

GETTING TO KNOW RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN: EDUCATION AND
ADAPTATION IN 21ST-CENTURY PERFORMANCE

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2020

ABSTRACT

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II forever changed the face of American musical theatre when *Oklahoma!* opened on Broadway in 1943. This collaboration is often cited by historians as the first fully-integrated book musical on the Broadway stage. Their collaboration produced such hits as *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*. While the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein continue to be commercially produced, 21st-century audiences may consider their works problematic. A critical examination of the text unveils inauthentic representations of non-white characters, misogynistic gender stereotypes, overt cultural appropriation, and questionable representations of slavery and domestic violence. While a 21st-century audience may be attuned to these unsavory elements, a dramaturgical perspective produces a deeper understanding. Through various adaptation and educational efforts, the place of Rodgers and Hammerstein on the 21st-century stage may be secured. In examining the recent production history of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, as well as educational models for the study of problematic literature, the fixtures of American musical theatre may be better understood.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory have examined a thesis titled “Getting to Know Rodgers and Hammerstein: Education and Adaptation in 21st-Century Performance” presented by Gabriel J. Livingston, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

To all the teachers, who make invaluable contributions to our world.

INTRODUCTION

A Bright Golden Haze on the Meadow

The dawn of the modern American musical casts a bright golden haze on the meadow. The curtain rises on an old woman churning butter and a cowboy begins to sing. When *Oklahoma!* opened on March 31, 1943, post-World War II audiences found new hope in the musical's earnest celebration of the down-home American spirit. Further, the musical's songs advanced the plot, the book scenes told a serious story, and the dances furthered the plot in an innovative way. *Oklahoma!* is often regarded as the first integrated book musical, and while other historians give the distinction to *Show Boat* (1927), the two musicals have one factor in common—Oscar Hammerstein II. Both Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II had illustrious careers with other writing partners before their 1943 collaboration. Prior to *Oklahoma!* Hammerstein wrote the lyrics for musicals such as *Rose-Marie* (1924), *The Desert Song* (1926), and *Music in the Air* (1932), while Rodgers wrote the music for musicals such as *On Your Toes* (1936), *Babes in Arms* (1937), and *Pal Joey* (1940). When their prior partnerships dissolved, Rodgers and Hammerstein found themselves adapting Lynn Riggs' *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1930) for the musical stage, the rest is history.

During their partnership, Rodgers and Hammerstein brought *Oklahoma*, *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) to the stage. Additionally, the pair penned *State Fair* (1945) and *Cinderella* (1957) for the screen. The musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein have since become cornerstones of American culture.

Timeless tunes such as “Getting to Know You,” “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” and “Some Enchanted Evening” have been indelibly etched into the American songbook. The musicals enjoy a long life through their Academy Award nominated film adaptations, numerous revivals, and school and community productions. In making the theatrical rounds, one hears anecdotes such as “I played Ado Annie in my middle school production of *Oklahoma!*” or “I played Captain Von Trapp in high school.” Personally, I have appeared in school productions of *Cinderella* and *The Sound of Music*. While parents and grandparents have fond memories of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals in production, the same may not be true of the new generation of theatregoers. In today’s socially-conscious era, the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein may be considered problematic.

Previous productions of *Carousel* were noted for its soaring score and the musical’s preoccupation with spirituality. At the time of its 2018 Broadway revival, *Carousel* was primarily being talked about in terms of its depiction of domestic violence. *The King and I* has always been known for its score and lavish productions, never failing to garner enthusiastic applause when Anna and the King traverse the stage in their sweeping polka. The musical has since been criticized for its inauthentic portrayal of King Mongkut; the 1956 film adaptation being banned in Thailand. *South Pacific* has always taken a political tone, first performed for a generation not far removed from the second World War. While the musical has always condemned prejudice, the libretto presents a narrow view of the Tonkinese inhabitants of the South Pacific islands. In examining these major musicals, several issues are noted. However, the major musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein have had an undeniable influence on the modern American musical. In the new age of social justice,

how can we confront the mid-century morals of Rodgers and Hammerstein while celebrating the sublime theatre they created?

In chapter one, I examine the morality inherent to the Hammerstein librettos. Known for his sentimentality and optimism, Hammerstein's work is imbued with "cockeyed" optimism. Dramaturgically speaking, Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals feature the "wise woman" character type. Throughout the canon, characters such as Aunt Eller in *Oklahoma!*, Nettie Fowler in *Carousel*, and Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music*, have a lesson to teach. When characters find themselves in the eye of the storm, the "wise woman" imparts a bit of wisdom that gives the protagonist the push she needs to carry on. Through the ever-evolving character type, the true moral themes may be revealed. Examining the character type throughout the Rodgers and Hammerstein collaboration may also prove their constant evolution as dramatists. The formula is barely established in the first collaboration, but it is most nuanced in their final musical.

