this will be a musical about forthright 'good' versus lovable 'evil.' Like all good fables, *Guys and Dolls* contains a moral lesson. That is, in the battle between 'good' and 'evil,' good will win. In the musical, Sky converts to Sarah's ways and finds happiness. Nathan and Adelaide are likely to be married and to thus enter a respectable institution, please her mother, and improve her health. The treatment of this topic is subtle in nature. The members of the 'good' side are not perfect. Sarah would not have gone to Havana, if she had been. The so-called members of the 'evil' side are shown to have good hearts. They are not truly bad, they just do 'bad' things like drink and gamble. This was a toned down version of Runyon's gamblers. In the "Idyll..," Sky was about to take out his gun and kill his fellow gambler when Sarah disrupts the crap game. However, the musical Sky is not portrayed as a potential killer. Sky has a gun, but the only time he takes it out on stage is to help Nathan regain control of his crap game. The violent aspect of Sky is not missed in the musical.

The remaining songs of the show are Adelaide's numbers at the Hot Box. "A Bushel and A Peck" and "Take Back Your Mink" represent typical nightclub songs of that era. Loesser modelled them after numbers he saw when he played and sang at The Back

Drop, a New York nightclub.²¹

With *Guys and Dolls*, Loesser created a truly diverse work. The diversity within this musical is even more impressive when one realises that Loesser had little formal musical training. Though his family claimed to be serious musicians, Loesser quit his formal training and taught himself how to improvise on the piano and harmonica. They should have realised that formal training was not needed for a man who composed his first song at the age of six.²² But with Loesser's talent, came his temperament. The more successful he became, the more difficult he grew. He rarely compromised. At one point during rehearsals for *Guys and Dolls*, he punched his leading lady when she could not sing "I'll Know" exactly as he had written and imagined it. Co-workers, who were dependent on his talent, attributed his eccentricities to his 'artistic temperament.'

The libretto and score created by Burrows and Loesser respectively, intrinsically trapped and channelled the energetic atmosphere of Runyon's gamblers, but it was up to the choreographer to transmit it visually.

Michael Kidd, the famed Broadway choreographer, drafted staging that proved reminiscent of Runyon's observations. He created a visually busy atmosphere from the start of the show.

²¹ Brahms: 22

²² *Ibid*: 21

While Loesser's "Runyonland" plays, the audience is treated to the spectacle of Times Square, complete with tourists, cops, hustlers, and pickpockets similar to the final scene in *42nd Street*. His staging of the "Crapshooters' Dance" highlighted the agility and fluidity of the roll of the dice. The staging and music worked so well together that Howard Barnes in the *Herald Tribune* wrote, "The work uses music and dancing as embellishments to the libretto, rather than making the latter a loose clothesline for assorted capers and vocal numbers."²³ All aspects of the musical came together to create an almost perfectly integrated show.

Guys and Dolls began its pre-Broadway try-out in Philadelphia in the early autumn of 1950. At the second full dress rehearsal before the preview opened, the production team decided to cut many lines from the libretto. They ended up cutting all of the funny lines, so they had to return them for the performance. Luckily, the first night in Philadelphia proved successful. However, on the second night, the team began to notice inconsequentialities in the story, which they knew must be corrected before the show got to Broadway. This done, they also decided to drop a duet between Sky and Nathan called "Travellin' Light" and a number entitled "Action" about the gamblers' search for the crap game. The latter they replaced with "The Oldest

²³ Green, S., *World of Musical Comedy* : 266

Established Permanent Floating Crap Game In New York,” inspired by the rhythm of a line written for the libretto.²⁴ Though these changes improved the show, they did not perfect it as we shall see later.

The biggest problem encountered in Philadelphia concerned the title number. Loesser had written “Guys and Dolls” as an antagonistic choral number, guys versus dolls. This did not work. They decided to rewrite the lyric and make the song a duet between Nicely-Nicely Johnson and Benny Southstreet. Originally, they were to be commenting on Sky’s attitude towards Sarah,²⁵ but the subject was changed to Nathan’s romance with Adelaide and how gamblers become respectable under the guidance of a woman. These changes made, they remained in Philadelphia for an extra week and then moved to Broadway.

Guys and Dolls opened on November 24, 1950, to glorious reviews. *Guys and Dolls* ran for 1,194 performances in New York, before coming to London in 1953, where it ran 555 performances. It has been successfully revived numerous times.

Guys and Dolls won the majority of awards the year it premiered. However, there was one award it deserved, but did not receive. The Pulitzer Prize for Drama, reserved for those plays that capture a slice of American life, was denied *Guys and*

²⁴ Burrows: 203

²⁵ *Ibid*: 204-205

Dolls, because Abe Burrows was being investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee.²⁶ No other play that year deserved the prize more, yet paranoia ruled out over logic.

Guys and Dolls is a quality adaptation of Runyon's "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," but it is not perfect. The flow of the plot remains choppy. The audience knows Sarah's intentions through her part in the duet "Marry the Man Today," but Sky's are unknown. Is he fleeing from commitment when he is last seen leaving the mission, supposedly for the West? What are his feelings? When he reappears, he is already married to Sarah. This significant part of the plot is left to the imagination of the audience. At least in the story, Sarah wins Sky with loaded dice.

Loesser and Burrows, in creating this musical comedy, took away the grime found in Runyon's stories. Runyon's gamblers and lowlifes carried guns and happily used them. Though the musical team managed to show the sophistication, yet simplemindedness of Broadway's street gamblers, they did so in their own way, not Runyon's. The majority of the time, they did use the idioms synonymous with Runyon, but they strayed by allowing the occasional contraction or slip in the jargon. A Runyon character would say "I have never been in love before," instead of "I've never been in love before," as found in Loesser's

²⁶ Suskin: 272

lyric. This contracted form stilted the distinctive nature of Runyon's language. These changes were probably made to compensate for the fact that the Runyon's dialogue flows smoothly on the page, but often sounds awkward aurally. The jargon may appear clumsy if not done properly. Despite this, the additions that Loesser and Burrows made could have easily been found in other works by Runyon. They captured the author's love of the absurd by adding situations that could only happen in the surreal world of "the Demon's" Broadway. A gambler' would never love a mission doll. A nightclub dancer would never wait fourteen years to get married. Or, would they? Perhaps - but only in the world of Damon Runyon's New York.

Notes

- a:** Broadway, in this sense, refers to the area centred on New York City's Times Square, not the theatre world.
- b:** In Act I: Scene 8, Sarah's romance becomes "fly-by-night" literally. She and Sky fly to Havana, Cuba and return in the same night.
- c:** Benny Green in his **Let's Face the Music**(pp. 149-150) feels that Loesser gained inspiration from Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. In the fourth chapter of *Kim*, Kipling writes:

Good luck, she is never a Lady,
But the cursest queen alive...
Greet her - she's hailing a stranger,
Meet her - she's breaking to leave.
Let her alone for a shrew to the bone
And the hussy comes plucking your sleeve.

