

ABSTRACT

Getting to Know You: Social Commentary in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*,
South Pacific, and *The King and I*

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In 1943, American musical theater was permanently transformed after Rodgers and Hammerstein's first musical collaboration, *Oklahoma!*, premiered on Broadway. Their approach, which focused on telling stories in a truthful and straightforward way through believable characters and closely interconnected music, lyrics, and script, gave rise to the "integrated book musical" that would dominate Broadway stages for decades. In addition to pioneering a new form of musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein were also remarkable for the way that they mixed entertainment with insightful social critique. This thesis attempts to explore some of the serious social issues which Rodgers and Hammerstein address in three of their most popular musicals: *Carousel* (1945), *South Pacific* (1949), and *The King and I* (1951).

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU: SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN RODGERS AND
HAMMERSTEIN'S CAROUSEL, SOUTH PACIFIC, AND THE KING AND I

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: <i>Carousel</i>	12
Chapter Three: <i>South Pacific</i>	28
Chapter Four: <i>The King and I</i>	45
Chapter Five: Conclusion.....	61
Appendix: Lyrics.....	65
Bibliography.....	72

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One of my earliest memories is of watching the film adaptation of *The King and I*. Enthralled by the costumes and music, my sisters and I acted out “The March of the Siamese Children,” and the famous “Shall We Dance?” sequence, replaying the tracks on the CD over and over again. As I grew older, my love for Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals remained but my appreciation for their work deepened. The idea for this thesis originally stemmed from an argument with a classmate who contended that Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals were “corny” and “outdated,” without any serious themes or relevance. Since the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein were an integral part of my childhood, I naturally resented these aspersions and decided to revisit some of their works to support my position. I never dreamed that a friendly disagreement would develop into an honors thesis, but this project has confirmed my love for Rodgers and Hammerstein and my belief in their importance and relevance, as well as giving me an even greater appreciation for the magnificent form of theater known as Broadway.

Thanks are due to many people, but I must begin by acknowledging Dr. Jean Boyd. She graciously agreed to direct my thesis and I am extremely grateful for her advice, guidance, and consistent helpfulness throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Laurel Zeiss and Dr. Kimberly Kellison for serving on my defense committee and for offering their very helpful critiques and insights. I have been blessed in my time at Baylor to have wonderful mentors who have encouraged me in many different ways, so I am grateful to Dr. Hunt, Dr. Kellison, Dr. Stegemoller, Dr. Good, and many others professors who have offered me advice and support. I am also grateful for the support of

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Any discussion of Broadway musicals must inevitably include the names of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Arguably the most highly respected and enduring composer/lyricist team of all time, Rodgers and Hammerstein were definitive forces in the development and popularization of Broadway as we know it today. The magical combination of Rodgers' seemingly limitless supply of memorable and beautiful melodies and Hammerstein's consistently moving and insightful lyrics allowed the duo to "popularize the 'integrated' musical as the dominant aesthetic ideal and permanently change the direction of the genre."¹ Through the course of their long and fruitful partnership, Rodgers and Hammerstein composed a total of nine musicals: *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *Allegro* (1947), *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), *Me and Juliet* (1953), *Pipe Dream* (1955), *Flower Drum Song* (1958), and *The Sound of Music* (1959). Out of these nine, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music* were wildly successful and have endured as some of the most popular and highly respected musicals of all time.

The two men who formed this influential and brilliant pairing were highly dissimilar, yet they managed to merge their personalities and careers to create works of

¹ Geoffrey Block, "Introduction," in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Block (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

almost unparalleled brilliance. Both were successful with previous partners and had created legitimate Broadway hits - such as *Show Boat* by Hammerstein and Jerome Kern and *Pal Joey* by Rodgers and Lorenz Hart - prior to their first project together. It was only when they joined forces, though, that these two remarkable men created a new conception of the Broadway musical that still informs much of what is seen today. Unlike the glittering song and dance routines that dominated Broadway stages before 1943, the musicals created by Rodgers and Hammerstein managed to blend plot, music, and characters into a seamless and coherent drama where serious issues relating to society could be considered and explored.

Richard Rodgers was born on 28 June 1902 in a “large house on Brandreth Avenue, Hammels Station, near Avenne, Long Island.”² The family into which Rodgers was born was moderately successful; his father was a doctor while his mother was the well-educated daughter of a wealthy Jewish merchant. Because Rodgers’ parents continued to live with his maternal grandparents, he grew up in a home filled with tension between his father and grandmother: “Frequently weeks went by without either speaking to the other,” a situation which created “a deep feeling of tension and insecurity.”³ Rodgers also recalled in his autobiography that his family was “Jewish for socio-ethnic reasons rather than because of any deep religious convictions;” following the death of his grandmother when he was still very young, religion ceased to be a significant factor in

² William Hyland, *Richard Rodgers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.

³ Richard Rodgers, *Musical Stages: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1975), 6.

Rodgers' life.⁴ Although he enrolled at Columbia University in 1918, his budding partnership with lyricist Lorenz Hart prompted him to leave the university after only a year and a half. His partnership with Hart was long and productive and created modestly successful Broadway runs for shows such as *Babes in Arms* (1937), *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938), and *Pal Joey* (1940).⁵

Possibly because of the tension with which his family home was filled, Richard Rodgers as an individual “was and remains an enigma,” but it is clear from his works, his writings, and the writings of those who knew him that he was “a driving perfectionist, a constantly restless innovator, and a tough man to do business with.”⁶ When asked in an interview, Rodgers offered the following formula for success in the musical theater: “1) Be in the center of things, 2) Want what you want more than anything else in the world, 3) Work at it constantly.”⁷ This simple, succinct advice not only confirms that Richard Rodgers was a man of tremendous determination and focus but also hints at the fact that he could be a difficult and demanding person. Although his music is filled with passion, his unrelenting commitment to the theater above all else could make him appear impersonal and uncommunicative. Even Oscar Hammerstein, who worked with him on

⁴ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 4.

⁵ “Richard Rodgers,” *Brittanica Academic*, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/EBchecked/topic/506594/Richard-Rodgers>.

⁶ Frederick Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music: The Story of Rodgers and Hammerstein* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2002), 76-77.

⁷ Deems Taylor, *Some Enchanted Evenings: The Story of Rodgers and Hammerstein* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 13.

such an intimate footing for so many years, was forced to conclude that he had never quite understood his partner.⁸

Although he may not have understood Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II nevertheless managed to work with him very successfully through their long partnership. Born on 12 July 1895, Oscar's very name reflected the grand theatrical tradition of his family: his grandfather, Oscar Hammerstein I, was one of the most famous impresarios in turn-of-the-century New York, responsible for establishing multiple opera houses in Manhattan and encouraging the development of Times Square as New York's theater district. Given his family's rich theatrical and musical history, Hammerstein's involvement in musical theater seemed almost inevitable, yet his early career goals led him to study law at Columbia University, a pursuit he gave up in 1916 to work as an assistant stage manager for his uncle.⁹ It was not until 1920 that Hammerstein's first show, *Always You*, was presented on Broadway.¹⁰ Following this somewhat inauspicious debut, Hammerstein collaborated on another forty-five musical works before his untimely death in 1960.¹¹ Aside from his work with Rodgers, Hammerstein's most famous collaborator was Jerome Kern with whom he composed the 1927 classic *Show Boat*. It is arguably this musical, rather than *Oklahoma!*, that was the first show to truly integrate music, lyrics, and plot into a coherent whole while simultaneously exploring serious

⁸ Hyland, *Richard Rodgers*, 258-259.

⁹ "Oscar Hammerstein II," *Brittanica Academic*, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://academic.eb.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/EBchecked/topic/253651/Oscar-Hammerstein-II>.

¹⁰ Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 33-35.

¹¹ *Brittanica Academic*, "Oscar Hammerstein II."

themes, but unlike *Oklahoma!*, *Show Boat* did not spark a widespread revolution in how musicals were written and understood. Nevertheless, it is an extremely important musical as it provided the blueprint from which much of Rodgers and Hammerstein's work evolved, from the comprehensive integration of music and plot to the serious advocacy against racism and inequality.

In terms of personality, Hammerstein was very different from his partner. While Rodgers could be somewhat difficult to work with, "the accepted perception of Oscar Hammerstein II is that he didn't have a mean bone in his body...his peers seem to have liked and admired him."¹² Hammerstein is often presented as the ultimate "nice guy," and although he does seem to have been a genuinely kind person, Rodgers offers a more nuanced and insightful summary of his long-time partner:

In many ways Oscar was a study in contrasts. He was a passionately loving man, yet he never gave any over indication of that love except through his lyrics. He was a meticulously hard worker, yet he'd roam around his farm for hours, even days, before putting words to paper. In business dealings he was practical and hard-headed, yet he was always willing to lend his support to idealistic causes. He was quiet-spoken and gentle, yet I saw him rise to heights of fury at the injustices around him, especially those dealing with the rights of minorities. He was a genuinely sophisticated, worldly man, yet he will probably be best remembered for his unequalled ability to express the simplest, most frequently overlooked pleasures of life.¹³

Many of Rodgers' observations about Hammerstein can also be applied to his work, for Hammerstein's hatred of inequality is clearly conveyed throughout his musicals, while his appreciation of simple pleasures is reflected through his perfectly balanced and simple yet profound lyrics.

¹² Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 26.

¹³ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 303.

Rodgers and Hammerstein began working together in August 1942 with their collaboration on a musical adaptation of *Green Grow the Lilacs*, a play written by Lynn Riggs. The play had been presented by the Theater Guild in 1931 and had enjoyed reasonable success, so the Guild, “dangerously close to insolvency,” invited Rodgers and his then-partner, Lorenz Hart, to turn the material into a Broadway musical. In a fateful twist that would have lasting consequences for Broadway’s history, a sick and tired Hart, struggling with alcoholism, declined the project in order to rest but gave Rodgers his blessing to proceed with another lyricist.¹⁴ Although Rodgers recalls that he considered many lyricists as partners, he “always returned to one man,” since despite Hammerstein’s 10-year dry spell, Rodgers had “absolute faith in Oscar’s talent.”¹⁵ The success of *Oklahoma!* proved that Rodgers’ faith was entirely justified. After opening at the St. James’ Theatre on March 31, 1943, the show not only ran for an “unprecedented record of 2,248 shows” but also “signaled a tectonic shift in musical theatre plates; it pushed the integrated book show into maturity.”¹⁶

Before proceeding further, it may be helpful to offer a definition of the “book musical.” As Broadway historian Peter Riddle explains,

the term “book” does not refer to the literary source of a music drama...in this context, the book is defined as the overall package of plot, dialogue, and characterization, and the way in which those elements are combined and

¹⁴ Taylor, *Some Enchanted Evenings*, 147-148.

¹⁵ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 207.

¹⁶ David Lewis, *Broadway Musicals: A Hundred Year History* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2002), 35.

interrelated. The music and lyrics are treated as separate elements. The actual dialogue and lyrics are combined into the working script, called the libretto.¹⁷

The book musical had been the prevalent form for Broadway shows since the 1920s, but Rodgers and Hammerstein reworked the form and elevated it to a level never before seen. Prior to *Oklahoma!*, the main parts of the book, particularly plot, song, and characters, were viewed as largely independent units. What Rodgers and Hammerstein did with *Oklahoma!* was to “usher in the age of the ‘integrated musical’, in which all the elements involved in a musical – music, drama, song, dance, scenery, costumes, etc. – contributed to a single integrated whole.”¹⁸ As Hammerstein explained it:

Musical plays are not ‘books’ written by an author with songs later inserted by a composer and lyric writer. The musician is just as much an author as the librettist. He expresses the story in his medium just as the librettist expresses the story in his. They weld their two crafts and two kinds of talent into a single expression. This is the great secret of the well-integrated musical play.¹⁹

Although such an approach may seem obvious to audiences today, it was revolutionary at the time, for “it was uncommon for the music to be central to all aspects of the play.”²⁰ Unlike the largely interchangeable song and dance numbers featured in most musicals, “the score of *Oklahoma!* comprises just twelve basic musical numbers” that were “woven

¹⁷ Peter Riddle, *The American Musical: History and Development* (Niagara Falls: Mosaic Press, 2003), 28.