In chapter two, I work to adopt the perspective of a 21st-century theatregoer. With current academic and political discourse in mind, I examine *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*. Of the "Big 5" musicals in the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, these three seem to pose the seemingly-irreconcilable issues. In my investigation of *Carousel*, several textual examples of misogyny in traditional gender roles, and allusions to domestic violence are noted. In particular, Julie's constant excuses on behalf of Billy, her assertion that someone you love can hit you without it hurting, and the ambiguity of Billy's fate are perceived as problematic. In *South Pacific*, themes of prejudice are presented, toxic masculinity is noted in scenes and storylines involving servicemen, Americans appropriate native culture, and the Tonkinese characters are inauthentic. *The King and I* suffers from the

same scrutiny, presenting inauthentic portrayals of Siamese characters and misogynistic views as to the place of women. Additionally, *The King and I* seemingly positions Anna as a white savior to the barbaric Siamese. With problematic plot points and dialogue noted, I turn to possible solutions for 21st-century performance of these musicals—adaptation and education.

In chapter three, I examine various adaptation efforts, as well as directors who have attempted to present the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein in major 21st-century revivals. In terms of adaptation, I examine the Broadway debuts of the Rodgers and Hammerstein screen musicals *State Fair* and *Cinderella*. Both productions were adapted for the stage by playwrights other than Hammerstein and took different approaches. *State Fair* practically presented a carbon copy of the 1945 film, whereas *Cinderella* was imbued with a highly political tone. The major adaptation in the Rodgers and Hammerstein catalog is David Henry Hwang's rewrite of *Flower Drum Song*. I explore key differences in the original and updated version of the musical, as well as David Henry Hwang's comments on the process of adapting the work. In exploring directorial approaches to modern production of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, I examine Bartlett Sher's Broadway revivals of *South Pacific* and *The King and I*. Both productions were critically acclaimed, and an authentic approach is noted in both. Sher approaches the musicals with a sense of reverence, but also with a critical eye. Sher wrestles with problems, but seizes them as opportunities. Additionally, I examine the decade-long wave of professional productions of *Oklahoma!* In examining productions at the Arena Stage, the 5th Avenue Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and the 2019 Broadway revival, varied approaches are noted. Each production interprets the musical for a 21st-century audience in different ways. Through this survey of

adaptation and direction, questions about problematic textual moments may be answered in part.

In chapter four, I explore an educational approach to the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein. With moral themes and problematic elements in mind, academic discourse may serve as an answer to questions posed. In my survey of academia's embrace of problematic literature, and methods in media literacy, the combination is poised to synthesize Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals in modern production. In researching the educational efforts of the Rodgers and Hammerstein organization, I happened upon their collection of musicals for young performers. The "Getting to Know" collection adapts certain Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals for pre-high school performers. In the adaptation process, it is essential to note what lies on the cutting room floor and what remains on the page. While some plot points are eliminated, many moral dilemmas remain in place. With issues remaining, I set out to examine what resources were available to guide discussion with students about these problems. In examining various educational resource guides from commercial productions of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, varied degrees of academic exploration are noted. Each guide provides teachers with activities and discussion points to enrich their theatre going experience. Within each lesson and discussion, the issues and problems are posed.

The collaboration of Rodgers and Hammerstein began with a crooning cowboy, and ended with the Von Trapp family facing an unsure future set to a reprise of "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." As the theatre lives and breathes, the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein are still often produced. In times when theatre makers are seeking to make their art more diverse, inclusive, and equitable, the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein must be called into

question. While issues are certainly noted with the major musicals, our 21st-century perspective is different from the mid-century morals of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Through various adaptation and education efforts, a greater understanding of Rodgers and Hammerstein's moral implications may be reached. The sublime melodies, poetic words, and endearing sentimentality will grace the stage for years to come. The question is, will we rise to the occasion?