The similarities are noticeable, but the inspiration is not proven.

Chapter 5

One of the most accomplished musicals in the history of the theatre owes its origins to the tenacity of Romanian film producer, Gabriel Pascal, who wished to secure the film rights to many of George Bernard Shaw's plays. After stopping at the the author's house in Ayot St. Lawrence and explaining to Shaw's secretary that fate had sent him, Pascal met an intrigued Shaw who inquired about the man's purpose for disturbing him. Upon hearing Pascal's reason, the always suspicious Shaw wished to know how much money the producer had, so Pascal pulled eight shillings from his trousers. This pleased Shaw, who was expecting an exorbitant sum, and he invited Pascal in, dubbing him "the first honest film producer" he had ever seen. Many hours later, Pascal emerged with the rights to many of Shaw's plays, among them *Pygmalion*.¹ Of course, this is the much embellished version of Pascal himself, and other sources vary the meagre amount of money that so impressed Shaw. Nevertheless, Pascal did secure the rights to the works of Shaw, no matter how little money he had in his pockets, and set in action a chain of events that produced one of the largest successes in theatre history.

After producing a successful film version of *Pygmalion* in 1938, Pascal decided that this play would make a wonderful

¹ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 241

musical. Earlier in that decade, Shaw had rejected an idea from Theresa Helburn, co-director of the Theatre Guild, to musicalise his play, *The Devil's Disciple*. Due to an unfortunate operetta version of his *Arms and The Man*, Shaw refused to allow any other of his plays "to be degraded into an operetta or set to any music except its own."² Pascal nevertheless first offered *Pygmalion* to Rodgers and Hammerstein, who worked on it for over a year and decided that it could not be done.³ Not to be deterred, Pascal then tried Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz, followed by "Yip" Harburg, Fred Saidy, and Cole Porter, finally offering the project to Alan J. Lerner and his partner, Fritz Loewe. Lerner and Loewe, masters at the combination of engaging melodies and memorable lyrics, had previously created a sentimental fable of European life with *Brigadoon*. Since a musicalisation of *Pygmalion* must include a British perspective, the partners seemed ideal for the project.

Beginning in 1952, Lerner and Loewe began to realise what a difficult task was upon them. While they believed in the features and structures of the traditional musical - plot and subplot hierarchy, a chorus in attendance - these seemed to find no toe-hold here. *Pygmalion* was a classic, yet unromantic, drawing-room comedy with no subplots. Lerner, as librettist, had

² Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 132

³ *Ibid*: 242-3

to find a way to create an ensemble and to develop more characters.⁴ At one point, he decided to make Higgins a professor of phonetics at Oxford with his students as the chorus - an idea that was swiftly discarded.⁵ Soon, both Lerner and Loewe abandoned the project and moved on to others, both concurring with Rodgers and Hammerstein that *Pygmalion* could not be musicalised.

By 1954, Lerner and Loewe had completely put the project out of their thoughts when they learned of the death of Gabriel Pascal, an unexpected event that put *Pygmalion* back into Lerner's thoughts. He contacted Loewe, and they decided to try again. Both deserted their new projects to concentrate on the once "impossible" project.

The rules of the musical theatre had been changing since Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II first became partners. Thanks to this partnership, musicals no longer necessarily required choruses, big dance numbers, or comic subplots to be successful. During Lerner and Loewe's break from the attempt to adapt *Pygmalion*, innovative shows, such as *Me and Juliet* and *The Pajama Game*, had proved successful at the box office. After the hiatus, they realised that they need not use a preconceived formula and now recognised that given the new developments,

⁴Green, B. *A Hymn to Him*: 84

⁵ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 241-2

they could do the musical without a chorus or a subplot. Instead of making significant changes to the play and losing any of Shaw's characteristic tone, they simply had to keep as much of the original dialogue as possible and add the offstage action - for instance, Eliza's mastering of pronunciation and her final test at the Embassy Ball.⁶ They decided to follow the screenplay which Shaw had written for the film version and to utilise Pascal's addition of Eliza's return to Higgins.⁷

These basic decisions made, the pair now had to secure the rights to the project. Since Pascal's death, the producer's wife and his mistress were battling over the estate, a fact which hampered Lerner and Loewe's quest for the rights. Also, during this time, MGM movie studio decided to pursue the rights as well. Fortunately, Lerner had his sizable inheritance in the same bank which MGM kept its money and so threatened to pull out his money, if the bank did not help him secure the rights. This ploy worked, and the pair received a commitment from the Pascal estate.⁸ Now all that stood in their way was the approval of the British Authors' Society which controlled Shaw's estate. Since no solid date could be set for this, Lerner and Loewe decided to write the show on spec, with no concrete means of finance save

⁶ Laufe: 197

⁷ Lees: 8

⁸ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 245, 148

personal funds, to ensure that they would be well ahead of anyone else who might want the project.

Lerner and Loewe decided that since the show was continuing despite its uncertainty, they might as well choose their collaborators - after all, a show with a professional production team would put them that much further ahead of their potential competitors. Oliver Smith, who had worked with the partners on two earlier shows, was chosen to design the sets, and Cecil Beaton, noted for his stylised version of Edwardian design, was chosen to fashion the costumes. Producer Herman Levin had been with the project from the start.⁹ Now that they had the key behind-the-scenes people in place, Lerner and Loewe began assembling their ideal cast.

Eliza Doolittle is the focus of *My Fair Lady*. In the first scene of *Pygmalion*, Shaw describes Eliza as an unattractive eighteen-to-twenty-year-old. Lerner and Loewe had to find an actress that could convincingly portray both this mousy flower girl and a lady. At first, Mary Martin showed interest in the role yet later, no doubt wisely, decided against it.^a Lerner happened to hear of a young British girl starring in *The Boy Friend*. After seeing Julie Andrews in this, her first Broadway role, Lerner felt that she would be perfect for Eliza. When they discovered that

⁹ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 245

she would soon be off contract, they auditioned her and signed her to be their female lead.

While Eliza's transformation is important, Higgins dominates the action, and his casting was essential to the show's success. For Professor Henry Higgins, Lerner claims that he immediately thought of Rex Harrison. This was not the case, as Michael Redgrave, Noël Coward, George Sanders, and John Gielgud were approached before Harrison was even considered. Nevertheless, Harrison, a famous British stage actor who had never been in a musical before, was chosen, though Lerner only knew that, according to composer Kurt Weill, he could sing "enough."¹⁰ Lerner and Loewe agreed that, despite the lack of a powerful singing voice, he had the right presence to play Higgins.