¹⁸ Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 123.

¹⁹ Cleveland Amory, “The Nicest Guys in Show Business,” in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Block (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 181.

²⁰ Riddle, *The American Musical*, 72.

in and out of the story...allowing them to function almost as leading motives, giving the story extraordinary unity and plausibility.”²¹

By ignoring the conventions of glittering choruses and focusing on telling a simple story in a direct and honest way, Rodgers and Hammerstein revolutionized the musical. Their approach was termed the integrated book musical and quickly became the standard form for Broadway musicals. The Rodgers and Hammerstein formula tended to focus on a few key features that are commonplace today but were highly innovative at the time. As set forth by theater professor Richard Kislán, these characteristics include “the conviction that the song was the servant of the play,” a focus on musicals that were “the product of sincerity,” a commitment to “artistic integrity that allowed the collaborators to focus on the direct, the honest, and the natural instead of precedent, expectation, or the ‘sure bet’.”²² For Rodgers and Hammerstein, part of artistic integrity was an honest examination of society and its shortcomings, prompting them to explore serious and meaningful themes in their shows. In following this pattern and upholding these artistic commitments, Rodgers and Hammerstein established a winning formula that they nevertheless adapted and altered to fit each of their musicals.

Although the talents of Rodgers and Hammerstein are undeniable, it is interesting to note that there were areas in which they did not excel. It is clear that their genius lay in their ability to adapt pre-existing sources rather than create new material: “on their own, away from established source material, Rodgers and Hammerstein fell short of

²¹ Deems Taylor, *Some Enchanted Evenings*, 173.

²² Richard Kislán, *The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Halls, Inc., 1980), 136-7.

magic...original ventures were not their forte,” as 1947’s *Allegro* and 1953’s *Me and Juliet* faltered both critically and commercially.²³ Each of their hit musicals was drawn from a play, book, or memoir, suggesting that their true talent lay in adaptation. Of course, not all of their adaptations prospered: 1955’s *Pipe Dream* based on a novel by John Steinbeck, was very poorly received and ran for a mere 246 performances,²⁴ while 1958’s *Flower Drum Song* from a novel by Chinese-American author Chin Y. Lee ran for a respectable, but not remarkable, 600 performances.²⁵

While all of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical collaborations, even the less successful ones, followed the integrated model established by *Oklahoma!*, each was innovative in its own way and considered substantial themes that were highly relevant to American society. Each musical was significant, but three in particular were radical for the way in which they highlighted specific social issues that were intimately related to American society at that time: *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*. *Carousel* examines the theme of domestic abuse and troubled marriages while also offering an indictment of society’s hypocritical standards; *South Pacific* considers racism and “otherness” in a World War II setting in the Pacific islands; *The King and I* explores the East/West divide and Western dominance in the small nation of Siam. Furthermore, these themes are explored largely through the lens of strong female characters who

²³ Lewis, *Broadway Musicals*, 62.

²⁴ Bradley C. Mariska, “‘Who Expects a Miracle to Happen Every Day?’: Rediscovering ‘Me and Juliet’ and ‘Pipe Dream’, the Forgotten Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein,” (Master’s thesis, University of Maryland, 2004), 44.

²⁵ “Flower Drum Song,” *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, last modified July 4, 2006, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/epm/50901>.

provide a prototype of radical feminism characterized by sacrificial love and gentle strength.

The unique themes found in these musicals are tied to both the physical setting of the musical and the specific time in which it was written and produced. The New England setting of *Carousel* provides a seemingly respectable backdrop for the deeply disrespectful and rebellious actions of the musical's male lead; the Pacific islands during World War II frame both the racism and the drama of doomed loved stories in *South Pacific*, and Siam provides a platform from which *The King and I* can explore East/West relations. The setting proves especially significant in Rodgers and Hammerstein's treatment of their female leads, for the exotic locales of both *South Pacific* and *The King and I* presented the duo with an opportunity to create far less traditional female leads in Nellie and Anna. While all three of the women exhibit the love and strength typical of Rodgers and Hammerstein's heroines, Nellie and Anna form a strong contrast to the more stereotypical Julie of *Carousel*, as they appear far more feminist in the modern understanding of the word. The historical context in which Rodgers and Hammerstein composed their works also clearly factors into each of the musicals. *Carousel* premiered towards the end of World War II, a time when the message of hope for the future and the promise that no one walks alone was particularly meaningful and relevant. When *South Pacific* opened in 1949, the issue of racism was becoming more prominent due to Truman's establishment of the "President's Committee on Civil Rights" in 1946 and the formation of the Congress for Racial Equality (known as CORE) in 1942. Finally, *The King and I*'s opening in 1951 was far more powerful due to the context of the ongoing

decolonization of the late 1940s and early 1950s and America's increasingly interventionist policies in regards to the East.

Through a close examination of these musicals, it is possible to gain both a deeper appreciation of American society and a fuller understanding of some of the problems of that society. The ways in which Rodgers and Hammerstein presented and addressed the social problems that they perceived in the 1940's and 1950's, many of which are still relevant today, is fascinating and thought provoking. *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I* were pioneering musicals which expanded and perfected the integrated musical form that Rodgers and Hammerstein developed in *Oklahoma!* and contained pertinent and insightful social criticisms that are intimately connected to the locales, themes, and characters of these musicals.

CHAPTER TWO

Carousel

Carousel is in many ways the unlikeliest of Rodgers and Hammerstein's hit musicals. Although it is widely respected and is regarded by critics as perhaps the best of all Rodgers and Hammerstein's collaborations, it has never received the popular acclaim enjoyed by some of their other shows. Part of the reason that *Carousel* is not performed as often as *Oklahoma!* or *The Sound of Music* is the inherent darkness of the source material, the play *Liliom*. Written by Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnar, the play originally premiered in Budapest in 1909 before being translated into English and transferred to New York under the auspices of the Theatre Guild in 1921.¹ It tells the story of the brutish carnival barker Liliom, who embarks on a doomed romance with mill worker Julie. After learning that Julie is pregnant with his child, Liliom attempts a robbery and then commits suicide when confronted with arrest for his crime. In the second act, Liliom is taken before a heavenly tribunal and is given the chance to return to earth for one day to do a good deed for his daughter. Although it was moderately successful as a play, the general consensus held that it was far too dark to provide source material for a musical. Furthermore, the Hungarian setting and high level of political commentary found in the show were off-putting to potential composers. To put the final nail in the coffin of *Liliom*'s musical prospects, a well-known rumor suggested that the

¹ Nolan, *The Sound of Their Music*, 153.

famous composer Puccini had approached Molnar about the possibility of turning his play into an opera, only to be haughtily rebuffed.²

Given these obstacles, it is remarkable that *Carousel* was ever created. After many years of fruitless negotiations with the playwright, Molnar, the Theater Guild finally acquired the rights to create a musical version of *Liliom* in 1944. Since the Theater Guild had previously worked with Rodgers and Hammerstein to produce the tremendously successful *Oklahoma!* in 1943, they unsurprisingly turned to the duo to adapt *Liliom*. Though Rodgers and Hammerstein were enthusiastic about the subject material, they were uncertain about how to successfully transfer it to the Broadway stage due to the heavy subject matter and foreign locale.³ As Rodgers recalled, he “threw in the idea of relocating the story in New England, which somehow won unanimous agreement,” thereby solving the problem of location.⁴ This change to 1870s New England prompted some modified plot points – the addition of the clam bake and treasure hunt – and also led to changed character names. The porter Wolf Beifeld became the fisherman Enoch Snow, his intended Marie transformed into mill worker Carrie Pipperidge, and the lead character Andreas Zavocky (known as Liliom) was remade into Billy Bigelow; of the main cast of characters, only Julie and Louise retained their original names. Although the location problem had been solved, Rodgers and Hammerstein continued to struggle with how to transfer the complicated character of Liliom/Billy onto

² Abe Lafe, *Broadway's Greatest Musicals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls), 83.

³ Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 159-160.

⁴ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 238.

the stage. Their breakthrough occurred when they began to think about a musical soliloquy:

We got the notion for a soliloquy in which, at the end of the first act, the leading character would reveal his varied emotions about impending fatherhood. That broke the ice. Once we could visualize the man singing, we felt that all the other problems would somehow fall into place. And they did.⁵

After this breakthrough realization, work on *Carousel* progressed more smoothly, and the musical began to come together.

Aside from the change in location, *Carousel* followed *Liliom* extremely closely; almost the entirety of Act I is lifted verbatim from Molnar's play, although Rodgers and Hammerstein made a concession to American moral standards by having Billy and Julie marry rather than simply live together. In Act II, play and musical began to diverge more markedly, setting up the fundamental alterations to the ending. In *Liliom*, Liliom is taken before a heavenly magistrate responsible for all suicides and asked whether there is anything on earth that he would like to do and whether he regrets "that you deserted your wife and child, that you were a bad husband, a bad father?"⁶ When Liliom stubbornly insists that he has no regrets, he is sent to be purified by fire for sixteen years, after which he will have the chance to return to earth to "think well of some good deed" to do for his child, for "on that will depend which door shall be opened to you up here."⁷ The final scene shows Liliom returning to earth and begging for food from Julie and his grown daughter, Louise, although neither of them recognizes him. After he begins talking about

⁵ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 238.

⁶ Ferenc Molnar, *Liliom: A Legend in Seven Scenes and a Prologue*, trans. Benjamin Glaser (New York: United Plays, Inc, 1921), 157.

⁷ Molnar, *Liliom*, 166.

Liliom and tells Louise that her father was “something of a bully” who would “fight anyone” and “even hit your dear little mother,” Julie orders him out.⁸ He begs Louise to let him show her magic tricks or do something good for her. When she refuses he slaps her hand, yet Louise tells Julie that it didn’t hurt at all. In response to Louise’s question of how that could be, Julie says that “It is possible dear – that someone may beat you and beat you and beat you – and not hurt you at all.”⁹ As an organ grinder begins to play in the distance, the curtain falls, bringing *Liliom* to a rather anticlimactic and unresolved finish.

By contrast, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel* ends on a far more hopeful and upbeat note. When he returns to earth, Billy has the power to choose whether or not Julie and Louise can see him so by the time he reveals himself to his daughter he has already watched the “Heaven’s Ballet” sequence in which he sees Louise’s loneliness and isolation. As in Molnar’s play, he slaps Louise’s hand when she rejects his gift of a stolen star, but unlike *Liliom*, the musical does not end with Billy’s failure. Rather, Billy is granted an extension of his time on earth so that he can attend Louise’s graduation. As the commencement speaker leads the chorus in a rendition of the uplifting “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” Billy whispers to Louise to “Believe him, darling! Believe,” before moving to Julie and telling her “I loved you, Julie. Know that I loved you!”¹⁰ While the chorus enjoins Julie, Louise, and the audience to “walk on with hope in your heart,” Billy’s

⁸ Molnar, *Liliom*, 178.

⁹ Molnar, *Liliom*, 185.

¹⁰ Oscar Hammerstein and Richard Rodgers, *Carousel* (New York: Williams Music, Inc., 1956), 71.

heavenly friend “smiles and beckons Billy to follow him” as the curtain falls, implying that Billy has in fact done a good deed for his daughter by giving her the gift of hope.¹¹

Broadway historian Abe Laufe argues that this change was necessary for the success of *Carousel*, for

Molnar’s unhappy final scene would never have contented most audiences in the musical theatre. By retaining Molnar’s basic idea, but by giving Billy a more beneficial influence on his daughter, Rodgers and Hammerstein provided a bittersweet ending that made Billy more sympathetic and the whole production more sentimental.¹²

By keeping much of Molnar’s play but making significant alterations to the ending, Rodgers and Hammerstein demonstrated their exceptional ability to utilize the good elements in source material while making the changes necessary to create commercial Broadway hits.