CHAPTER 1

Characters Carefully Taught

In the 1940s and 1950s, the writing team of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II forever changed the face of American musical theatre. Their work not only influenced the theatre, but contributed a great deal to the American songbook and overall culture of the nation. The musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein are known for sweeping melodies, sentimentally poignant lyrics, and their literary source materials. When *Oklahoma!* opened on Broadway in 1943, and the curtain rose on an old woman churning butter (rather than a leggy chorus), a new era of musical plays emerged. This collaboration is often cited by historians as setting the precedent for drama, music, and dance to fully integrate on the Broadway stage. *Oklahoma!* presented audiences with song, story, and regional charm, but also pondered themes of isolation, the community collective, and the gravity of choice. After *Oklahoma!*, Rodgers and Hammerstein continued to explore what a musical could say and, dramaturgically speaking, how it could function. An important hallmark of their work, that continued to evolve during their collaboration, is the wisdom-imparting character found in most of their musical plays.

The character type, often referred to as the “wise woman,” is typically an older woman who moves the action of the play forward through a song that reiterates the moral theme of the play. The wisdom-imparting character, while moving the action of the play forward and delivering the moral message, may not always stand as the moral compass of the piece. Likewise, ingénues and leading men in the major musical-plays do not always lead by example. The exchange of ideas, generally between the wise woman and ingénue in need,

presents a moral theme to the ever-important third character—the audience. In examining the moral themes in Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, and their relationship to a twenty-first century audience, the “wise woman” character is the place to begin. In examining the wise woman and her dramaturgical evolution, we see that from a seed of an idea in *Oklahoma!*, grew the likes of Lady Thiang in *The King and I* (1951), Nettie Fowler in *Carousel* (1945), Bloody Mary in *South Pacific* (1949), and Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music* (1959).

In 1943, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!*, an adaptation of Lynn Riggs’s play *Green Grown the Lilacs* (1930), opened on Broadway. The original production was directed by Rouben Mamoulian and choreographed by Agnes de Mille. Not only did *Oklahoma!* serve as a progenitor of the fully-integrated musical play, but the musical presents an early iteration of the wise woman stock character. In the musical, the central storyline follows Laurey as she is torn between two suitors. Curly (the leading man) and Jud Fry (the brooding farm hand) compete for Laurey’s favor. Specifically, either suitor is in competition to see who will escort Laurey to the box social. Through the action of the first act, Curly pursues Laurey to no avail. However, Curly’s relationship with farm girl Gertie Cummings is a point of frustration for Laurey. In preparation for the box social, and hosting several of the ladies at their home, Aunt Eller and Laurey witness Curly with Gertie. This is deeply affecting to the reluctantly-smitten Laurey, who proudly exclaims to her peers:

Why should a womern who is healthy and strong
Blubber like a baby if her man goes away?
A-weepin’ and a-wailin’ how he’s done her wrong—
That’s one thing you’ll never hear me say!¹

¹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Oklahoma!* (New York, NY: Random House, 1943), 44.

After Laurey has decided that “many a new day will dawn” before she looks back to the lost romance with Curly, the three characters (Laurey, Curly, and Gertie) find themselves in a scene together. Just when the action has nowhere to go, and the relationship between Curly and Laurey seems impossible—Aunt Eller enters the scene. From the beginning of the play, Aunt Eller has been established as a friend and confidant of both Laurey and Curly. While she is the biological aunt of Laurey, Curly calls her “Aunt Eller” affectionately. Their relationship is clearly close, and the audience is meant to believe that Curly “comes a’ singin’” to Aunt Eller daily. Aunt Eller’s love for Laurey and Curly is clear, and her desire to see the pair attend the box social together is well-known. In the scene between Gertie, Laurey, and Curly, Aunt Eller calls Gertie inside to talk. Aunt Eller’s action has two effects on the play: the moment allows the action to proceed and allows Laurey and Curly to ruminate on their romance and sing their “almost love song.”

While Aunt Eller’s essential function in this moment sets the precedent for the wisdom-imparting character, the formula had not yet been established. In some ways, Aunt Eller is comparable to Lady Thiang or Mother Abbess, but in other ways she greatly differs from other characters of her type. While it is true that Aunt Eller asserts a major theme saying, “Territory folks should stick together, Territory folks should all be pals,”² what truly cements Aunt Eller’s role as the progenitor of the wisdom-imparting character is the simple fact that her decisions move the action of the play forward when it seems impossible. However, the fundamental difference between Aunt Eller and other “wise woman” characters is that she does not deliver the moral message of the piece through a song to the ingénue in

² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Oklahoma!* (New York, NY: Random House, 1943), 137.

need. Rather, Aunt Eller delivers a monologue to Laurey late in act two that both speaks to thematic elements in the play, and the cultural moment of the 1943 premiere. After witnessing the death of Jud Fry, Aunt Eller says to Laurey:

‘At’s all right, Laurey baby. If you cain’t fergit, jist don’t try to, honey. Oh, lots of things happens to folks. Sickness, er bein’ pore and hungry even—bein’ old and afeared to die. That’s the way it is—cradle to grave. And you can stand it. They’s one way. You gotta be hearty, you got to be. You cain’t deserve the sweet and tender things in life less’n you’re tough.³

Out of *Oklahoma!* and Aunt Eller, the hallmark character type of later Rodgers and Hammerstein musical plays may be found in her early form.