The partners felt that since they were making good progress with the show in spite of the lack of capital, they should travel to London to try to convince Harrison to join them, as well as to get the proper feel for the story and its ambience. Upon arriving in London, Lerner and Loewe visited Harrison and played him some of Higgins' possible numbers. Harrison did not really care for them, yet he agreed to think about participating. In the event, these songs were cut from the show, and Harrison accepted the role. To prepare for his part, Harrison decided to take singing lessons, which revealed that he could carry a tune - though his

¹⁰ Citron, *Wordsmiths*: 246

voice sounded strained - and that he could easily speak on pitch. Lerner capitalised on this fact and began to write talk-sing lyrics specifically for Harrison's Higgins. This inspired decision allowed Harrison an overwhelming success.¹¹

With the two leads cast, the duo set out to find an Alfred Doolittle. Though the other characters, such as Colonel Pickering and Mrs. Pearce, were important, they were essentially supporting non-musical roles and did not require as much sheer personality as Doolittle's. To sing Doolittle's big music-hall numbers, they found a veteran British actor and music hall star, Stanley Holloway, and added him to the cast.

Casting complete, the team chose to explore the Covent Garden area in the early hours of the morning. Their observations helped develop some authentic sounding Cockney colour for Eliza Doolittle. The sounds and accents they found flavoured Eliza's first song, "Wouldn't It Be Lovely." In the end, their trip to London proved profitable for both the artistic and the business sides of the project. The British Authors' Society granted Lerner and Loewe the rights to Shaw's *Pygmalion*, so the musical was now official.

In 1913, when George Bernard Shaw modernised the ancient myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, the story of a sculptor who loves his creation so much that she comes to life, he turned

¹¹ Laufe: 204

Pygmalion into Professor Henry Higgins, a phonetics expert, with a personality based loosely on the author himself. Eliza Doolittle, a common flower girl, represents Galatea. The slow evolution of Eliza, so Henry can pass her off as a duchess at an Ambassador's Garden Party and win a bet, constitutes the modern version of the myth. But unlike the myth, *Pygmalion* is not a love story: Higgins antagonises his creation, as well as shaping her into a lady, his goal being to turn an uncultured flower-girl into an elegant, independent woman.¹² Though Eliza grows to care for the volatile and opinionated professor, she ultimately leaves him, a plot turn that went against the standard romantic notions of the time. In fact during its first production, the actor playing Higgins, Sir Herbert Tree, used an absence by Shaw as a chance to show that Higgins was 'really' in love with Eliza.¹³ When Shaw found out, he was livid, and the play returned to its original form where romance was firmly dismissed. Shaw's pursuits were cerebral and philosophical rather than sexual; his wife was an intellectual companion, rather than a romantic attachment. His love affairs existed through correspondence and rarely, if ever, materialised physically. Like Shaw, Higgins is a lonely man, but he conceals it by spouting bachelor's rhetoric. The master of the English language cannot "put together a few words to relieve his

¹² Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*: 37

¹³ Huggett: 161

loneliness.”¹⁴ Higgins, a confirmed bachelor with habits that even the smallest change can upset, is thrown into a state of confusion by Eliza’s departure, for he had come to depend on her. What bothers him more is the fact that he does not understand why she has left - he treated her as he treats all his fellow man. Higgins is too blind to see that this is exactly why she left: all she wanted was kindness and respect from the man she had grown to care for as a friend. Upon hearing this, Higgins admits that he considers Eliza a friend, but he then preaches about the differences between her new life and her old. According to Higgins, people in refined society, or at least the small circle that constitutes his society, tend to be unsentimental. If that does not suit her, she should return to her old way of life and find some “sentimental hog” to marry. When she tells him that she will marry Freddy, Higgins is surprisingly upset, though not out of jealousy. He feels that he used his valuable time to create a “consort for a king,” not the wife of a foolish young idler. He is furthered angered when Eliza says that she will become the assistant of one of his former pupils and teach phonetics, in order to support herself and Freddy. Despite this anger, Eliza stands up to Higgins and speaks her mind. This show of spirit, instead of causing Higgins to back down, fills him with pride for he said he’d make a woman of her, and, in his view, he did. He now considers

¹⁴ Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*: 49

the once “silly girl” to be a “tower of strength” and respects her as his equal. His delusion tells him that he, Eliza, and Colonel Pickering, can live together as confirmed ‘bachelors,’ for he still does not realise Eliza’s emotional needs, even when she leaves him for the last time. *Pygmalion* ends with the resolute Eliza’s departure as Higgins laughingly comments on her marrying Freddy - something that he still does not truly believe. Remaining true to an unromantic view of the relationship between Eliza and Higgins, Shaw, who did not put any stock into well-defined happy endings, goes on to tell in his epilogue that she does indeed marry Freddy and becomes the more dominant partner - her metamorphosis into a refined, independent woman complete.

Romance had never been Shaw’s intent, for he valued the proper use of the English language above all else, having taught himself to speak properly so as not to appear unsophisticated. He chose to make his heroine, Eliza, an example of a ‘new woman,’ who gains independence and social respectability through education. But Eliza’s independence is subjective: she has no economic resources to support herself. Marriage would be the quickest means to attaining this subsistence, yet unlike her original, Galatea, Eliza is not loved by her creator. Nevertheless, Eliza will be married and Higgins is who audiences have always

assumed would be her spouse - the confirmed bachelor, as so many before him, conquered by love.

In the 1938 film directed by Gabriel Pascal, the script remained true to Shaw until the end when Eliza returned to Higgins after going off with Freddy. This implied an ending that was open to interpretation. The more sentimental Shavians could imagine that she returned to be Higgins' companion, while the romantics could seize on a possible love interest. This open ending appealed more to Lerner and his potential audience than the original Shaw text, so it became the basis for the musical's closure.

Lerner had quite a task in front of him. This was his first adaptation, and it was of a literary classic. Changes inevitably had to be made. Some moments left out of *Pygmalion*, for instance the moment Eliza masters her pronunciation or when her final test occurs, needed to be seen in the musical. He decided to change the locations of Eliza's tests from Mrs. Higgins' drawing room and an Ambassador's Garden Party to Mrs. Higgins' box at Ascot and an Embassy Ball, respectively, to allow for lush Cecil Beaton costumes and ensemble numbers (singing in the former, dancing in the latter). Lerner and Loewe chose to add a small chorus of Higgins' servants to comment on Eliza's progress and show the progression of time, and there was also the chorus of

cockneys permanently available in the vicinity of Covent Garden. Lerner worked to keep the wit of Shaw's play intact by varying little from the original dialogue. When possible, lyrics were fashioned out of original dialogue that had to be omitted, thus providing continuity between words and music. But much of the original still remained, so *My Fair Lady* would have more dialogue than any other musical to that date.¹⁵ Though these minor changes remained true to the spirit of the original text, Lerner deliberately strayed from Shaw's intent by emphasising the romantic potential of the ending of *My Fair Lady*, as the musical came to be known. Lerner knew that audiences would enjoy the show better if there were some promise of romance, so when he published his libretto, he omitted Shaw's sequel which explained her marriage to Freddy and stated "...Shaw and Heaven forgive me! - I am not certain that he is right." Even the title, *My Fair Lady*, begs the question as to whose fair lady she is.