In many ways, *Carousel* follows the pattern established by *Oklahoma!* and centers on the same elements: “an essentially American setting, period atmosphere, an evocative ballet sequence, and a score replete with popular hits.”¹³ Practice makes perfect though, and some critics and historians contend that *Carousel* is in fact an improvement on *Oklahoma!*. Geoffrey Block argues that *Carousel* “attempted to convey a still richer dramatic situation with characters who were perhaps more complexly realized, through music, than the inhabitants of the Oklahoma Territory,”¹⁴ while Abe Laufe states that “Rodgers and Hammerstein integrated songs with plot even more smoothly in *Carousel*

¹¹ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 71.

¹² Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 84.

¹³ Riddle, *The American Musical*, 86.

¹⁴ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 163.

than they had in *Oklahoma*, the dialogue at times being spoken over a musical background which gradually led into song.”¹⁵ In addition to the greater complexity and smoother integration of song and dialogue, *Carousel* also featured at least two highly notable innovations: the on-stage suicide of a main character and the introduction of the musical soliloquy, a genre which had previously been limited to the operatic stage. *Carousel* marked the first time that a soliloquy of Shakespearian proportions was incorporated as part of a Broadway show,¹⁶ and it allowed Rodgers and Hammerstein to “open a window into the innermost thoughts and motivations” of their main character, explaining “the driving force behind Billy Bigelow’s fateful decision to turn to crime.”¹⁷ Although the musical soliloquy would have a lasting effect on Broadway, appearing in various incarnations throughout Broadway history, Billy’s suicide was far more shocking to contemporary audiences. Having the protagonist – however flawed and imperfect he might be – commit suicide midway through the second act “defied convention” and was “a much more radical departure from musical comedy conventions” than anything found in *Oklahoma!*.¹⁸

Keeping Billy’s suicide demonstrates that, although they greatly increased the sentimentalism of the ending in order to appeal to mainstream Broadway audiences, Rodgers and Hammerstein still managed to maintain much of the ambiguity found in

¹⁵ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 87.

¹⁶ Complete lyrics for “Soliloquy” may be found in the Appendix.

¹⁷ Riddle, *The American Musical*, 86.

¹⁸ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 89.

Molnar's work. In his introduction to the first English edition of the play, translator Benjamin F. Glazer points out that the moral of *Liliom* is:

nothing you can reduce to a creed. Molnar is not a preacher or a propagandist for any theory of life. You will look in vain in his plays for moral or dogma. His philosophy – if philosophy you can call it – is always implicit.¹⁹

This ambiguity is in clear contrast to the characters and themes in *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *King and I*, which are undeniably dense and complex but are also readily observable. There can be little doubt that “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught” is an examination of racism or that “Western People Funny” refers to the divide between East and West, but such clear cut themes are more difficult to perceive in *Carousel*. Similarly, the characters seem simultaneously less developed and more complex than in other musicals, defying simple explanations; it is challenging, if not impossible, to sum up Billy Bigelow’s character in one sentence. Despite the pervasive ambiguity, though, *Carousel* still has clearly discernible themes regarding the power of love, the role of society, and the issue of domestic abuse.

The fundamental conflict between individuality and society is revealed through the juxtaposition of Billy, Mr. Snow, and their respective romances. The audience is first introduced to Enoch Snow through Carrie’s first-act number “Mister Snow,” a song in which she tells Julie of her engagement to Enoch and describes him as a her “sea-faring, bold and daring, big bewhiskered, overbearing, darling Mister Snow.”²⁰ Mr. Snow himself does not appear until closer to the end of Act I, when Carrie awkwardly

¹⁹ Benjamin F. Glazer, “Introduction,” in *Liliom: A Legend in Seven Scenes and a Prologue*, xiv.

²⁰ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 13.

introduces him to Julie, who is distraught about Billy's involvement with the no-good Jigger Craigin. An awkward and self-satisfied individual, Mr. Snow states his belief that "A man's got to make plans for his life – and then he's got to stick to them" before expounding on his plans to build a fishing empire.²¹ Broadway scholar Geoffrey Block believes that "with his irritating, self-satisfied laugh," Act I's characterization of Enoch "is reminiscent of Laurey's silly rival Gertie in Oklahoma and embodies the negative as well as the positive consequences of conventionality and practicality."²² On the positive side, Snow is "steady and reliable" and is economically successful, as the Snow's trip to New York in Act II illustrates.²³ In the negative column, Snow is judgmental and critical, condemning Carrie unheard after he catches her with Jigger and melodramatically enjoining her to "Leave me alone with my shattered dreams. They're all I have left – memories of what didn't happen."²⁴ Towards the end of the play, Snow is also revealed as a hypocrite in his behavior over the burlesque show, and his judgmental nature is further underscored by Enoch Jr.'s comment to Louise that he'd like to marry her but "the hardest thing'll be to persuade Papa to let me marry beneath my station," a clear indication of Snow's self-importance.²⁵

Rodgers and Hammerstein seem to be making some interesting observations about society through their treatment of Snow. While Act I Enoch is presented as

²¹ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 29-30.

²² Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 173.

²³ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 28.

²⁴ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 48.

²⁵ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 67.

“overbearing but essentially likable hard-working man with lofty plans for his sardine business and his family,” by the end of the play he has transformed into an “insufferable, condescending, and genuinely unsympathetic character” with a fleet of children whom he has raised in his pompous and self-important image.²⁶ On the surface, the Snows are ideal members of society – upright, prosperous, stable – yet their success comes at a price: “Snow and Carrie grab the materialistic American rainbow but not without a loss of spontaneity and human compassion, not without becoming ...prudish, moralistic, bourgeois snobs.”²⁷ No tragedy or suffering mark the lives of the Snows, but there is a fundamental lack of authenticity that makes it “possible that one might prefer the fuller, albeit deeply troubled, lives of Bill and Julie...to the deceptively happy-ever-after, rudely interrupted American dream of Mr. and Mrs. Snow and their brood.”²⁸ The contrast between Billy and Snow can be seen as “the political debate... between the legitimate act of defiance and the essential rule of law,” a theme which Rodgers and Hammerstein also considered in *Oklahoma!*.²⁹ Julie and Billy’s relationship is unconventional and unusual, outside the bounds of society, yet “their inarticulate and unexpressed love contains a richness lacking in the conventional courtship and marriage of Enoch and Carrie,” representing Rodgers and Hammerstein’s belief in the importance of individuality.³⁰

²⁶ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 173-174.

²⁷ Gerald Mast, “As Corny as Kansas in August, As Restless as a Willow in a Windstorm,” in *The Richard Rodgers Reader*, ed. Geoffrey Block, 95.

²⁸ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 175.

²⁹ Mast, “As Corny as Kansas in August,” 95.

³⁰ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 174.

Music historian Joseph Swain advances a more positive view of Carrie and Snow in which their characters reveal the value of community:

in Molnar's play, conventional society in the persons of the Beifelds is quite indifferent to Liliom's fate, and therefore the loss of this society after his suicide means nothing to him. In revising the conclusion of *Liliom*, Rodgers and Hammerstein created a ballet which reveals Billy's daughter, Louise, excluded from the New England community because of him. Thus, in order for this exclusion to mean something, in order for it to motivate Billy to descend once again to the world, the community must be important.³¹

Rather than representing the negative, controlling aspects of society, this interpretation presents Carrie and Snow as ideals who represent the broader world of community and the vital importance of belonging to a community. The duo thus does "what is quite rare on the stage... idealize conventionality and thereby make it valuable."³² Swain does admit that the second act portrayal of the Snows is far less idyllic but dismisses it as a "dramatic inconsistency" and argues that, by that point in the show, "the virtues of the New England community have been pretty well established," allowing the Snows as characters, not ideals, to behave in less charitable ways.³³ While community is clearly an important theme in *Carousel*, Rodgers and Hammerstein treat it with an ambiguity which honors the spirit of Molnar's work. On the one hand, by taking the "rugged individualist" Billy Bigelow as protagonist, it is the musical that "comes closest to declaring for an individualist ethic in the face of the community ideology," yet Billy's death is related to his inability to understand the community while Julie's survival is only

³¹ Joseph Swain, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 125.

³² Swain, *The Broadway Musical*, 125.

³³ Swain, *The Broadway Musical*, 125.

due to her acceptance of community through Cousin Nettie, “the play’s representative of community values.”³⁴

Although the issue of community is complicated and ambiguous, the theme in *Carousel* which is the most problematic for modern audiences is the issue of domestic abuse. Midway through the first act, Julie reveals to Carrie that Billy has hit her. Billy himself confirms this when Mrs. Mullin, the carousel proprietor, comes to offer him his job back, yet he protests at the use of the word beating: “I don’t beat her. What’s all this damn fool talk about beating? I hit her once and now the whole town is – the next one I hear...”³⁵ Billy’s defensiveness here is reflected in his conversation with the “Starkeeper,” the representation of God in *Carousel*: “I didn’t beat her – I wouldn’t beat a little thing like that – I hit her.”³⁶ Through Billy’s repeated insistence that he merely hit her, Rodgers and Hammerstein seem to be drawing a distinction between hitting and beating. Although such a distinction may seem pointless to modern audiences, Rodgers and Hammerstein were attempting through the specific choice of word to indicate that Billy is not hurting Julie (or later Louise). As in Molnar’s play, when Louise inquires why Billy’s slap did not hurt her, Julie responds that “It is possible, dear – fer someone to hit you – hit you hard – and not hurt you at all.”³⁷ For Geoffrey Block, it is highly significant that Billy’s blows do not hurt either Julie or Louise, since “without condoning

³⁴ Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama: A Study of the Principles and Conventions behind Musical Shows from Kern to Sondheim* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 86.

³⁵ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 35.

³⁶ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 61.

³⁷ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 69.

Billy's actions Hammerstein seems to be telling us that other forms of abuse might take an even greater toll."³⁸ While Billy physically strikes out at Julie and Louise, this violence arises out of frustration with himself and his inadequacies rather than hatred for them. As he rather confusingly explains when the Starkeeper asks why he hit Julie: "Well, y'see – we'd argue. And she'd say this and I'd say that – and she'd be right – so I hit her."³⁹ With Louise, Billy tries to explain that he is giving her a gift and wants to make her happy; it is only at her rejection that he "impulsively, involuntarily" slaps her hand.⁴⁰ Although his abuse is still indefensible, it seems that in some inexplicable way, Billy's deep but unspoken love for Julie and Louise seems to protect them from his violence.

If Billy's love for Julie is protective, her love for him is ultimately both transcendent and redemptive. As a character, Julie Jordan is deeply disconcerting to modern audiences, with her seemingly blind love and support for a man who is brutal and abusive towards her. Yet, despite her submissive exterior, Julie has tremendous strength of character. This quiet strength is evident from the opening scenes when she defends herself against Mrs. Mullin's accusations and refuses Mr. Bascombe's demands that she return to the mill. Despite Billy's brutish manners and total lack of consideration for her, Julie remains by his side so he doesn't have to be alone. Julie understands Billy and chooses to love and accept him in spite of his flaws, as is clearly demonstrated in her

³⁸ Block, *Enchanted Evenings*, 174.

³⁹ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 61.

⁴⁰ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 68.

heartbreaking second-act solo, “What’s the Use of Wondering.”⁴¹ As she confesses to Billy as he lies dead in her arms, “You weren’t a good boy – you were bad, and quick tempered and unhappy...I know why you hit me. I always know everythin’ you were thinkin’...”⁴². Julie’s wisdom and understand is even recognized by Billy’s Heavenly Friend, for in response to Billy’s panicked exclamation that Julie “took the star...seems like she knew I was here,” the Heavenly Friend responds simply: “Julie would always know.”⁴³

In many ways, the second act of *Carousel* “centers on Billy’s purgatorial efforts to grow up, fess up, and move up to heaven. This is not a boy-meets-girl story; it’s a story about Billy’s struggle for redemption.”⁴⁴ That his redemption is only possible through Julie’s unfailing love and consistent forgiveness of his shortcomings reveals much about the strength of Julie’s character and Rodgers and Hammerstein’s belief in the power of sacrificial love. Although Billy may be the main character of *Carousel* and the one with the most apparent strength, Julie’s depths of love and understanding ultimately give her a redemptive and transcendent power which is far beyond the physical strength of Billy. On the surface, Julie may seem like little more than a passive milquetoast, but in reality she is a relatable and inspirational woman who exemplifies Rodgers and Hammerstein’s model of a feminism based on the power of love and forgiveness.