Modern audiences find objection with plots concerning only love interests for female characters. As previously stated, the main plot in *Oklahoma!* revolves around Laurey and her pursuit of romance with Curly, while also being pursued by Jud Fry. The subplot involves the promiscuous Ado Annie as she finds herself in a love triangle with Will Parker (a local man) and Ali Hakim (the Persian Peddler). Not only does the crux of drama relying on the women’s romantic pursuits pose an issue to a modern audience, but the portrayal of Ali Hakim also raises concerns. By the simple fact that the musical was written by two white American men, modern audiences see the Persian character as a caricature of white ideas of non-white people. However, in examination of trends and tastes of the twentieth century theatre, an interest in exoticism is noted. While this does not mean portrayals of foreign, non-white characters are true to life, it is simply a style of the time. As for preoccupation with romance, the importance of romantic relationships may only exist from the perspective of Laurey and Ado Annie. Based on context, the unmarried Aunt Eller owns land and farms it

³ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Oklahoma!* (New York, NY: Random House, 1943), 141.

herself. This signals to the audience that living outside of marriage is possible for a woman on the Oklahoma Territory. The true theme of the show may be boiled down to community, and the implications of the collective. Major dramatic works such as *Lysistrata* (411 BC), *The Crucible* (1953) and *Inherit the Wind* (1955) deal with themes of community and collective action, and *Oklahoma!* may be a monument to a similar theme. A focus on the theme of community and the implications of its power essentially strip each character of the “moral compass” responsibility.

The next Broadway collaboration of Rodgers and Hammerstein was *Carousel* (1945). The musical, based on the play *Liliom* (1909) by Ferenc Molnár, was again directed by Mamoulian and choreographed by de Mille. *Liliom* and *Carousel* are closely connected. The original play is set in Budapest and follows Liliom and Julie as they navigate courtship, marriage, and parenting. As in the musical, Liliom (who becomes Billy in *Carousel*) is a troubled man with a criminal past. When he learns of Julie’s pregnancy, Liliom is equally thrilled and terrified of the prospect of parenthood. To provide for his unborn daughter, Liliom finds himself in the middle of criminal dealings. The robbery in which Liliom is an accomplice ultimately goes wrong, resulting in his death by suicide. In both *Liliom* and *Carousel*, the Liliom character finds himself on the other side of life attempting to right his wrongs to enter heaven. In both versions, Julie finds herself in a relationship that ultimately ends in ruin, leaving her with seemingly nowhere to turn. Aside from the tragic and untimely death of her partner, Julie has been the victim of domestic abuse at the hands of Billy. At the culmination of tragedy, the wisdom-imparting character comes into play.

In *Carousel*, *Liliom*’s Mother Hollunder becomes Nettie Fowler. Rather than *Liliom*’s sharp-tongued Mother Hollunder, *Carousel* presents Nettie Fowler as Julie’s wise older

cousin. In the American adaptation of the piece, the setting is transferred from Budapest to coastal Maine. The shift in setting also signals a shift in function for the Mother Hollunder/Nettie Fowler character. In *Carousel*, Nettie Fowler is a mere shadow of the harsh Mother Hollunder. She is introduced to us in the buoyant number “June is Bustin’ Out All Over” and is placed at the center of a joyous clam bake, as opposed to her *Liliom* counterpart whose entrance is marked by nagging and hard truth. Nettie in *Carousel* certainly does not forsake Mother Hollunder’s commanding responsibility, her first line of the play reminds the men, “Hold your horses! ... HOLD YER HORSES!”⁴ However, Nettie’s celebration of the month of June is accompanied by complimentary coffee and donuts. In the second act when Julie finds herself paralyzed by grief in the wake of Billy’s death, Nettie’s presence shifts from wise and joyous to poignantly sober as she delivers the moral message. It is in this moment that Nettie Fowler delivers what could be considered the quintessential imparting of wisdom, singing:

When you walk
Through a storm
Keep your chin up high,
And don't be afraid of the dark.
At the end
Of the storm
Is a golden sky
And the sweet
Silver song
Of a lark.
Walk on
Through the wind
Walk on
Through the rain
Tho' your dreams be tossed and blown,

⁴ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 20.