So, in Lerner's version, Eliza returns to Higgins, who acknowledges her by asking the location of his slippers and then covering his face with his hat. According to Lerner's stage directions, "if [Higgins] could but let himself, his face would radiate unmistakable relief and joy...[and] he would run to her." The actions of this ambiguous ending do not go violently against

¹⁵ Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*: 65

the wishes of Shaw, but Lerner slanted the ending strongly away from the author's emphasis.

Pygmalion's five acts take place either in Mrs. Higgins' drawing room or her son's studio, after the opening scene in Covent Garden. Lerner routinely expanded the *My Fair Lady* script to include action which the original may have suggested for offstage. For instance, Eliza turns up the day after she meets Higgins at his studio to demand lessons. What does she do between their meetings? Shaw states that Eliza does not have a parental home: her mother is dead, and her father is a disreputable dustman, who lives with another woman. Taking this cue, Lerner and Loewe decided to have Eliza encounter her father and two of his cronies outside their favourite pub. This provides time not only to change the scenery, but also develop the character of Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, a comic low-life who always has his best interests at heart. It is during this scene that he sings "With a Little Bit of Luck" which details his philosophy of life. After he finds out that Eliza has moved in with two gentlemen, Doolittle senses an opportunity and reprises his song explaining that "With a little bit of luck, [a man's children] will go out and start supporting [him]!" He goes to see Higgins' and 'sells' his daughter for five pounds.

Doolittle's first song establishes his values, revealing why he

allows his daughter to live with two strange men and carry out an experiment. Lerner builds on Shaw's characterisation and creates a man who, though fond of his daughter, is not beneath using her situation for his benefit. The lyrics allow Doolittle to establish his philosophy of life in an atmosphere where he can speak out - among his mates - in front of his favourite pub and in Covent Garden, for his surroundings made him the man that he is.

Doolittle's meeting with Higgins proves more profitable than he ever imagined, for the professor is so impressed by the lyrical nature of the dustman's speech (He spouts such phrases as "I'm willing to tell you; I'm wanting to tell you; I'm waiting to tell you."), which Higgins attributes to the Welsh strain found in Doolittle's voice, that he recommends him to an American millionaire who needs speakers for his moralist society. The American dies and leaves Doolittle four thousand pounds a year, causing an unwanted leap from the lower echelons to the middle-class. His final song, "Get Me to the Church On Time," gives him one last chance to bond with his peers before he marries and conforms to the middle-class values which his new wealth, unwittingly supplied through Higgins, requires.

Lerner utilised the lyrics of Alfred Doolittle's songs to develop a sub-action by showing his social transformation, though once elevated he still chooses to celebrate in the Cockney style. In

Shaw's epilogue, he had established that Doolittle, though now a member of the middle class, is not accepted by it: they consider him an upstart without true gentility. His combination of Cockney ways and radical philosophy is more accepted by the eccentric upper-class, who find him charming. Unlike Shaw, who had Doolittle spout rhetoric describing how middle class morality was "Just an excuse for never giving [him] anything," Lerner develops him through song and gives more insight into this deceptively simple man.

Lerner developed lyrics in the talk-sing style, where words are spoken on pitch rather than sung, especially for Harrison. Fortunately, this style of song, with an emphasis on the words, stays truer to the characterisation of the professor than lyrics where enunciation is sacrificed to tone. Shaw believed, and conveyed through Higgins, that the English language was pristine and should be used in its purest forms, spoken and written. While singing may give new beauty to words, it is not the beauty of clarity, since it often requires that words be sacrificed for melodic reasons, as certain combinations of syllables are easier to sing than others. Lerner's lyrics for Higgins clearly communicate Shaw's passion for intelligible language. There is a line in the play's preface, where Shaw states that "the English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to

speak it.”¹⁶ Lerner takes this statement and develops it into the song “Why Can’t the English.” This song in Act I: Scene 1 gives the audience a preview of Higgins’ personality by showing what is truly important in his eyes - the proper use of the English language. “Why Can’t the English” proved to be Lerner’s most Shavian song with its density of examples and complexity of phrasing, which established a tone of articulacy to be associated with Higgins. For instance, Higgins sings the following lyric:

One common language I’m afraid we’ll never get.
Oh, why can’t the English learn to set
A good example to people whose English is painful to your
ears?
The Scotch and the Irish leave you close to tears.

Instead of repeating phrases, besides the title phrase, Lerner comes up with original illustrations, such as “Norwegians learn Norwegian; the Greeks are taught their Greek,” to support Higgins’ argument.

Lerner continued to characterise Higgins as before, when the true essence of his personality is revealed through “I’m An Ordinary Man,” where Higgins explains his views on women and romance to Pickering. Upon hearing this song, the audience has no doubt that he is the most confirmed of all confirmed bachelors who would “prefer a new edition of the Spanish Inquisition than to ever let a woman in [his] life.” At this point, Lerner has his

¹⁶ Shaw: 3

British character slip into American syntax by saying “prefer...than” instead of “prefer...to,” perhaps to show that “an ordinary man” can make a mistake. After this song, the audience is left to wonder if anything, or anyone, can change him.

In “A Hymn to Him,” Higgins reiterates his lack of understanding of the female sex. This song not only partially reflects Shaw’s views on women, but also those of Lerner and Rex Harrison, the first Higgins. During a time of marital unrest before rehearsals, Harrison was commiserating with the oft-married Lerner, when out of nowhere, he announced that their lives would be much easier if they were homosexual.¹⁷ This idea intrigued Lerner, so he came up with the lyric “Why can’t a woman be more like a man.” In this song, Higgins expounds the glory of manhood and further explains his lack of understanding for the opposite sex first brought forth in “I’m An Ordinary Man.”

While Higgins’ character stays constant until the final scenes of the show- he remains a stubborn bachelor - Eliza goes through a complete outward transformation, beginning the show as a gutter-snipe that evolves into a lady, though deep-down she remains an idealist. Her evolution is evident in the songs Lerner created.