⁴¹ See the Appendix for complete lyrics to “What’s the Use of Wondering.”

⁴² Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 57.

⁴³ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 69.

⁴⁴ Oscar Andrew Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins: A Musical Theater Family*, (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2010), 171.

The themes of love, redemption, and hope in the face of overwhelming odds were particularly relevant for a mid-1940s America that was dealing with the ending and aftermath of World War II. Oscar Hammerstein's grandson, writing about his grandfather's work, believes that *Carousel's* themes were especially timely:

Carousel tells the story of a doomed love between a brutish carnival barker and a factory girl and ends with his ignominious death. The second act finds him in heaven, where God offers him the opportunity to make amends for his loathsome behavior. Despite the fact that he fails to do so, the audience empathized with his all-too-human efforts to offer advice, to seek forgiveness, to complete an unfinished life, and to bid a proper goodbye from beyond the grave. A war weary world was having this very same conversation with itself.⁴⁵

Carousel premiered in April 1945, just weeks before the end of World War II in Europe and months before the end of the war in the Pacific. Gerald Mast agrees that the war years had a strong effect on *Carousel's* reception for, "The wartime *Carousel* suggested that present sacrifice could produce a brighter future... The meaning lay not in the present but in the hope for a future where no one walks alone."⁴⁶ In fact, in some interpretations of *Carousel*, Billy Bigelow can be seen as a "surrogate veteran," whose struggle to relate to the community gives "a voice for the shell-shocked, guilt ridden soldiers returning home and the American society in which they no longer knew how to participate."⁴⁷ Although the themes were heavy and the plot dark, the ultimate message of hope and redemption that closed the show resonated deeply with wartime American audiences.

⁴⁵ Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins*, 175.

⁴⁶ Mast, "As Corny as Kansas in August," 95.

⁴⁷ Kati Donovan, "No One Walks Alone: An Investigation of the Veteran and Community in Rodger's and Hammerstein's *Carousel*," *Studies in Musical Theater* 5, no. 3 (January 2012), 288.

Despite the weighty themes, departures from convention, and comparisons to *Oklahoma*, critical reception of *Carousel* was warm. Although some critics disliked the ballet, complained about the length, or protested the lack of humor, “almost all were effusive in their praise of the musical score and acting.”⁴⁸ The show ran for a profitable 890 performances, significantly less than either *Oklahoma!* or *South Pacific* but certainly more than the average Broadway musical of the time. Interestingly, this musical was the favorite work of both Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Rodgers stated that:

Oscar never wrote more meaningful or more moving lyrics and, to me, my score is more satisfying than any I’ve ever written. But it’s not just the songs; it’s the whole play. Beautifully written, tender without being mawkish, it affects me deeply every time I see it performed.⁴⁹

Famous Broadway composer Irving Berlin agreed with this interpretation and stated his opinion that “You’ll Never Walk Alone” was “the best song Oscar Hammerstein ever wrote,” as “the lyrics conveyed Oscar’s take on Emersonian self-reliance, his faith in the brotherhood of man, and his positive view of life.”⁵⁰

Thus, *Carousel* is a musical of great depth and complexity. The most faithful adaptation of source material Rodgers and Hammerstein ever created, the show retains much of the darkness and ambiguity found in Molnar’s play *Liliom* yet presents it in a way that is acceptable and understandable to Broadway audiences. The changes to the ending make the show more hopeful and uplifting, offering a message of redemption for a war-weary America. Through the beautifully integrated music and lyrics, Rodgers and

⁴⁸ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 86.

⁴⁹ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 243.

⁵⁰ Hammerstein, *The Hammersteins*, 173.

Hammerstein created a deeply emotional show, a “bittersweet fantasy” that explored the issues of individuality versus conformity, domestic abuse, and the transcendent power of love.⁵¹ Although *Carousel* has never attained the commercial popularity of *The Sound of Music* or *Oklahoma!*, it remains a moving, beautiful, and meaningful work of theater with messages that still resonate today.

⁵¹ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 238.

CHAPTER THREE

South Pacific

In stark contrast to the uncertainty that surrounded *Carousel's* commercial and critical prospects, the future of *South Pacific* was never brought into serious question.

Indeed, Rodgers recalled that he felt from the beginning that:

South Pacific was failure proof. The story was honest and appealing, the songs were closely interwoven but still had individuality, the staging was masterly, and it certainly didn't hurt to have the leading roles played by two such luminaries [Mary Martin and Ezio Pinza].¹

Based on James Michener's 1947 Pulitzer-prize winning novel "Tales of the South Pacific," *South Pacific* endures as a brilliant and thought-provoking analysis of racism, prejudice, and colonialism, set on the stage of World War II's Pacific theater. From the source material to the song structure to the treatment of the characters, *South Pacific* is vibrant, engaging, and challenging.

Michener's novel opens with an unforgettable and evocative description of the Pacific islands:

I wish I could tell you about the South Pacific. The way it actually was. The endless ocean. The infinite specks of coral we called islands. Coconut palms nodding gracefully towards the ocean. Reefs upon which waves broke into spray, and inner lagoons, lovely beyond description. I wish I could tell you about the sweating jungle, the full moon rising behind the volcanoes, and the waiting. The waiting. The timeless, repetitive waiting.²

¹ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 262.

²James Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), 9.

Michener's novel consists of a series of nineteen loosely connected stories about life in the South Pacific during World War II. Although there is no overarching storyline, main character, or consistent theme, there is a distinct structure to the novel. As musicologist Jim Lovenheimer points out, Michener considered the book as a novel, "even though the book has no linear narrative. Instead, Michener used an arch structure that peaks with 'Fo Dolla', the central, and longest, story, and also creates a palindrome out of the order of the stories."³ The most gripping stories are those which were eventually selected to form the core of *South Pacific*: the tumultuous relationship of nurse Nellie Forbush and French planter Emile de Becque and the fateful love story of Lieutenant Cable and Polynesian Liat.

Although the key points and characters of the musical are found in only the two stories "Our Heroine" and "Fo' Dolla," Rodgers and Hammerstein incorporated discernible plot elements from at least another six out of the nineteen stories, indicating the close attention and detailed thoroughness with which they approached the novel and its adaptation into a musical form. Nellie Forbush is introduced in the fourth story, "An Officer and a Gentleman," as a "slender, pretty nurse of twenty-two" who "came from a small town in Arkansas and loved being in the Navy."⁴ After her romance with the charming, but married, Ensign Bill Harbison ends badly, Nellie disappears from the novel until the eighth story, "Our Heroine," where the story of her romance with Emile de Becque and her accompanying struggle to overcome her racial prejudices regarding Emile's children from prior relationships with island women is told. As presented in the

³ James Lovenheimer, *South Pacific: Paradise Rewritten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 39.

⁴ Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific*, 62.

musical, Emile de Becque is a combination of not only the French planter with whom Nellie falls in love but also the mysterious Englishman “Anderson,” the hero of the entirely separate story “The Cave,” who sacrifices his life to radio important messages to the American troops from a Japanese-occupied island. The rest of *South Pacific*’s main characters – Luther Billis, Lieutenant Joseph Cable, Bloody Mary, and Liat – are introduced in the ninth and tenth stories, “Dry Rot” and “Fo’ Dolla.” More minor, but memorable, plot points relating to Billis such as his obsession with boar’s teeth and his wild “diversionary” prank are drawn from “A Boar’s Tooth” and “The Airstrip at Korona,” while Cable’s death is confirmed in the final story, “A Cemetery at Hoga Point.”

There are differing accounts of how exactly Michener’s novel came to the attention of Rodgers and Hammerstein. The duo was still reeling from the disappointing reception of their innovative and forward-looking 1947 musical *Allegro*, which failed to perform to the high standards of either of its predecessors. Rodgers recalled in his autobiography that by early 1948 he “still hadn’t found an idea for a musical that excited me,” and that it was Josh Logan who suggested the idea of Michener’s book at a party, sparking Rodgers’ interest in the material and his eventual conclusion that it would make an excellent musical libretto.⁵ Michener, though, recalled the process somewhat differently, relating in his autobiography how the book was initially pitched to MGM but ended up being picked up by Broadway set designer Jo Mielziner, who had previously worked with Rodgers and Hammerstein on *Carousel* and *Allegro* and took the story to

⁵ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 258.

Rodgers long before Josh Logan became involved.⁶ The third version, as told by Broadway historian Laurence Maslon, is a combination of the other two stories in which Logan was involved with MGM prior to contacting Rodgers about a musical option for the material.⁷

Whatever the details of Rodgers and Hammerstein's initial introduction to and interest in Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, by mid-1948 they had acquired the rights to the material and were actively considering how best to adapt the disparate stories and loosely connected episodes into a coherent and self-contained two and a half hour unit. Although both Rodgers and Hammerstein were initially interested in "Fo' Dolla" and saw tremendous potential in the story, they decided that it would appear too much like an imitation of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* on stage and consequently chose to meld it with the more distinctive and unexpected "Our Heroine." Rodgers recalled that they decided Nellie and Emile "had to be the main story. The contrast between the two characters and the strong appeal of their attraction to each other virtually dictated that it would be a more dramatic and unusual plot," than the somewhat conventional doomed romance of "Fo' Dolla"; however, because they both appreciated the thematic depth and social critique found in "Fo' Dolla" they decided to blend the two, reasoning that "Nellie and Emile and Liat and Joe could complement each other and make for a fuller evening."⁸ This conjecture proved to be entirely correct, for the contrasting relationships

⁶ Lovenheimer, *South Pacific*, 47.

⁷ Lovenheimer, *South Pacific*, 48.

⁸ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 259.

serve as a potent illustration of the racism and societal prejudices against which Rodgers and Hammerstein were arguing.

Although it is viewed today as an extremely traditional and classic staple of the American musical theatre repertoire, Broadway historian Professor Abe Laufer argues that *South Pacific* “was not a musical comedy in the traditional sense,” and that “at least two startling innovations distinguished it from most of its predecessors.”⁹ In the first place, “the show lacked the conventional line of chorus girls,” the ultimate sign of Broadway glitz and glamor which Rodgers and Hammerstein had also omitted in *Oklahoma!*; however, unlike in *Oklahoma!*, which features numerous chorus dance numbers as well as an extended ballet sequence, Rodgers and Hammerstein intentionally kept the dancing in *South Pacific* to a minimum because the show “had been constructed as a drama with music rather than as a musical comedy.”¹⁰ The emphasis on *South Pacific* as first and foremost a drama is also seen in its depiction of two serious romantic relationships. According to musical theater convention, “if the main love story is serious, the secondary romance is usually employed to provide comic relief,” a pattern which is seen in *Oklahoma*’s Will Parker and Ado Annie and *Carousel*’s Mr. Snow and Carrie.¹¹ Neither Nellie and Emile or Joe and Liat could be considered remotely comic, so comic relief in *South Pacific* is provided by Luther Billis, whose antics balance some of the weighty elements of the show with traditional theatrical levity. Finally, *South Pacific* also “achieved the fluidity of a motion picture by having no blackouts and by blending one

⁹ Laufer, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 130.

¹⁰ Laufer, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 130.

¹¹ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 259.

scene into another,” an unusual move given that Broadway shows tend to delineate themselves from movies with an emphasis on the theatricality of live-performance.¹² While unusual, the fluid staging ultimately worked in the show’s favor, enhancing the drama and providing a more immersive and seamless experience.