Walk on, walk on,
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone!⁵

Julie finds strength in Nettie's consolation, and goes on to raise her daughter alone. As seen in the Act Two ballet, their lives are plagued with unique challenges, but they persevere.

Ahead of the 2018 revival, *Carousel* was dubbed “the wife-beater musical.”⁶ In the era of the #MeToo movement, audiences took issue with Julie's excusing abuse at the hands of Billy. However, when Julie ponders, “What's the use of wonderin' if he's good or if he's bad?” and she concludes, “He's your fella and you love him — that's all there is to that,” the silent observers are not meant to arrive at the same conclusion. Rather, in witnessing Julie's tumultuous relationship with Billy Bigelow and hearing Nettie Fowler's counsel, onlookers may draw their own moral conclusions. Later in Act Two, ahead of the reprise of “If I Loved You” and finale version of “You'll Never Walk Alone” Louise (Billy and Julie's daughter) asks her mother, “But is it possible, fer someone to hit your hard like that—real loud and hard—and not hurt at all?” Julie responds with, “It is possible, dear, fer someone to hit you—hit you hard—and not hurt at all.”⁷ The 2018 revival, helmed by Jack O'Brien, omitted the dialogue entirely.

In 1949, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* opened on Broadway. The musical is based on short stories found in James A. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*. The musical was a cultural phenomenon and has been highly impactful through presenting

⁵ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 58.

⁶ Laurie Winer, “Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*, After #MeToo.” *Vulture*, April 11, 2018.

⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 69.

challenging themes to the American audience. The musical also exhibits a departure from form in Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. The project was not directed by Mamoulian, and choreography was not by de Mille. Rather than turning to dramatic literature for source material, the team decided to adapt James A. Michener's collection of short stories based on his time in the South Pacific during World War II. The original production, directed by co-librettist Joshua Logan, featured seamless transitions through text, staging, and design technology. Stage directions in the libretto, such as this mid-scene shift found late in act one, provide insight to the unique style of staging:

The music builds in a rapturous upsurge. CABLE gathers LIAT in his arms. She reaches her small arms up to his neck. He lifts her off her feet. The lights fade slowly as his hand slides her blouse up her back toward her shoulders. The lights dim to complete darkness. Light projections of large and lovely Oriental blossoms are thrown against the drop. Native couples stroll across the stage, only dimly seen. The music mounts ecstatically, then diminishes. The stage is clear. The light comes up on the hut again and moonlight now comes through the opened doorway where CABLE stands.⁸

The production even made waves when publications began reporting that Mary Martin as Nellie Forbush, washed her hair live on stage every night (at her own suggestion)⁹. With all the innovations that came with *South Pacific*, it is no surprise that the moral message was not delivered through a specific character, as it had been in *Carousel*. Rather than a wise woman singing a song, the characters of Nellie and Lt. Joseph Cable came to moral conclusions themselves, taking responsibility for the forward action of the piece.

⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 92-93.

⁹ Mel Gussow, "Mary Martin, 76, First Lady of Musicals, Dies." *New York Times*, November 5, 1990.

In the piece, Nellie Forbush finds herself infatuated with Emile de Becque. Nellie is a navy nurse from Little Rock, Arkansas and Emile is a French planter who has settled in the South Pacific. Concurrently, Lieutenant Joseph Cable finds himself enamored with Liat, a Tonkinese islander who is the daughter of Bloody Mary (the Tonkinese merchant). As both Nellie and Lt. Cable attempt to navigate relationships with individuals of another race and nationality, their homegrown prejudice haunts them and guides their action. While Nellie is making continuous trips to Emile's estate, she is falling in love. Eventually, Emile hosts a grand dinner party in which Nellie is the guest of honor. It is only after this evening that Nellie discovers the truth about Emile—he has two mixed-race children from a previous relationship. This is where the prejudice deeply imbedded in Nellie comes to the surface and she flees, closing act one. Early in act two Nellie and Emile are at odds, but the opposite could be said for Lt. Cable and Liat. While the two young lovers are battling a language barrier, this does not hinder their infatuation for one another. However, Bloody Mary is responsible for a major shift in narrative. Bloody Mary sings a song to the young lovers titled "Happy Talk." In the number, she celebrates the union of two beautiful young people. She is especially pleased with the future that Lt. Cable can provide for her daughter, and goes on to mention the notion of "special" babies. This comment from her brings Cable back to reality. "Special babies" suggests the notion of mixed-race children and the prejudice within Cable is brought to the surface. He leaves Liat.