Her first song, “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely,” immediately contrasts Eliza with Higgins and shows her desire to improve her

¹⁷ Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*: 87

situation. Lerner has her sing that "All [she] wants is a room somewhere, far away from the cold night air." In *Pygmalion*, the thing that amazes Eliza the most about her new situation are the luxuries of hot water and warm clothes. Her singing in a Cockney accent creates an ignorant longing for wealth that demonstrates her imaginative nature and somewhat foreshadows her future situation. She sings how she wants a "warm and tender" man who will take good care of her - a notion which she grows to believe in until it comes up repeatedly against Higgins' lack of compassion.

After being chastened by Higgins for her lack of progress, she sings "Just You Wait" which establishes her independent and impatient manner. With fiery anger, she sings of all the bad things that she would like to happen to her taskmaster, Higgins. She finds it difficult to grasp the concept that 'practice makes perfect,' yet Eliza is determined. Her hard work pays off, as she finally loses her Cockney accent and gains the praise and admiration of Professor Higgins.

Eliza's mastering of pronunciation, one of the crucial turning points in the plot of *My Fair Lady*, was passed over by Shaw in *Pygmalion*. Lerner and Loewe, however, knew the moment had to be stressed. Once they got the basic idea for "The Rain In Spain," it took only ten minutes to finish. With the addition of a

chorus of servants who comment on the action and the use of blackouts to indicate the passage of time, the audience feels not only the exhaustion of the main characters, but also their jubilation when their goal is finally achieved. They know that Eliza is now ready to test her skills in society: her new clarity in singing reflects a marked progress and gives her an all-important authority.

Eliza's test is to take place in Mrs. Higgins' box at Ascot. Only the most proper are allowed. In the "Ascot Gavotte," Lerner provides commentary on the smugness of the upper class, who show no visible signs of excitement as they comment on the horse race. Lerner uses this song to establish that Eliza's personality, no matter how well-mannered, will ultimately be out of place in this spectacle.

Lerner's knack of incorporating Shaw's dialogue shines in the song "You Did It," which begins Act II. Lerner puts the exchange between Pickering and Higgins to music, thus eliminating unnecessary dialogue and indicating their elation. In the last scene of Act I, Zoltan Karpathy, a former student of Higgins', desires to know who Eliza is. He makes several attempts, unsuccessful thanks to Higgins, to dance with her. As the scene closes, he is finally successful. The audience is left wondering if Karpathy will reveal that Eliza is not a true lady. At the start of

“You Did It,” the audience believes that all was successful, until Higgins announces that Karpthy called her a fraud, a moment that provides brief comic tension. Lerner then resolves this by explaining that he believed her to be a Hungarian princess.

My Fair Lady, like *Pygmalion*, was not designed primarily as a love story, but has often been construed as such. A common event at the time of the musical’s premiere was to release the songs to the public before the show began, allowing the potential audience to learn the songs and, hopefully, buy tickets for the musical. It was because of this practice that the general public began to feel that *My Fair Lady* was, in fact, a romance. The show was written with only one obviously romantic number, “On the Street Where You Live,” which is sung by Freddy, a minor character. But for his leading characters, Lerner created a few songs that, when out of the context of the musical, could easily be interpreted as love songs. Heard independently, these songs portray two individuals who sound as if they are experiencing the normal fluctuations associated with romance.

Having mastered the basics of pronunciation, Lerner now uses more polished lyrics for Eliza. In “I Could Have Danced All Night,” Eliza sings how “her heart took flight,” because Higgins danced with her. The feeling of physical exhilaration is unfamiliar to Eliza, and she errs in thinking that Higgins’ attention

is the cause of it. She misinterprets his happiness in her success as a possible romantic attachment. Out of the confines of the musical, the song sounds as if the singer has just had a wonderful evening with the man she loves (in a way she has) and does not want it to end.

Later in the show, after the experiment is successfully concluded, Eliza, tired of being ignored, leaves the flat and encounters Freddy Eynsford-Hill, who tells her how much he admires her. Eliza loses her temper in "Show Me," where she lashes out at Higgins, though Freddy bears the brunt of it. Eliza, by this time realises that she simply wants to be treated as a human being who has feelings just like everyone else. She is ready for someone who will truly love her, not just speak at her. Lerner uses his lyrics to demonstrate Eliza's frustration, as when exasperation wins out over training and she linguistically slips by rhyming "explain" (pronounced "explaine") with "mine." When she speaks, she must concentrate on the proper way to express herself. In the show, this song shows her anger at being continually ignored by the unfeeling Higgins; however, taken on its own, it sounds like a young woman who is ready for a physical relationship that her beau is unwilling to begin.

Eliza is not the only one with songs that can be interpreted in a romantic vein. "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face," within

the confines of the show, demonstrates Higgins' confused feelings over Eliza's departure. The inspiration for this song comes directly from Act V of Shaw, where Higgins states that he has grown accustomed to Eliza's voice and appearance. He now considers her an equal - a respectable human being instead of a "squashed cabbage leaf" - and does not know how he will get along without her. He admits that he is fond of her - a fact that takes the entire length of the show for him to discover. She has managed to dent this lonely bachelor's impenetrable armour, yet he is "very grateful she's a woman and so easy to forget." He is not willing to sacrifice his bachelor status for this woman. Upon listening to the song independently, a different impression is given. In parts of the song, he sounds like a jealous lover, speaking of Eliza's life as Mrs. Freddy Eynsford-Hill as being "simply frightful," but he soon returns to the feeling that he cannot forget her. His pinnings for "her joys, her woes, her highs, her lows" show what an integral part of his life she has become and make it sound as if his heart was broken by her leaving. Free from the limits of the plot, the song portrays a man who, if provided another chance, would do anything to win her over.

Lerner personally felt and hoped that audiences would feel that *My Fair Lady* was a love story, yet he wanted to remain as faithful to Shaw as musical theatre practicalities would allow.

While he did this the majority of the time, the ambiguous nature of these songs attests to his true view of the show.

These songs add to the puzzling quality of the ending, where Eliza returns to Higgins. In the true Shavian view, Eliza would never have done this, for Higgins had turned her into a totally independent woman. The romantic faction of the Shavians, however, could accept the ending that Lerner created, because they felt that though she came back to Higgins, she would remain as an equal, bound by companionship. She returns to accept the equal status that he finally afforded her. Lerner and the romantics felt that Higgins' indeterminate actions when she returns shows that he is in love with her, and that they will end up together.