South Pacific was also distinctive in the weighty themes which it considered and the very obvious social criticism which it contained. One of the most prominent themes in the show is the subject of racism and prejudice, which Rodgers and Hammerstein address both directly and indirectly throughout the entirety of the musical. The question of “different” is introduced from the very first scene of the musical, when the show opens with Emile’s Polynesian children singing a song in French rather than English, certainly not an opening most audiences would expect from that most American of entertainment forms, Broadway. Shortly after her entrance, Nellie explains to Emile that she became a nurse because she “wanted to see what the world was like outside of Little Rock” and “to meet different kinds of people and find out if I like them better.”¹³ The otherness of Emile is recognized by Nellie in the touching “Twin Soliloquies” number, when she realizes that “We are not alike/ Probably I bore him/ He’s a cultured Frenchman/ I’m a little hick.”¹⁴ Perhaps more importantly, Nellie sees these differences in a negative light, as obstacles to her relationship with Emile, suggesting that “difference itself is identified

¹² Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 130.

¹³ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 9.

¹⁴ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 10.

as a potential problem.”¹⁵ This idea is underscored by the almost deceptively light-hearted number “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta’ my Hair” in which the nurses encourage each other to dismiss men who root for different sports teams or enjoy different comics. Although the song is obviously intended as hyperbole and is used for comic effect, underneath the humorous exterior the idea that “different equals bad” is clearly exposed.

The most obvious and famous exploration of racism in the play is found in the doomed love story of the Philadelphia boy Lieutenant Joe Cable and the beautiful Polynesian girl Liat. Cable’s internal conflict between his love for Liat and the societal expectations forbidding interracial marriages is famously and somewhat controversially revealed in the number “Carefully Taught.” Although Cable loves Liat, he is ultimately unable to overcome his prejudices regarding her race. After having rejected Bloody Mary’s offer of Liat in marriage, Cable tells Nellie that “I love her [Liat] and yet I just heard myself saying I can’t marry her. What’s the matter with me, Nellie? What kind of guy am I, anyway?”¹⁶ This comment precedes his song “Carefully Taught,” in which he opines that “you’ve got to be taught to hate and fear,” reinforcing the idea found throughout *South Pacific* that prejudice is not something inborn, but rather something learned.¹⁷ By that point, Cable is bitter and disillusioned, and “having lost his heart” he

¹⁵ Andrea Most, “‘You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught’: The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*,” *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 3 (October 2002): 319.

¹⁶ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 134.

¹⁷ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 136.

“express [es] his feelings about the superficiality of racial barriers.”¹⁸ The song is worth exploring, for it was the main source of controversy when the show opened, and “aroused opposition from persons objecting to its ‘propaganda’.”¹⁹ In fact, “two Georgia legislators... were sufficiently annoyed to express their distaste for the song publicly.”²⁰ Although Hammerstein’s 1927 collaboration with Jerome Kern, *Show Boat*, had also explored weighty matters of race and prejudice, the lyrics to “Carefully Taught” are some of the most scathing, insightful, and hard-hitting criticism of societal acceptance and propagation of racism.²¹

Interestingly, Rodgers and Hammerstein had somewhat different claims regarding “Carefully Taught” as a statement against racism. Rodgers stated quite clearly in his autobiography that “the song was never written as a ‘message’ song;” rather,

it was included in *South Pacific* for the simple reason that Oscar and I felt it was needed in a particular spot for a Princeton-educated young WASP who, despite his background and upbringing, had fallen in love with a Polynesian girl.”²²

Thus, for Rodgers, the song was simply part of the complete integration of themes, music, and characters for which *South Pacific* is highly notable. According to the more politically active Hammerstein, though, the song was intended to convey a message, as “the lyrics were a protest against racial prejudice as well as a statement of Cable’s

¹⁸ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 262.

¹⁹ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 127.

²⁰ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 127.

²¹ For the complete lyrics of “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught,” please consult the Appendix.

²² Rodgers, *Musicals Stages*, 261.

conflict between his prejudices and his love for Liat.”²³ Regardless of the intentions behind the song, it is certain that it stands out for its strong indictment and sobering reminder of America’s racism.

Although Cable and Liat’s relationship is the most obvious and tragic example of racism in action, the conflict between Emile and Nellie presents a different side of prejudice that is in some ways even more jarring. Nellie’s racism is different than that of Cable, and “by offering a character who has never been a racist (Emile), one who discovers he is a racist (Cable), and one who successfully overcomes her racism (Nellie),” Rodgers and Hammerstein are able to create a more thorough examination of racism as well as showing “the ways in which, through education, prejudice can be overcome.”²⁴ In the finale of Act 1, Nellie meets Emile’s children without realizing that they are his, and her stunned reaction to the truth and subsequent flustered departure make clear her distress. It is not until the middle of Act Two, though, that the extent of her racism is revealed. After hearing that Joe has refused Liat, Emile appears, wanting to know why Nellie has requested a transfer. Nellie tells him that she can’t marry him, not because of his children but because of their Polynesian mother: “I can’t help it. It’s not as if I could give you a good reason. There is no reason. This is something emotional. This is something that is born in me.”²⁵ Of course, as “Carefully Taught” – which immediately follows this scene – makes clear, Rodgers and Hammerstein believed that racism is not inborn or natural. Nevertheless, they clearly recognized how powerful and

²³ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 127.

²⁴ Most, “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught,” 312.

²⁵ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 135.

destructive a force it can be: for Nellie, it takes the death of Joe and the near death of Emile before she reexamines and sets aside her prejudices.

Ultimately, Nellie's transformation offers a message of hope, suggesting that prejudices can be overcome and that, despite being "carefully taught" to believe certain things, people do have the potential to change. Towards the end of Act Two, after learning that Joe is dead and Emile's fate is tenuous, Nellie delivers a heartfelt monologue:

"Come back so I can tell you something. I know what counts now. You. All those other things – the woman you had before – her color...what piffle! What a pinhead I was! Come back so I can tell you. Oh, my God, don't die until I can tell you. All that matters is you and I being together. That's all!"²⁶

This depiction of Nellie is a complete reversal from the woman who only a few short scenes ago was rejecting Emile because of his Polynesian children. The moment is made even more heartbreaking and meaningful by the entrance of Liat, who is looking for Joe only to learn from Nellie that he is dead: it is too late for him to change. To complete Nellie's transformation and rehabilitation, the next time the audience sees her is in the final scene of the musical, when she is playing with Ngana and Jerome and instructing them to "mind me when I talk to you and be nice to me. Because I love you very much."²⁷ As Nellie sings the French song with which the play opened, symbolizing her acceptance of the "different" which she at first rejected, Emile joins them. The closing tableau, "the simple snapshot of a family at dinner" offers the hope that "with the proper kind of love,

²⁶ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 158.

²⁷ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 168.

racial and ethnic difference can be overcome.”²⁸ Thus, although Rodgers and Hammerstein do not shy away from depicting the pain and prejudice of racism, *South Pacific*, like *Carousel*, does conclude with a message of hope for a brighter future.

Of course, the racism depicted in *South Pacific* also raises deeper questions about the glorified image of World War II and the nature of colonialism. As Lovenheimer insightfully points out, *South Pacific* “emphasizes the irony of Americans fighting a war against racist enemies while their own racism remains unresolved.”²⁹ Although “when *South Pacific* opened in 1949 enough time had elapsed after World War II to make the wartime locale subordinate to the romantic love stories,” the causes, battles, and outcomes of the war would surely have been present in everyone’s mind.³⁰ World War II was and is widely regarded as one of the noblest wars of all time, and while history views many other wars as nothing more than pointless bloodshed by egotistical and self-serving governments, World War II is held up as an example of good confronting evil and emerging triumphant.

Given the prevalence of this traditional narrative, Act One, Scene 8, is particularly interesting. When Brackett and Harbison ask Emile to join Cable on the dangerous mission, Emile states that “I know what you’re against. But what are you for?” pointing out that “I have seen these bullies multiply and grow strong. The world sat by and watched.”³¹ This statement could be seen as an indictment of the passivity and non-

²⁸ Most, “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught,” 337.

²⁹ Lovenheimer, *South Pacific*, 1.

³⁰ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 130-131.

³¹ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 85.

interventionism which had characterized both American and European responses to Hitler prior to his invasion of Poland in 1939. After Emile refuses to accept the mission and leaves, Harbison ponders his questions: “We can’t guarantee him a better world if we win. Point is, we can be damned sure it’ll be worse if we lose. Can’t we? Well, can’t we?”³² The fact that Cable does not respond to this question and that Brackett has to be prompted to do so introduces some ambivalence about the American cause and the inherent rightness of it.

Although Rodgers and Hammerstein receive a great deal of credit for their bold statements against racism and their sensitive and less overtly patriotic portrayal of the Pacific theater, there are some who question the motives and message of *South Pacific*. Professor Philip Beidler believes the decision to create a 1949 musical about World War II in the Pacific does raise the question of “what kind of people, slightly more than seven years after Pearl Harbor and three years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, could possibly make World War II against the Japanese into a Broadway musical?”³³ Beidler insists that the notion that “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s attempt to use the Broadway theater to make a courageous statement against racial bigotry in general and institutional racism in the postwar United States” is nothing more than a “cherished legend.”³⁴ Rather, he argues that *South Pacific* was a calculated business venture designed to make money and made

³² Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 86.

³³ Philip Beidler, “South Pacific and American Remembering; Or, ‘Josh, We’re Going to Buy this Son of a Bitch,’” *Journal of American Studies* 27, no. 2, (August 1993), 208.

³⁴ Beidler, “South Pacific and America Remembering,” 213.

possible only because the war in the Pacific is “the most American of all great American wars...compounded of its most virulent racism, east and west.”³⁵ In effect, Beidler is saying that the supposedly groundbreaking anti-racism musical set during World War II is only possible because it exploits deeply ingrained racism towards the Japanese. Bruce McConachie supports this position and goes even further, arguing that the stereotypes of islanders and hostility towards the Japanese in *South Pacific* helped “to establish a legitimate basis for the American war against the people of Southeast Asia in the 1960s.”³⁶ Given all of statements that Rodgers and Hammerstein publicly made against racism and way they both implicitly and explicitly condemn prejudice throughout *South Pacific*, it seems unlikely that it was truly their intention to propagate racism and stereotypes. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider that discernible traces of racism and colonial superiority remain even among those who advocate most passionately for equality, a consideration which is also relevant in relation to *The King and I*.

South Pacific has also been criticized in some quarters for its gender stereotypes, particularly “its sentimental view of Liat’s sexual enslavement and its blanket assumption that Nellie’s only task in life was to choose a man to marry.”³⁷ It is undeniable that Liat’s character comes across as decidedly passive: her romance with Cable is engineered by her mother, as is her marriage to the French planter Jacques Barrere. Her passivity is symbolized by her silence, for throughout the play Liat speaks fewer than ten lines, most

³⁵ Beidler, “South Pacific and America Remembering,” 209.

³⁶ Bruce A. McConachie, “The ‘Oriental’ Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia,” *Theatre Journal* 46, no. 3 (October 1994), 386.

³⁷ Robert Patrick and William Haislip, “‘Thank Heaven for Little Girls:’ An Examination of the Male Chauvinist Musical,” *Cineaste* 6, no. 1 (1973), 25.

of which are only a word or two in French. It is only Act II, Scene Ten that Liat shows any hint of self-determination as she comes to inquire into the whereabouts of Joe. Even here, though, she does not speak for herself: it is Bloody Mary who tells Nellie that “she won’t marry no one but Lootellan Cable.”³⁸

Liat’s submissiveness is fairly obvious, but less readily apparent is Nellie’s journey “from wartime autonomy to postwar domestic confinement.”³⁹ Specifically, Lovenheimer points out that the musical made significant changes to Michener’s Nellie, for “through the elimination of her romantic past and the muting of her sexuality... Hammerstein makes Nellie far less controversial than she otherwise might have been.”⁴⁰ In Michener’s novel, Nellie is adventurous, decisive, and proactive, and although her spunk remains in the musical, it is diminished. Rather, Lovenheimer argues that the Nellie of *South Pacific* is forced to “accept and become part of the principal male character’s world in order to attain self-fulfillment.”⁴¹ Of course, much of what Nellie objects to in Emile’s world is due to her racism, but it is interesting that Nellie, not Emile, is the one who changes her worldview. Thus, even the “cock-eyed optimist” Nellie who bravely goes to war as a nurse is ultimately forced to find happiness through a man, certainly a portrayal of femininity which post-war 1949 society would have fully endorsed. This highly traditional and conservative portrayal of women is in contrast to the forward-thinking nature of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s racial critiques, but Jack

³⁸ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 159.