Later in the piece these issues are resolved through internal revelations made by the characters. Late in the second act, Lt. Cable notoriously sings,

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 hate all the people your relatives hate—
You've got to be carefully taught!¹⁰

Nellie then finds herself at odds with her prejudice when Emile embarks on a certain-death mission. In retrospect, the love she has for him is stronger than any prejudice taught to her in Little Rock. While the characters eventually turn to themselves for the answers, the function of Bloody Mary is essential for this self-revelation. Additionally, Bloody Mary's careful calculations in bringing Cable to Bali Ha'i may speak to her wisdom in another way—she acts in the interest of self-preservation.

The morality of *South Pacific* is another example of the importance of active thought on behalf of the audience. Nellie and Cable's homegrown prejudice renders the leading characters morally flawed. While we may next turn to the "wise-woman" as a moral compass, Bloody Mary does not fill the role. Rather than directly address the ingénue in need, Bloody Mary gently reminds the spectators of the challenges and inequities instigated by prejudice. While Lt. Cable's second-act ballad points out this flaw and condemns any sort of racism, Nellie and Cable are by no means exonerated. Only through forward action can the problem be solved, and even when steps are taken the ending does not point to a contented conclusion. With the death of Lt. Cable, who will set his revelation into motion? His inaction

¹⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 136-137.

has led to his fate. As for Nellie and Emile, what will happen when the war is over? Will Nellie stay on the island, or return to Little Rock? In Little Rock, will Miss Forbush act against prejudice, or will she settle into her old ways? In *South Pacific*, the moral theme is presented to the audience to do with as they see fit.

In 1959, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I* opened on Broadway. The musical was based on *Anna and the King of Siam* (1944) by Margaret Landon. The novel was a semi-fictionalized account of Anna Leonowens, who served as school teacher in the court of Siam from 1862 to 1867. Previously, *Anna and the King of Siam* had been made into a 1946 film starring Irene Dunne and Rex Harrison as Anna and the King, respectively. However, stage rights were purchased by British stage actress, Gertrude Lawrence, who commissioned Rodgers and Hammerstein to adapt the work into a stage musical. The musical, that would become *The King and I*, served as a vehicle for Lawrence and marked her final stage role. The musical was made into a film in 1956 starring Deborah Kerr and Yul Brynner as Anna and the King, respectively. Since its Broadway premiere in 1959, *The King and I* has received countless revivals, national tours, and regional productions.

Unlike the aforementioned works, *The King and I* begins with a scene in which its female lead imparts her own wisdom. Unlike other ingénues in the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, Anna Leonowens is a bit older, a bit wiser, but above all she is a teacher. The audience is led to believe that rather than learn a lesson, this heroine will teach one. The first lesson Anna imparts is to her son, Louis. In the face of fear, she encourages her frightened son to “whistle a happy tune,” thus imparting a life lesson in the first scene of the play. As the action of the play progresses, Anna has several lessons to teach. Not only does she teach the school children geography, but she also teaches them the importance of getting

to know one and other. She teaches the Royal Wives about monogamous love between a man and a woman, in the context of traditional marriage. Anna also fosters Tuptim's hunger to read and exposes her to world literature, specifically gifting her a copy of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For most of the first act, Anna is clearly established as a wise woman, breaking the mold from the traditional Rodgers and Hammerstein form. However, a swift turn of events renders Anna the ingénue in need of a moral compass.

When a disagreement with the temperamental King leaves Anna angry in her quarters, the tables are turned and the true wise woman of the work is revealed. After Anna's song, "Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?" Lady Thiang comes to Anna to encourage her to consider the King's side of the quarrel. In the song, "Something Wonderful," Lady Thiang paints a picture of an empathetic King with his own complex motivations and intentions.

Lady Thiang pleads with Anna to understand the King and his own troubles saying,

This is a man who thinks with his heart,
His heart is not always wise.
This is a man who stumbles and falls,
But this is a man who tries.
This is a man you'll forgive and forgive
And help and protect, as long as you live.¹¹

In the dialogue of the scene itself, Lady Thiang informs Anna that the King has learned of foreign governments referring to him as a barbarian. In the text, the King is temperamental and unreasonable, but also has many aspirations for Siam and the education of his children.