Part of the magic of *My Fair Lady* is this openness to interpretation. Every member of the audience can decide what they think happens in the unseen future. Lerner, unlike Shaw, did not feel the need to qualify his ending: he knew what the audience was apt to decide and tailored the body of his work around this fact. Shaw was too stubborn to budge from his unromantic notions. *Pygmalion's* audiences generally interpreted the play's ending as indefinite, even though Eliza never returns to Higgins in the play.

With a predominately British cast, *My Fair Lady* began its

Broadway run on March 15, 1956,¹⁸ opening to only rave reviews. Critics were impressed that *My Fair Lady* maintained so much of the Shavian wit that it was hard to tell where it began and *Pygmalion* ended.¹⁹ They applauded Lerner for not giving in to the temptation of adding an outright romantic ending.²⁰

My Fair Lady sold out for two of its six years on Broadway, before repeating the feat in London's West End. If tradition were followed, this musical should not have worked. There is plentiful dialogue, sparse, though well-spaced-out dancing, and no love songs between the leads. The action mainly occurs indoors, and the leads provide the humour. Most of all, *My Fair Lady*, though created by Americans, is considered by some as definitively British,²¹ for here was a musical set in England, about English people, that even poked fun in passing at the way Americans spoke. What carried the show, as well as the inherited plot-line and generous characterisations, was a rich score and memorable songs - most of them immediately became hits, and *My Fair Lady* became one of the most successful musicals of all time.

My Fair Lady represented Lerner's first attempt at adapting a piece of literature to the musical stage. Though

¹⁸ Suskin: 468

¹⁹ Hischak: 100

²⁰ Laufe: 198

²¹ Hischak: 99

inexperienced, Lerner and Loewe managed to seamlessly blend the book with the score and created a work that effectively conveyed the substance, if not the rough edges of *Pygmalion*. Lerner knew that to change the candour of Shaw would be a mistake, but he had no qualms about rubbing some rough edges off the play, so Lerner refined Eliza even before her “education” began. While Eliza howls during her bath in *Pygmalion*, in the musical this is passed over. Shaw’s play, with dialogue that could certainly stand on its own, yet was colourful enough to inspire songs, provided the ultimate text for adaptation. Lerner took dramatic liberties only when he needed further character development or to change a setting for visual reasons. Lerner integrated the two to the point that *Pygmalion* became *My Fair Lady*, demonstrating his flair for adaptation.

Shaw intended *Pygmalion* to be an entertaining social treatise on the benefits of proper speech and education, yet his audience’s perception differed from this intention. Audiences felt that *Pygmalion* was a humorous love story and affirmed this belief by laughing throughout performances, much to the chagrin of Shaw who considered indiscriminate laughter during his plays highly rude and disruptive to the actors’ conveyance of his message.²² Lerner, on the other hand, concurred with Shaw’s original audience in enjoying the inherent humour of the

²² Huggett: 114

situations faced by the leading characters and ensured that they were given proper comic attention.

Would *My Fair Lady* have been written if Rodgers had not teamed up with Hammerstein? Probably not. Lerner and Loewe looked to the innovations of this pair and applied many of them to their work on this project. If Rodgers and Hammerstein had not dared to disregard tradition and create fully integrated shows that did not rely on spectacle to entertain, and if others, such as Frank Loesser and Adler and Ross, had not additionally embraced this independent-minded creativity, *My Fair Lady* would have remained an abandoned project, and the public would have been denied “one of the best musicals ever written.”²³

Notes

- a: Lerner and Loewe went to Martin’s apartment to play her and her husband some of the show’s numbers. After they left, she reportedly told her spouse that “those poor boys have lost their talent.”

²³ Hischak: 99

Chapter 6

Richard Rodgers once said that "...adaptations are helpful, since they enable the writer to work from a source that already has a shape and form,"¹ but it takes real talent to fashion these aspects into viable pieces of musical art. The artists discussed earlier possessed this gift, evidenced by the memorable nature of the musicals which form the basis of this paper. Though these shows represent to many in the present day all that was stereotyped and sentimental about the past of the musical theatre, their successors relied heavily on their irreplaceable innovations.

With *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers and Hammerstein created a piece of musical theatre that despite being - or perhaps because a period study, withstood the test of time and encouraged artists of succeeding generations to utilise their creativity to maintain the musical as an art form. Hammerstein built on his work in *Showboat* and seamlessly blended the book with both music and dance to create a fluid piece of entertainment that accentuated the personalities of the characters to the point that the audience knew what they were thinking. This show demonstrated the new partners' talent for characterisation: Hammerstein could reveal the spirit of a character in one line of lyric, while Rodgers could

¹ Rodgers: 251.

amplify this essence through song. Jud's sitting in his "Lonely Room" as dissonant chords reveal the darker side of his nature is not easily forgotten. Likewise, Ado Annie, the "Girl Who Cain't Say No," reveals how she is in a "turrible fix," as Rodgers' lively melody evokes her skittish nature. Rodgers' melodies complemented Hammerstein's words in a way that neither had experienced before to create convincing character songs that were, at this time, unparalleled in the musical theatre.

Oklahoma! marked many firsts: not only was it the first show of the Rodgers and Hammerstein partnership, but also it was the first use of dance to advance the plot, and the first time a man was killed onstage. In this adaptation of Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs*, Rodgers and Hammerstein took an unsuccessful play and improved it to the point that it was all but forgotten. *Oklahoma!* remained true to Riggs' storyline, but portrayed it in a tighter, more entertaining vein.

In the time following *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers and Hammerstein successfully adapted another play and, rather unsuccessfully, created an original musical. The lacklustre success of *Allegro* made the pair realise that their talent depended on a strong book, so, as in the past, they sought another adaptation. In adapting from short stories, Rodgers and Hammerstein were allowed more room for interpretation. With *South Pacific*, the team pared down

Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific* into a cohesive, interwoven tale of life on an American-occupied Pacific island. Much of the blood, sweat, and melancholy of wartime evaporated into a sweetened account of unlikely romance and tragic passion. Though the musical incarnation lost some of the grit and complexity of Michener's stories, it proved to be the most lauded show of the Rodgers and Hammerstein partnership and the strongest in the pair's repertoire. Abandoned was conventional plot construction: *South Pacific's* comic moments were provided by both the show's leading couple and an extraneous pair of incidental characters, while the true romantic tragedy occurred in the subplot. There was no outright choreography: all movements were designed to look natural and unassuming, and the chorus existed to add to the hustle and bustle of island life. Rodgers and Hammerstein used this show to attack the social problem of racism without being too preachy or distracting from the mood of the show.

With *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein changed audiences' and critics' expectations of the musical theatre, as everyone became "'integration' conscious."² Their talent for defining characters through song and melding different strands into a single mode of storytelling signified a new maturity in their art.