³⁹ Lovenheimer, *South Pacific*, 108.

⁴⁰ Lovenheimer, *South Pacific*, 109.

⁴¹ Lovenheimer, *South Pacific*, 112.

Gohn argues that it was necessary for the duo to present “the ‘destabilizing’ message about race relations in a matrix that included remarkably conventional and reassuring, even retrograde, messages concerning the relations of the sexes and colonialism,” thereby making the social critique palatable to audiences.⁴²

Although Lovenheimer’s argument is compelling to an extent, Nellie’s character can also be viewed as another example of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s unique brand of feminism. Nellie is undoubtedly the chief protagonist of the show and is treated by Rodgers and Hammerstein as the heroine. Her acceptance of Emile and his children can be interpreted not as a capitulation to masculine authority but as an act of tremendous strength: she has the integrity of character to realize the wrongness of her racism and to change her life accordingly, something that the male Joe Cable is unable to do. While Julie’s love for Billy redeems him, Nellie’s love for Emile enables her to sacrifice her racist preconceptions and thereby redeem herself. In both cases, the power of sacrificial love is made clear, and a female character demonstrates tremendous strength in the exercise of that sacrificial love.

An often-overlooked element of World War II in the Pacific is the question of colonialism. As a French planter, Emile de Becque is clearly one of the elite and plays a controlling role on the islands. In his state of affluence, Emile has Polynesian servants; indeed, all of the Polynesians presented in the play are employed in a subservient manner, from Henry as Emile’s cook to Bloody Mary as a salesperson. This subservience was typical of French and Tonkinese relations, for the French typically employed “indentured

⁴² Jack L.B. Gohn, “‘In a Conventional Dither’: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Camouflaged Critique of Race Relations at Mid-Century,” *The Hopkins Review* 5, no. 3 (2012), 421.

Tonkinese who worked on French plantations.”⁴³ Although the clash between French and Tonkinese culture and expectations is explored much further in Michener’s novel, traces of tension remain in the musical. Bloody Mary represents the independent Tonkinese economy as she sells grass skirts and other souvenirs to the GIs and derides the French as “stingy bastards.”⁴⁴ Ultimately, though, Bloody Mary is trapped within the French system which requires her to carefully groom the beautiful Liat for an advantageous marriage to a French planter, essentially selling her daughter in matrimony to give her a chance at a better life.

Although *South Pacific* heavily criticizes American racism and prejudice and presents a less than glowing picture of World War II in the Pacific, the musical was still hugely successful. In fact, “in number of prizes, awards, and citations received,” *South Pacific* “exceeded most musical productions in the history of the New York theater and surpassed all of its competitors in the same season.”⁴⁵ The show opened on April 7, 1949, at the Majestic Theater and won seven Tony and nine Donaldson awards, as well as receiving the 1949-50 Pulitzer Prize in drama. Critics and audiences alike adored it, and propelled the show to a five year, 1,925 performance run that at the time was second only to its older sibling *Oklahoma!*.⁴⁶ The soaring melodies, gripping drama, and believable characters enthralled audiences and gave Rodgers and Hammerstein their second smash hit of the decade.

⁴³ Lovenheimer, *South Pacific*, 164.

⁴⁴ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 19.

⁴⁵ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 121.

⁴⁶ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 132.

While *South Pacific* definitely affords an excellent night in the theater – as the huge success of the 2008 Broadway revival confirmed – it also causes the viewer to question ingrained assumptions about racism, prejudice, World War II, gender roles, and colonialism. Through the juxtaposition of Liat and Cable and Nellie and Emile, Rodgers and Hammerstein explore different facets of, reactions to, and consequences of racism. Prejudice is strongly condemned, but the hope that it can be overcome is presented through Nellie's ultimate acceptance of Emile's biracial children. Although Nellie's transformation is positive in that she overcomes her racism, some critics have interpreted it as a late 1940's argument that women should conform their views to men and find their happiness in marriage. In addition to the themes of racism and gender, *South Pacific* also raises questions regarding colonialism and the glorification of American involvement in the Pacific theater of World War II. All in all, *South Pacific* is a timeless and profound musical that melds perfect theater with insightful social criticism.

CHAPTER FOUR

The King and I

After the massive success of *South Pacific* in 1949, Rodgers and Hammerstein once again found themselves searching for direction and inspiration. As Rodgers recalls, he and Hammerstein pragmatically decided against writing another musical in the near future, for “with the show [South Pacific] obviously set to run for years, we saw no point in competing with ourselves by following it up with another musical of our own.”¹ Fortunately for the Broadway community, the duo reconsidered this plan when they discovered an exciting new project: to write a musical as a vehicle for one of Broadway’s greatest stars, the legendary Gertrude Lawrence. This request presented an interesting dilemma for Rodgers and Hammerstein, since they had never before “written a musical specifically with one actor or actress in mind.”² In fact, aside from the highly billed stars of *South Pacific*, all of their previous collaborations featured relatively unknown actors. Despite their misgivings about writing a project for a famous – and famously temperamental – actress, the two accepted the project in 1950 and began work on what would evolve into one of their most interesting and thought-provoking musicals: *The King and I*. A sumptuous extravaganza, *The King and I* explores a variety of fascinating issues including the role of gender, the effects of colonialism, and the dynamics of East versus West.

¹ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 268.

² Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 269.

The historical origins of *The King and I* are somewhat murky. Anna Leonowens, the “I” of the musical’s title, published an autobiography in 1870 which provided a highly embellished and fantasized account of her experiences at the court of Siam. Although Anna’s account is not entirely reliable, it is verifiable that King Mongkut, who reigned from 1851 to 1868, engaged Anna Leonowens to serve as a teacher to some of his wives and children. This narrative was then converted into Margaret Landon’s popular 1944 book *Anna and the King of Siam*, which in turn provided the basis for the 1946 motion picture of the same name starring Irene Dunne and Rex Harrison.³ Although Rodgers and Hammerstein may have studied the original account from Anna Leonowens herself, they drew primarily from Margaret Landon’s work. As with *South Pacific*, *The King and I* forced Rodgers and Hammerstein to adapt material that was already familiar to the general public.

As with the adaptation of Michener’s *South Pacific*, significant changes, cuts, and edits had to be made in order to make Margaret Landon’s *Anna and the King of Siam* a workable stage musical. Some scenes were lifted almost verbatim from the book, including Anna’s first encounter with the Kralahome, but others, such as her confrontations with the King, were significantly altered.⁴ One of the main challenges of Landon’s book was that it followed the entirety of Anna’s time in Siam and therefore lacked a strong narrative arc that could be adapted to the stage; consequently, much of the material had to be cut entirely in order to create a cohesive story. Rodgers and

³ Knapp, *The American Musical*, 261.

⁴ Margaret Landon, *Anna and the King of Siam*, (New York: The John Day Company, 1944), 34.

Hammerstein chose to focus on the conflict between Anna and the King over the matter of her house – a component of Landon’s book, but not an overly important one – as a means to create a cohesive plot and illuminate the personalities of both Anna and the King. Furthermore, Rodgers and Hammerstein took significant liberties with the ending of the narrative. In the book, Anna leaves Siam out of a desire to go to England to see her daughter Avis, a character who is entirely eliminated from the musical, and to put her son Louis in school. In the musical, her climactic fight with the King over the matter of Tuptim prompts her attempt to leave, although the king’s untimely death – also an invention of the musical –changes her mind and leads her to remain in Siam.

In addition to cutting and modifying storylines, Rodgers and Hammerstein also made extensive changes to the characters by eliminating, combining, and significantly altering different characters. Anna is undoubtedly the most faithfully preserved character from the book although the stage incarnations of Louis, Lady Thiang, and the Kralahome are all similar to their book portrayals. Tuptim’s importance is increased dramatically in the stage version, and Lun Tha is at least half-invented, as their doomed love affair constitutes only two chapters in the book and develops along lines that are less than suitable for a 1950s Broadway musical.⁵ Perhaps the most noticeably altered character is that of the King. While Landon’s book depicts many of his positive qualities, including his desire for progress, his inquisitive mind, and his devotion to his country, it also portrays him as cruel, harsh, and barbaric in many of his attitudes and practices. In the

⁵ Landon, *Anna and the King of Siam*, Chapters 31-32: In these chapters, Tuptim runs away from the palace. She is discovered hiding in the temple, posing as a novice. She is studying with Khun Phra Palat (Lun Tha in the musical) who is unaware of her identity. When they are discovered, both are brutally tortured and executed at the command of the King.

musical, the authority and strength of the King are maintained, but his brutality and vindictiveness are diminished. The choice to make the King a far more likable, relatable, and sympathetic character is reminiscent of Rodgers and Hammerstein's decision to similarly alter the character of Billy Bigelow, reflecting their remarkable ability to remain true to the spirit of their source while making the necessary edits to allow the material to shine in stage format.

After overcoming their initial hesitations about creating a musical for a specific actress, Rodgers and Hammerstein became excited by the possibilities of the material.

Rodgers recalled that:

It was obvious that the story...had the makings of a beautiful musical play. There was the contrast between Eastern and Western cultures; there was the intangibility of the attraction between teacher and king; there was the tragic subplot of the doomed love between the king's Burmese wife and the Burmese emissary; there was the warmth of the relationship between Anna and her royal pupils; there was the theme of democratic teachings triumphing over autocratic rule; and lastly, there were the added features of Oriental pomp and atmosphere.⁶

In accordance with their general procedure, the duo immersed themselves in the material and committed fully to both the subject matter and the locale. The result was an opulent display that combined rich themes with beautiful music and vibrant characters. So magnificent was the show that "some critics called it an American opera, for although it was a drama with music, it had the spectacle and pageantry of grand opera."⁷ Both sets and costumes were sumptuous, and even those reviewers who felt that the show did not achieve the heights of *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific* were forced to concede that it was a truly magnificent display.

⁶ Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 270.

⁷ Laufe, *Broadway's Greatest Musicals*, 152.

Although *The King and I* does not claim nearly the same level of innovation as some of their previous musicals, Rodgers and Hammerstein continued their track record of tinkering with their formula of integrated songs and plot in order to fit the demands of the material. As in *South Pacific*, “the male relationship of most importance...is again between an aging man, the King, and a younger woman.”⁸ Unlike their previous musicals, though, this relationship “was unconventional in presenting two leading characters who did not have one love scene, or even kiss,” an anomaly in Broadway musicals of the time.⁹ Romantically, the show focuses on the slave girl Tuptim, her lover Lun Tha, and their tragic relationship, which bears some similarities to the romance of Joe Cable and Liat. Both romances are doomed from the start, and both end with the death of the male and an uncertain outcome for the female. Interestingly, the audience is never told what becomes of either Tuptim or Liat, although Tuptim’s statement that “I shall join him soon” after hearing of Lun Tha’s death does not bode well for her character.¹⁰ Rodgers and Hammerstein also broke with convention by ending the show with the death of one of the title characters. Their shows had previously featured deaths of key characters – most memorably the suicide of Billy in *Carousel* and the semi-accidental killing of Jud in *Oklahoma!* – but “having one of the star performers die on stage” as the climax of the show was an unprecedented step in Broadway history.¹¹

⁸ Riddle, *The American Musical*, 88.

⁹ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musical*s, 159.

¹⁰ Oscar Hammerstein and Richard Rodgers, *The King and I*, (New York: Random House, 1951), 130.

¹¹ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musical*s, 159.