Lady Thiang sees his goals and Anna's ability to help him achieve them, therefore she attempts to bridge the gap. Not only does Lady Thiang function as the only way to advance

¹¹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 34.

the plot from this point, she also introduces the major theme of the work. These hallmarks of the wise character cement Lady Thiang's hold of the title.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's final Broadway collaboration came in 1959 when *The Sound of Music* opened on Broadway. The production featured a libretto written by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, direction by Vincent J. Donahue, and choreography by Joe Layton. The original Broadway cast featured Mary Martin as Maria, Theodore Bikel as Captain Von Trapp, and Patricia Neway as Mother Abbess. The 1965 film adaptation stars Julie Andrews as Maria, Christopher Plummer as Captain Von Trapp, and Peggy Wood as Mother Abbess. The film version was widely successful, winning five Academy Awards, held the record for highest-grossing picture for five years (beating *Gone with the Wind*), and has become synonymous with the movie musical. The piece also presents the most nuanced presentation of the "wise woman" character type.

In the musical, Maria is a lost young woman. Against the backdrop of the Nazi invasion, Maria finds herself as a postulant seeking her purpose in the world. Mother Abbess sees it fit that Maria leave the abbey to discover herself, and sends her to be governess for Captain Von Trapp's seven children. While on duty at the Von Trapp home, Maria falls in love with the children and eventually their father. This ignites a war within Maria, her love for the Captain seemingly stands in the way of her position, and more importantly her relationship with God and duties to the church. With nowhere to turn, Maria returns to the abbey. This is where Mother Abbess assures Maria that there is not one way to serve God and that her love for the Captain may be considered holy as well. Mother Abbess, in the act one finale, sings to Maria:

Climb every mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream¹²

In simplest terms, Mother Abbess fulfils the role of the wise character simply by singing a song that moves the action forward when it seemingly has nowhere to go. However, on closer examination, the wisdom and actions of Mother Abbess serve as a catalyst for the entire play. In her capacity as leader and mentor, she identified the need for Maria to venture into the world to gain some sense of self, and to grow up. Without Mother Abbess' wisdom and action, the play would not exist.

Since the musical's original Broadway production and monumental film adaptation, the role of Mother Abbess has been played by women of all ages. Patricia Neway, who played Mother Abbess in the original Broadway production was 40 years old; whereas Peggy Wood, who played Mother Abbess in the film adaptation was 73 years old. In the last twenty years, the age of Mother Abbess has been played younger and younger. Starting with *The Sound of Music*'s first Broadway revival in 1998, Patti Cohenour was 46 years old. Audra McDonald, playing Mother Abbess in the NBC live broadcast, played the role at age 43 and Ashley Brown, in the Jack O'Brien-helmed national tour was the youngest Mother Abbess, at 33 years old. Jack O'Brien, director of the 2015 national tour, insists that a younger Mother Abbess shifts the dynamic of her relationship with Maria.¹³ Audra McDonald offers a new perspective on Mother Abbess. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times, McDonald

¹² Oscar Hammerstein II, Richard Rodgers, Howard Lindsay, and Russel Crouse. *The Sound of Music*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1960), 66.

¹³ Kathy Strain, "BWW Interview: Ashley Brown from THE SOUND OF MUSIC on Tour." *BroadwayWorld.com*. February 19, 2016.

states that inspiration for her portrayal came from the idea that Mother Abbess has experienced the outside world, but chose the convent walls instead.¹⁴ With Mother Abbess shrinking in age and growing with life experience, the role of the wise woman is dramatically shifted. The idea that knowledge comes from personal experience, previously unexplored in the canon, adds poignancy to the wise woman's moral message.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II worked tirelessly to produce musicals in their two-decade career. While the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon is generally known for its old fashioned, wholesome content, serious themes and subject matter are noted in each of their musical projects. The pair worked tirelessly to innovate the American musical theatre, not always succeeding, but forever changed the way audiences perceive the integrated musical. Dramaturgically speaking, the pair continued to improve their formula from project to project, finding new methods of storytelling and characterization. The hallmark "wise woman" of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals is no exception. Throughout their partnership and beyond, the wisdom imparting character of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals has consistently evolved dramaturgically, from a seed of an idea with Aunt Eller in *Oklahoma!*, to a more fully formed "wise woman" formula in *Carousel*. The pair then experimented with variations on their function and place in action with Bloody Mary in *South Pacific* and Lady Thiang in *The King and I*. The Rodgers and Hammerstein partnership culminated in the quintessential wisdom imparting character and iconic "wise woman" song with Mother Abbess in *The Sound of Music*. The words of these women and themes of their respective works live on; their impression is long lasting and the seeds they have planted grow still

¹⁴ Deborah Vankin, "Audra McDonald Curls up at Home." *Los Angeles Times*. October 23, 2013.

today. Turning to the “wise woman” in each of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals sheds light on the true moral message of their works. An understanding of moral theme is essential in considering Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals in modern production.