² Rodgers: 229

Another great characterisation man was Frank Loesser who, along with Abe Burrows, adapted Runyon's "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown" and made the author's two-dimensional characters more vivid with an array of musical styles. While *Guys and Dolls* is the most traditional of the shows studied here, it still demonstrated Rodgers and Hammerstein's influence, as this adaptation was originally conceived as similar to *South Pacific* in terms of plot construction with a main couple that had both funny and serious moments to which another couple could easily be added. Like traditional shows, *Guys and Dolls* had a more serious couple - Sarah and Sky - associated with a purely comic couple - Adelaide and Nathan; but unlike the standard shows, the two couples were of equal weight, which meant no subplot. Though similar to traditional shows, *Guys and Dolls* was fully integrated: each song forwarded the action by establishing atmosphere or characterisation. Only Adelaide's two diegetic numbers were in the old-style - scantily-clad chorus girls singing an irrelevant number. Similar to the earlier adaptations, Loesser and Burrows sugar coated the violent-nature of Runyon's goons by making them lovable mugs who consider themselves sophisticates, and for the most part, Runyon's uncontracted language in the present tense was used, though occasional slips occurred. The true uniqueness of *Guys and Dolls* was Loesser's use of music to

establish the atmosphere of chaotic New York and its horseplayers and gamblers and create a character piece, not for one specific individual, but for all of the excitement of Broadway.

Out of all of the musicals presented here, only one assumed an almost equal status to its source material: *My Fair Lady*, adapted from Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Lerner and Loewe realised that all forms of tradition would have to be abandoned to effectively complete this project and to stay as close to Shaw's work as possible. Unlike the aforementioned adaptations that were based on popular, yet far from classic works, *Pygmalion* was considered a masterpiece of the dramatic world and was not to be fundamentally tampered with, and Lerner and Loewe, after much struggle, realised that *My Fair Lady* would have to be unlike anything ever seen before. Their musical had a leading couple who were not "technically" a romantic pair, supported by a few auxiliary characters, only one of whom was moderately developed. Coupled with this lack of subplot were an abundance of dialogue and limited dancing. For the first time in a musical, the leading man did not sing; instead, he spoke on pitch. The resulting musical incorporated much of Shaw's dialogue, though an implied romance between Higgins and Eliza was played up to distract from Shaw's diatribe on how anyone can make something of himself given the proper education. Lerner and Loewe

confirmed that they too could contribute to the new style of musical, though their breakthroughs would not have been possible without Rodgers and Hammerstein, whose overall success they could never match. *My Fair Lady* was the pinnacle of Lerner and Loewe's career, and they never again achieved a critical or commercial success near that of *My Fair Lady*'s.

While these adaptations remained true to their source in terms of basic plot, as musicals, they could no longer exist within normal confines: they made the transition between a contained piece of literature into a show, which in spite of being exemplary of the new style of musical, was still wider in scope. In order to achieve this extended range and appeal to the masses, a general sweetening occurred between page and stage which eliminated the unsavoury aspects found in the source material and put a rose-coloured tint on dark situations. This brightening transpired in each of the musicals at the focus of this paper: Curly gets to spend his wedding night with Laurey, where originally he was jailed for his involvement in Jud's death; the seabees resort to singing about their frustrating loneliness, instead of aggressively acting on it; Sky wins Big Jule's soul in a crap game and is never prevented from murdering him by Sarah; and finally, Eliza returns to a delighted Higgins.

Did this general sweetening enhance the success of these

musicals? In the case of the plays, the answer is yes. The changes made to *Green Grow the Lilacs* eliminated the tediousness of the third act of the play and replaced it with a *definite* happy ending that strongly appealed to its original war-scarred audience, whose future was far from secure. *Oklahoma!*'s continued popularity can be attributed to the fact that it serves as a reminder of the simplicity that once was and represents a marked contrast to the crudity that peppers the modern musical world.

While *Oklahoma!*'s success surpassed its base material, *My Fair Lady* achieved status equal to its parent, due to an "officially" implied romance between its leads. *Pygmalion*'s original audiences always assumed that Eliza and Higgins were romantically attached, though Shaw stubbornly rebuked this idea. Lerner agreed with the popular view and subtly developed the romantic aspects of the plot culminating with Eliza's return at the end, which confirmed for the public the popular interpretation.

Before the Golden Age, play adaptations differed the least from their original source, as the majority of them consisted of the text of the play with added musical numbers, thus creating a traditional formula show. It took the talent of men like Rodgers and Hammerstein and Lerner and Loewe to maintain the similarities by breaking away from this style of conversion and

perfecting an approach which integrated dialogue into verse and visually created scenes that were only mentioned in the original play. By doing this, the continuity of the play was ensured as pages of original dialogue blended into a single song and, as a result, the action moved at a quicker pace.

The adaptation of short stories allows artists much more of a creative challenge than plays, for they are not already in stageable format. When converting a prose narrative, or a set of short stories, many decisions have to be made at an early stage, such as which characters need to be added/removed/developed, or which tales should be used. As a result of these decisions, short story adaptations tend to stray from the intended meaning of their basis, instead conveying a softened version. In reference to the earlier question regarding sweetening affecting an adaptation's success, the answer is mixed with regards to short stories.

With *South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein created a romanticised, escapist version of a slice of World War II that ignored most, if not all, of the harshness found in Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*. Relying on the original only for characters and events, Rodgers and Hammerstein inserted their own tone to the piece which made it more popular with audiences than it would have been if it more accurately depicted the times. By the

musical's 1949 premiere, audiences could accept positive reminders of wartime - unlikely romances, an enemy retreat, etc. - but were not ready to relive the desolation and violence that accompanied them, especially as the Korean conflict loomed on the horizon. In this case, the sugar coating created a winning piece of nostalgia that might not have happened had Rodgers and Hammerstein not brought out the more optimistic side of Michener's creation.

But sweetening is not always a good thing. Loesser's and Burrows' adaptation of "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown," though full of memorable songs and characters, would probably have been as successful if the edge found in Runyon had remained in the story's musicalisation. Violence contributed a significant portion to Runyon's characters' lives, as they made their living breaking the law. While this roughness would not have worked if it had been explicitly presented, a brief glimpse of these sophisticates' darker side would have added that extra depth that is missing from the show as it stands. Runyon's stories were well-known and instantly recognisable, thus this adaptation, though accurate overall - the characters were Runyon creations and generally spoke as such - still did not ring wholly true to the original and did not achieve its full potential as a representation of Runyon, though in the public's eye, it remains a faultless

success.