One of the challenges presented by *The King and I* was that of evoking a foreign culture in a believable way, forcing Rodgers and Hammerstein to explore previously uncharted territory. As Rodgers recalled, “Even though our view of Siam couldn’t be completely authentic, Oscar and I were determined to depict the Orientals in the story as characters, not caricatures. Our aim was to portray the king and his court with humanity and believability.”¹² How successful Rodgers and Hammerstein were in this lofty goal is a matter of some debate. Laufe praises the pair for avoiding imitation of Oriental music, believing that the show was made more effective by the refusal to caricature a different musical tradition, but his enthusiasm is not shared by most academics.¹³ Broadway historian Stacy Wolf has mixed views of the duo, applauding them for “representing Asian cultures in order to take on serious social issues and argue for tolerance,” yet pointing out that while the musicals “feature Asian characters,” they typically “erase the specificity of Asian cultures to prove that underneath everyone is alike and should behave according to American cultural values.”¹⁴ This “Americentrism” is the primary ground for Bruce McConachie’s criticism of the show, for he argues that musicals such as *The King and I* played into inaccurate perceptions of the East that “helped to convince American citizens to support U.S. policies in Southeast Asia in the 1960s,” which became increasingly interventionist as the fear of Communism spread.¹⁵ Although Raymond

¹² Rodgers, *Musical Stages*, 274.

¹³ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 157.

¹⁴ Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁵ McConachie, “The ‘Oriental’ Musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the U.S. War in Southeast Asia,” 385.

Knapp does not support McConachie's view regarding foreign policy, he is strongly critical of the duo, stating that the show is:

blatantly wrong about Siam's history and about the character of the King and the historical role he actually played...Given its mix of good intentions, insights, and blithe indifference to getting things historically right, the show on the whole inevitably patronizes: we are invited to enjoy our superiority, to contemplate as a curiosity a far away kingdom of harems, slavery, and barbarity, and even to mourn the passing of that culture with the death of its king.¹⁶

The inbred superiority of West towards East is most clearly reflected in the characters of Anna and the King, who can be seen as representations of their respective societies. Anna's profession is of itself very telling, for as a schoolteacher her job is to educate the children, the wives, and ultimately, the king. Thus, her very career indicates a certain level of condescension, which is underscored by the behavior of the king. While he is proud of his Siamese customs, he nevertheless has a strong desire to Westernize his country. When he first meets Anna, he informs her that "you are part of general plan I have for bringing to Siam what is good in Western culture."¹⁷ Later in the musical, Lady Thiang pleads with Anna to understand that "he wish to be new-blood King with Western ideas. But it is hard for him."¹⁸ Although he clearly views himself as an absolutist monarch, his many protestations come across as "willful, even childish," and he ultimately allows himself "to be guided by the British governess not only in foreign correspondence but in foreign and domestic policies" the success of the king's diplomatic efforts with the British diplomat Sir Edward Ramsay at the start of the second

¹⁶ Knapp, *The American Musical Theater*, 262, 264.

¹⁷ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 19-20.

¹⁸ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 59.

act is entirely attributable to Anna, as the King would clearly have provoked a fight if left to his own devices.¹⁹ Despite his immaturity and stubbornness, the King is also an intelligent man who works very hard for his country and who possesses many admirable qualities. As the King is dying at the end of the play, Louis asks Anna if he was “as good a king as he could have been,” to which Anna responds: “I don’t think any man has ever been as good a king as he could have been...but this one tried. He tried very hard.”²⁰

Although the King is obviously the main Siamese character, the rest of the Siamese people are presented as a similarly strange blend of childlike ignorance and self-aware perceptiveness. The childlike nature is emphasized from the fascination the women have for Anna’s voluminous hoop skirt to the children’s unwillingness to believe in snow to the wives’ panics upon seeing a British man with a monocle, but this ignorance is balanced by an interesting self-awareness which is most clearly illustrated in the opening second act number “Western People Funny.” As the ladies dress in the Western fashions in preparation for the arrival of the British ambassador, they point out the “puzzlement” of Western people:

To prove we’re not barbarians,
They dress us up like savages...
They feel so sentimental about the Oriental,
They always turn us inside down and upside out.
They think they civilize us
Whenever they advise us
To learn to make the same mistake
That they are making too!²¹

¹⁹ Sheing Mei-Ma, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Chopstick Musicals,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (2003), 18.

²⁰ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 137.

²¹ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 82.

Through this song, Rodgers and Hammerstein create an interesting contrast between the childlike wonderment of the Siamese towards Anna's Western ideas and their remarkable ability to see through Western pretensions and realize that Western people make just as many mistakes as Easterners do, even if they themselves are not fully aware of it.

Lady Thiang and the Kralahome's understanding of the relationship between Anna and the King further underscores the Siamese ability to comprehend truths which the West, as represented by Anna, does not. After convincing Anna to go to the King, Lady Thiang has an exchange with the Kralahome in which the Kralahome says that he will tell the King that "it is she who needs him." Lady Thiang responds: "That will also be true. This woman knows many things, but this, I think, she does not know."²² Anna's blindness to her relationship with the King is later exposed after he gives her a ring and she asks the Kralahome to ask the King for a rise in her salary, to which the Kralahome surprisingly responds that: "I shall do this for you, because this is a strange world in which men and women can be very blind about things nearest to them."²³ Scenes such as these intimate that the West is not perhaps as all-knowing as it likes to think itself and suggest that cultures can learn much from one another. Thus, the relationship of Anna and the King, and by extension Anna and Siam, is one of mutual enrichment: "Anna learns a lesson of multicultural tolerance from the King of Siam, and she teaches him to be gentle and to trust a woman."²⁴

²² Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 62.

²³ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 115.

²⁴ Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria*, 2.

The King and I also touches on the topic of colonialism, which is closely interrelated with the topic of East vs. West. It is obvious early in the show that the King is very concerned about the international status of Siam. Set in the 1860s, *The King and I* takes place during a time when European countries were increasingly focusing their efforts on colonization and were rapaciously establishing control over nations across Africa and Asia. In his famous Act I soliloquy, the King ponders whether he should ally with other nations: “If allies are weak, am I not best alone? If allies are strong with power to protect me, might they not protect me out of all I own?”²⁵ That his fears of a hostile takeover are well founded is confirmed when Lady Thiang tells Anna that “our agents in Singapore have found letters to British government from people whose greedy eyes are on Siam. They describe King as a barbarian, and suggest making Siam a protectorate.”²⁶ Considering the King’s understandable fear of the threat of European interference in his kingdom adds another dimension to the East vs. West dilemma, for the king simultaneously admires and fears Western countries and culture.

Another of the serious themes addressed in *The King and I* is sexism, although even this topic is heavily colored by the East vs. West thread that runs so strongly throughout the entirety of the show. Raymond Knapp argues that:

the importance of power relations in the show makes its representation of the West by a woman alone in an alien cultural environment particularly significant, underscoring that within that culture, women have no real power and are often treated as little more than slaves.²⁷

²⁵ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 34.

²⁶ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 58.

²⁷ Knapp, *The American Musical Theater*, 261.

The King's sexist attitude is established in his very first scene as he appraises Tuptim like a piece of property and expresses shock that "a woman has written a book?" in relation to her request to read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.²⁸ That his sexist attitude is embraced by the rest of his court is made clear only a few moments later when Anna is told by Lady Thiang that the Siamese women refer to her as sir, "Because you scientific. Not lowly, like woman."²⁹ Anna's indignant reaction to this statement establishes her belief in the equality of the sexes and foreshadows further disagreement with the King and the Kralahome. There is little doubt that Rodgers and Hammerstein side with Anna on the issue of sexism, for Anna is undoubtedly the protagonist of *The King and I* and in many ways ultimately "wins" her battle with the King when his deathbed letter admits that Anna has been "most earnest help of all" (although the letter also emphasizes the strangeness of that fact).³⁰

Sexism continues to appear throughout the show, as in Anna's angry rant following her schoolroom confrontation with the King, when she complains that: "because I'm a woman, you think, like every woman, I have to be a slave or concubine."³¹ Possibly the most explicit statement of the King's (and by extension, the East's) views about women is found in one of the final scenes, when the King sings that:

A woman is a female who is human,
Designed for pleasing man, the human male.
A human male is pleased by many women,

²⁸ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 23.

²⁹ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 26.

³⁰ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 135.

³¹ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 54.

And all the rest you hear is fairy tale.³²

This attitude is contrasted with Anna's response, when she espouses the romantic view of the West that "every man is like a King and every woman like a Queen, when they love one another."³³ Ultimately, the sexist conflict between Anna and the King is another manifestation of the divide between East and West, as it "comes down to the incompatibility of specifically feminine self-determination with the culturally reinforced expectation of masculine authority."³⁴ This expectation is, of course, the product of the misogynistic Siamese paradigm, which is clearly condemned as incorrect when compared to the Western idea of monogamous love. The superiority of the Western model is further underlined by the subplot of Lun Tha and Tuptim, who are presented as sharing a monogamous and romantic love that accords well with Western ideals.

In many ways, Anna is the strongest female character ever created by Rodgers and Hammerstein. She has the courage and spirit to move to a foreign and sometimes hostile country and confront its ruler with dignity and strength in pursuit of what she perceives as her rights; even in the face of consistent belittlement from the Kralahome and intermittent conflict with the King, Anna remains steadfast. Of the three heroines from *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*, Anna in many ways feels the most modern. She speaks her mind and stands up for herself, and although she clearly mourns for her deceased husband Tom, she feels no need to have a man be romantically present in her life. When the British ambassador Sir Edward Ramsay begins to hint very heavily

³² Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 117.

³³ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 119.

³⁴ Knapp, *The American Musical*, 266.

about his romantic interest in Anna, asking whether she remembers that “I once asked you to marry me – before Tom came along,” she expresses no interest whatsoever and reaffirms her commitment to her work with the people of Siam.³⁵ Although Anna’s storyline does not include romantic love and demonstrates more characteristics that are associated with twenty-first century feminism, she still clearly displays the sacrificial love which typifies Rodgers and Hammerstein’s feminist heroines. Like Nellie in *South Pacific*, Anna has the strength of character to reconsider her preconceptions about Siam and the Siamese due to her love for the children and her respect for the King. At the end of the play, she is willing to sacrifice her wounded pride and remain in Siam to ease the dying King’s mind and assist his son.

While Anna is certainly the focus of *The King and I*, the other female characters in this show are also portrayed with sensitivity and depth. In Lady Thiang, head wife of the King, Rodgers and Hammerstein also create an incredibly complex character. Her justly famous solo “Something Wonderful” reveals her “intense love for her husband along with her desperate desire to be to him what she cannot,” and her aching acceptance of an imperfect man recalls Julie’s similarly heartbreaking “What’s the Use of Wondering” from *Carousel*.³⁶ Like Julie, Lady Thiang demonstrates great strength of character in a very gentle and indirect way, ruling through suggestions rather than demands and exhibiting tremendous wisdom and kindness. The third female lead, Tuptim, is perhaps less fully realized than Anna or Lady Thiang but is nevertheless a

³⁵ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 91.

³⁶ Kislán, *The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theater*, 212.

compelling character who demonstrates great courage and commitment in her pursuit of freedom and consequent defiance of the King.

Finally, *The King and I* continues to explore Rodgers and Hammerstein's favorite themes of race and toleration, albeit in a less obvious manner than in *South Pacific*. Although Anna learns about cultural toleration from her interactions with the Siamese people, the primary vehicle for the message of toleration is the subplot relating to Tuptim and Lun Tha. From the moment of her arrival at the Siamese court, Tuptim is viewed with suspicion because she comes from Siam's traditional enemy, the neighboring country of Burma: the King demands of her "Am I to trust the ruler of Burma? Am I to trust this present they send me, or is she a spy?"³⁷ In addition to the suspicion caused by her origin, Tuptim's obvious unhappiness with the King and her love for the Burmese emissary Lun Tha causes the other royal wives to ostracize her. In Tuptim and Lun Tha's haunting love song "We Kiss in the Shadows," the lyrics could be understood "to stand for the lonely aspirations of so many ostracized lovers longing for ultimate acceptance from an intolerant society."³⁸ Tuptim's ties to the theme of toleration are further underscored by the balletic retelling of the famous anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which she arranges as entertainment for the British ambassador. In this impressive, extended sequence in Act II, "a stylized dance-narration...exhibits in microcosm the musical play's twin themes of slavery and oppression."³⁹

³⁷ Hammerstein, *The King and I*, 17.

³⁸ David Lewis, *Broadway Musicals: A Hundred Year History*, 62.

³⁹ Kislán, *The Musical*, 232.

For whatever reason, *The King and I* has never received as much popular acclaim or critical attention as either *Carousel* or *South Pacific*. Nevertheless, following its opening March 29, 1951, at the St. James Theatre, the show ran for a very respectable 1,246 performances, which at the time made it “the thirteenth longest-running production and third longest-running musical comedy in the history of the New York theater.”⁴⁰ Although there was a certain amount of ambivalence from critics who felt that it did not measure up to some of the duo’s previous work, the show has received strong commendation from more modern scholars. David Lewis states that it “is surely one of the two or three best integrated musicals ever mounted on the New York stage,”⁴¹ while Deems Taylor describes it as “a complete triumph...a tribute both to their skill and to their faith in the intelligence of the theatergoing public” and expresses his belief that *The King and I* is the best score that Rodgers ever wrote.⁴²

Regardless of its critical reception, it is evident that *The King and I* is an incredibly rich and complex theatrical creation. As a musical, the show was a clear success due to its magnificent sets, sumptuous costumes, compelling characters, and soaring melodies. As social commentary, the show continued Rodgers and Hammerstein’s track record of exploring complicated issues through their works. The most important issue considered by the show is the divide between East and West, which is reflected through the characters of the King and Anna. Although Rodgers and Hammerstein fall victim to some ingrained Western superiority by presenting the

⁴⁰ Laufe, *Broadway’s Greatest Musicals*, 159.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Broadway Musicals*, 62.

⁴² Taylor, *Some Enchanted Evenings*, 233.

Siamese as somewhat childlike and naïve, they at least partially redeem themselves by showing that the Siamese also possess great intelligence and a level of self-awareness that greatly exceeds that of the Europeans. In addition, Rodgers and Hammerstein explore the differences between East and West through discussions of social customs, gender attitudes, and foreign policy, thereby helping to create a more fully rounded portrait of the East than is often found in Broadway musicals.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Rodgers and Hammerstein composed each of the three musicals we have examined, all of them are unique and highly original works of theater that explore complicated themes and ideas. Each show has its own distinct character, both musically and thematically. While the music is unfailingly tuneful and memorable, the colorful strains of the “Carousel Waltz” evoke a very different scene than the atmospheric and longing “Bali Hai.” The characters are vibrant, distinctive, and complex creations who bear very little resemblance to one another. From a Hungarian play to an American collection of short stories to a British memoir, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s selections of diverse source materials portray radically different stories and settings. Yet even with all the differences in music, story, character, and setting, these Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals manage to create a sense of continuity and unity through the similarities found in their works.

First and foremost among these similarities is an overarching optimism which pervades the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein. When Nellie introduces herself as a “cockeyed optimist” who is stuck “with a thing called hope” that can’t get out of her heart, Rodgers and Hammerstein could just as easily be describing themselves.¹ Even in *Carousel*, an undeniably dark story about a brutish carousel barker who abuses and abandons his pregnant wife, Rodgers and Hammerstein manage to find hope for

¹ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 9-10.

redemption, and show ends with an inspirational chorus. In fact, all of Rodgers and Hammerstein's shows close on an uplifting note. While it could be argued that *The King and I* ends on a darker note with the death of the King, his reconciliation with Anna and witnessing of the start of his son's new and enlightened reign transform his death – accompanied by the glorious strains of “Something Wonderful” – from a tragedy into an honorable sacrifice making way for the continued development and westernization of Siam. Thus, even in scenes of death and mourning, Rodgers and Hammerstein manage to convey a prevailing sense of optimism and hope for the future.

Closely linked to this optimism is Rodgers and Hammerstein's belief in the power of love. As cliché as this may sound, love does provide the final solution to many of the problems confronted by the characters in Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals; conversely, a lack of love often creates problems and obstacles. In *Carousel*, Billy's inability to articulate his love for Julie makes him cold and harsh towards her, so at the end of the play it is his verbal confession of love for Julie that ultimately allows him to do a good deed for Louise and thereby secure his own eternal pardon. In *South Pacific*, Nellie's racist hatred almost costs her everything she holds dear, but her love for Emile enables her to overcome her prejudices and accept him and his children unconditionally. In *The King and I*, Anna's immediate love for the Siamese children gives her the strength to remain in Siam despite the conflict engendered by her love/hate relationship with the King. Ultimately, love triumphs, allowing her to forgive the King and remain in Siam, helping his son to take the reigns of leadership. For Rodgers and Hammerstein, love is a powerful force that enables people to change for the better, overcome obstacles, and emerge triumphant.

In addition to the themes of optimism and love, Rodgers and Hammerstein also showcase a strong belief in the importance of acceptance and respect. It is clear that both of them felt passionately about the equal treatment of women and minorities, as is reflected both explicitly and implicitly throughout their shows. The strong, resilient female characters they created demonstrate their belief in the equality of the sexes and advance a unique brand of feminism in which their characters act with great strength, but also with great love. Anna is clearly a strong and passionate woman who defies social conventions by traveling to a foreign country and fearlessly confronting the King, and she experiences tremendous personal growth as she allows herself to love the King, his children, and the people and country of Siam. Nellie is courageous and free-spirited, reveling in the adventure of working in the Pacific islands and, through her love for Emile, overcoming her prejudices to grow as a person. Even Julie, at first glance the weakest of the three characters, possesses tremendous strength in her own quiet way. She is never cowed or intimidated by Billy or anyone else, and her sacrificial love for Billy ultimately empowers him to redeem himself. In the supporting cast of these musicals, Lady Thiang, Bloody Mary, Cousin Nettie, Carrie Pipperidge, and Tuptim are all important characters who play key roles and show remarkable initiative, determination, and strength.

More explicitly, Rodgers and Hammerstein argue in favor of equality through their handling of racism in their musicals. The doomed love story of Joe Cable and Liat in *South Pacific* clearly conveys the message that racism can literally kill while simultaneously making clear how trifling and insignificant racial differences truly are. In *The King and I*, the beauty of respecting other cultures and the mutual enrichment that

can result from “getting to know” others is clearly displayed through the relationship of Anna and the King while slavery and injustice are unmistakably condemned through the subplot involving Tuptim and Lun Tha. Once again, *Carousel*, at first glance, has nothing to do with equality, but in a much more subtle way it reveals social inequality through the juxtaposition of the unemployed Billy and the entrepreneur Mr. Snow, ultimately condemning Mr. Snow for his self-satisfied snobbishness towards those less economically fortunate than himself.

Thus, certain key ideas mark the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, two men who were strikingly different and yet managed to produce works of unbelievable continuity and unity. While adapting very different stories from a wide variety of sources, Rodgers and Hammerstein always maintained an unshakable optimism and belief in the ability of people to change. Although they dealt with serious social issues in all of their works and were particularly passionate and outspoken in regards to inequality between genders and races, their fundamental optimism allowed them to communicate hope for a brighter future in which people would change for the better. Their message of equality and justice is as relevant today as it was in their time, and their message of hope is perhaps even more important in a world that seems to have lost its way.

APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL LYRICS

“Soliloquy”¹

I wonder what he’ll think of me!
I guess he’ll call me
“The old man” –
I guess he’ll think I can lick
Ev’ry other feller’s father –
Well, I can!

I bet that he’ll turn out to be
The spit an’ image
Of his Dad –
But he’ll more common sense
Than his puddin’ headed father
Ever had.

I’ll teach him to wrassle
And dive through a wave,
When we go in the mornin’ for our swim
His mother can teach him
The way to behave,
But she won’t make a sissy out o’ him –
Not him!
Not my boy! Not Bill...
Bill!

My boy, Bill!
(I will see
that he’s named
After me,
I will!)
My boy, Bill –
He’ll be tall
And as tough
As a tree,
Will Bill!
Like a tree he’ll grow,
With his head held high
And his feet planted firm on the ground,
And you won’t see no-
Body dare to try
To boss him or toss him around!

¹ Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 38-40.

No pot-bellied, baggy-eyed bully'll boss him around!

I don't give a damn what he does,
As long as he does what he likes!
He can sit on his tail,
Or work on a rail
With a hammer, a hammerin' spikes.
He can ferry a boat on the river,
Or peddle a pack on his back,
Or work up and down
The streets of a town
With a whip and a horse and a hack –

He can haul a scow along a canal,
Run a cow around a corral,
Or maybe bark for a carousel –
Of course it takes talent to do THAT well.

He might be a champ of the heavyweights,
Or a feller that sells you glue,
Or President of the United States –
That'd be all right, too –

His mother'd like that. But he wouldn't be President unless he wanted to be!
Not Bill!
My boy, Bill –
He'll be tall
And as tough
As a tree
Will Bill!
Like a tree he'll grow,
With his head held high
And his feet planted firm on the ground,
And you won't see no-
Body dare to try
To boss him or toss him around!
No fat-bottomed, flabby-faced, pot-bellied, baggy-eyed
Bastad'll boss him around!

And I'm damned if he'll marry his boss' daughter.
A skinny lipped virgin with blood like water,
Who'll give him a peck and call it a kiss
And look in his eyes through a LORGNETTE –

Say! Why am I takin' on like this?
My kid ain't even been born yet!

I can see him
When he's seventeen or so
And startin' in to go
With a girl.
I can give him
Lots o' pointers, very sound
On the ay to get 'round
Any girl.
I can tell him –
Wait a minute! Could it be - ?
What the hell! What if he
Is a girl!
Bill!
Oh, Bill!

What would I do with her? What could I do FOR her? A bum – with no money.

You can have fun with a son,
But you got to be a FATHER
To a girl!

She mightn't be so bad at that –
A kid with ribbons
In her hair,
A kind o'sweet and petite
Little tin-type of her mother –
What a pair!

I can just hear myself braggin' about her.
My little girl,
Pink and white
As peaches and cream is she.
My little girl
Is half again as bright
As girls are meant to be!
Dozens of boys pursue her,
Many a likely lad
Does what he can to woo her
From her faithful Dad.
She has a few
Pink and white young fellers of two and three
But my little girl
Gets hungry ev'ry night
And she comes home to me
My little girl!
My little girl

I got to get ready before she comes!
I got to make certain that she
Won't be dragged up in slums
With a lot o'bums –
Like me!

She's got to be sheltered and fed, and dressed
In the best that money can buy!
I never know how to get money,
But I'll try –
By God! I'll try!
I'll go out and make it
Or steal it or take it
Or die!

“What’s the Use of Wond’rin”²

What’s the use of wond’rin’
If he’s good or if he’s bad,
Or if you like the way he wears his hat?
Oh, what’s the use of wond’rin’
If he’s good or if he’s bad?
He’s your feller and you love him –
That’s all there is to that.

Common sense may tell you
That the endin’ will be sad
And now’s the time to break and run away.
But what’s the use of wond’rin’
If the endin’ will be sad?
He’s your feller and you love him –
There’s nothin’ more to say.

Somethin’ – made him the way that he is,
Whether he’s false or true.
And somethin’ gave him the things that are his –
One of those things is you.
So,
When he wants your kisses
You will give them to the lad
And anywhere he leads you, you will walk,
And anytime he needs you –
You’ll go runnin’ there like mad!
You’re his girl and he’s your feller –
And all the rest is “talk”...

² Hammerstein, *Carousel*, 51.

“You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught”³

You’ve got to be taught to hate and fear,
You’ve got to be taught from year to year,
It’s got to be drummed in your dear little ear –
You’ve got to be carefully taught!

You’ve got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade –
You’ve got to be carefully taught.

You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To have all the people your relatives hate –
You’ve got to be carefully taught!
You’ve got to be carefully taught!

³ Hammerstein, *South Pacific*, 136-37.

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