Though the original material primarily lost some of its meaning in the translation to musical, the resulting shows remain memorable and are successfully revived today. Audiences may not now realise that these shows, which they consider the epitome of traditional musical theatre, were once the *crème de la crème* of the new style, integrated musical and demonstrated the growing importance of a musical's book, and thus the continued use of adaptations. But adaptations are not restricted to the Golden Age of Broadway, as some of the most prominent shows currently running found inspiration in other works. Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*, which is running in both New York and London, developed from Gaston LeRoux's book of the same name, while the Broadway hit *Rent* is a modern day *La Bohème*. Both of these shows underwent sweetening to get to their present state, but sugar coating is no longer the norm: *Miss Saigon*, a contemporary *Madama Butterfly*, and *Cats*, the longest running musical in Broadway history, based on T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, maintain the tone of their source material.

Musicals in the Golden Age of Broadway, especially adaptations, affected the lives of their audiences by offering a quick escape from reality. If a member of the audience was

familiar with the source material before seeing its musicalisation, his escape was that much faster as the show provided a tangible version of characters and situations that were already embodied in his imagination. By installing a sense of romance and fantasy in a reality based situation, these musicals allowed audiences to eschew their problems and sink into a magical world. Rarely did composers let everyday situations interrupt their make believe, for though common predicaments would allow the audience to connect that much more with the character, they still took away from the idealism that was a mainstay in shows at this time.

This break with reality is one of the lasting legacies of the Golden Age: composers to this day aim to create escapes for their audiences and do so by continually ignoring the harshness of the real world. According to John Lahr, modern musicals “cannot cope with America’s loss of innocence,” a fact demonstrated by the continued return to the passé formulas of past decades.³ These formula musicals were ground-breaking in their time and continue to hold a key role in the history and development of the musical theatre, but their vein had its moment and should now be shelved to allow for new ideas: as Lahr puts it, musicals should “live dangerously or die.”⁴ As a result, modern shows often fool their audiences into believing that they are tackling the hard

³ Lahr: 104

⁴ *Ibid*: 121

issues, only to give in to emotion in the end.

Take Jonathan Larsen's *Rent*, the modern day *La Bohème* mentioned earlier. Here is a show that tackles all of the socially "big" issues of the present: drugs, homosexuality, AIDS, safe sex, homelessness - all play a significant part in the show and are portrayed in a rough, edgy manner that entertains while educating the audience to the fact that normal young people live with these situations everyday. As a modernisation of the opera, it stays fairly close to the plot: two young artists who live in a Bohemian quarter of New York, Roger and Mimi, (in this case, a guitar playing composer and an "S and M" dancer) are in love, yet tragically, both are dying of HIV. Mimi relies on drugs to ease her pain, and this coupled with her disease cause her condition to deteriorate. In the opera, she dies leaving her love heartbroken, yet this is not the case in this post-Golden Age musical. Throughout the show Larsen displays a fresh approach to theatre which he sacrifices to give in to sentimentality: Mimi dies, but her death is a brief one, as she quickly returns to life saying that their friend Angel, a drag queen who succumbed to AIDS (Larsen killed off the true comic character of the show!), told her to go back and continue being Roger's inspiration because there is "No Day Like Today." This happy ending is reminiscent of the finale of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*, where, though her father was killed

committing a crime and she has had to live with the shame her entire life, even at her graduation, Louise knows that “[She’ll] Never Walk Alone.” This “tug at your heartstrings” ending was expected from Rodgers and Hammerstein, but from an aged thirty-something composer? No. The new generation of composers fail to realise that audiences expect reality: yes, audiences continue to go to the theatre for an escape, but a more intellectual one. They believe that theatre, whether musical or straight play, is the last medium to reflect human truth, and accordingly, expect to ruminate and be surprised by what is presented on the stage. Usually, theatregoers have put some thought into what tickets they purchase; if they want sheer entertainment, they can watch television or go to the cinema, which requires no forethought, as they can decide what to see just prior to the movie.

Risk remains a four-letter word to many composers in the musical realm today, and few are willing to sacrifice their security to acknowledge contemporary social problems and phenomena that affect the people of the world or present a show in an inventive manner that challenges the audience. Those that do believe in change are not always guaranteed a success. Stephen Sondheim’s 1969 *Company*, though being one of the first concept musicals, met with lukewarm reviews: here was a story that

reflected the times in which it was written - the end of the sexual revolution - that had one character, a single man named Bobby, linking five separate couples who want Bobby to find someone. Sondheim, and librettist George Furth, did not go along with popular belief and allow their character to find someone and settle down. Instead, they had him sing about the perils of "Being Alive" and his acceptance of being alone without anyone to worry about except himself. This was Sondheim's true break from the norm, and he continues to be the innovator for the younger generation of composers, much like his first teacher, Oscar Hammerstein II did for him. Others have tried to break away from the concept of the Golden Age musical: Kander and Ebb (*Cabaret*, *Chicago*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*) and Leonard Bernstein (*Candide*, *West Side Story*) occasionally demonstrated novel ideas in terms of subject matter or production, though they have been far from consistent in their breakthroughs. Despite these exceptions, most composers remain content to maintain the *status quo*, thus allowing the musical to lose the position it once held as a fertile outlet for change.

Musicals are the most accessible and popular mode of theatre, but they are also the most expensive to produce. For instead of pushing forward and bringing new creativity to the theatre, musicals are going back to the era prior to the Golden Age

where spectacle was the fashion. Producers now spend so much time ensuring that the set is memorable that they disregard the quality of the show. People may not be able to tell you what the plot of a modern musical was about, but they can tell you all about the chandelier that fell or the helicopter that landed on stage. But what do those effects have to do with the quality of a show? The answer is nothing: they make the show memorable as the one with the effects, not as the one where the songs, dialogue, and situations blended together to tell the story.

Despite the popularity of current musicals, they will never have the same status as those from the Golden Age. Popular music has overtaken show music - no longer are they one and the same - on the charts, and only the occasional rock musical makes the crossover, for instance *Evita* or *Tommy*. This is due to the view that musicals are not for everyone; many feel that musicals and the theatre in general are only for the culturally elite, which is an unfortunate misconception. True, many straight plays that mark an often uncomfortable departure from the norm are not for the average man, but musicals generally offer something for everyone, as they tend to be reflections of the past.

Musicals can no longer afford to disregard the progress the world has made since the Golden Age. Since the two decades that contributed so much to the evolution of the musical, the world has

not been stagnate: the peace movement, drugs, gangs - all have been a significant part of contemporary history, yet for the most part, they have been ignored by musicals, because the musical has not evolved at the same rate as society: its periods of creativity occur in spurts and are never constant. Musicals today rely more on their marketing than their quality. While they have grown in their complexity in production terms, their stories remain outmoded. If musicals want to regain their status as bastions of creativity, they must take risks and deviate from their role as purveyors of the American dream to become vendors of American reality.

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