CHAPTER 2

How Do You Solve a Problematic Musical?

In 2011, the St. Louis Municipal Opera Theatre staged a production of *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*. The musical revue is a celebration of the illustrious career of American choreographer and director Jerome Robbins, whose breadth of work includes *The King and I*, *West Side Story*, *On the Town*, *Gypsy*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and several more classic musicals. The musical anthology presents major musical numbers from productions either directed or choreographed by Robbins. Major musical numbers in the production include “New York, New York” from *On the Town*, “Comedy Tonight” from *A Funny Thing That Happened on the Way to the Forum*, “You Gotta Get a Gimmick” from *Gypsy*, and “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” from *The King and I*. A seemingly noncontroversial musical, the Muni’s production of *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* became the subject of controversy when the act-two curtain opened on a Caucasian actress portraying Tuptim, the Burmese slave of the King. The actress, Sarah Bowden, appeared on stage in traditional Thai costume and was met with cries of, “Boo yellowface!” from disgruntled members of the audience who left the theatre shortly thereafter. In Diep Tran’s coverage of the protest for *American Theatre* magazine, the issue is presented as not only a casting concern, but rather a troubling sign of insensitivity to diverse cultures.¹ As simple as it would be to place blame on the theatre company for hiring a white actress, the very material itself must be called into

¹ Diep Tran, “Talking Back: A Protest of Yellowface at the Muni.” *American Theatre*, June 22, 2018.

question. In times when the world is reexamining what it means to be diverse, inclusive, and equitable, the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein may be perceived as problematic. With a close examining of the original text through a modern perspective, a historical perspective, and with moral themes in mind, a greater understanding may distinguish the musicals of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II as living theatre rather than relics of a bygone era.

In examining the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, the canon may be best represented by the “big five” musicals. Specifically, the major works of the collaboration are undoubtedly, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*. Other musicals in the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, notably *Flower Drum Song*, present insightful discussion and unique challenges in relation to matters of morality, representation, diversity, and inclusion. *Flower Drum Song*’s storyline follows Chinese immigrants as they live in San Francisco and attempt to assimilate into American culture. While the original novel was written by a Chinese author, C.Y. Lee, the musical’s plot departs from the original novel. The musical becomes the Chinese story from the White-American perspective. Thus, any representation of Asian characters and customs must be called into question. The musical and the film made a conscious effort to cast Asian American actors, and brought the issue of assimilation to the mainstream. However, Asian Americans were only *mostly* cast, and the film version of *Flower Drum Song* has been criticized for “its inauthentic portrayal of

Chinese Americans, described by some critics as ‘condescending’ and ‘less than fully human.’”²

To remedy the two-dimensional portrayals of Chinese immigrants in the original, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization joined forces with playwright David Henry Hwang to revise the libretto of *Flower Drum Song*. Hwang writes in *The New York Times* about the impetus for a revision of the libretto, and how he presents *Flower Drum Song* with a more nuanced perspective. Hwang begins by explaining that his own youth was filled with inhuman representations of Asian characters in the mainstream media. Amid a sea of inauthentic and stereotypical stories, Hwang happened upon the 1961 film adaptation of *Flower Drum Song*. In comparison to the standard fare, *Flower Drum Song* presents a story of “love and culture clash in San Francisco's Chinatown, about romances between Asian men and women who spoke without accents, singing and dancing to beautiful and jazzy songs like 'I Enjoy Being a Girl,' 'Grant Avenue' and 'You Are Beautiful.’”³ Hwang says that while *Flower Drum Song* in its original form is considered inauthentic, the musical remained a guilty pleasure from his childhood. Hwang’s adaptation recognizes the cultural moment of the original *Flower Drum Song*, reveres the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein as trailblazing in its day, and ultimately presents a historical account of race and public perception while peeling back the mask of Asian stereotype. Hwang writes in *The New York Times*, “One era's cultural breakthroughs may calcify and become stereotypes through time.

² Ryan Tacorda, “Constructing Chinese American Identity through Film and Theatre: Flower Drum Song as Ingroup Narrative and as Counterstory Comment.” *UCLA Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 9, no. 1 (2004): 119.

³ David Henry Hwang, “A New Musical by Rodgers and Hwang.” *The New York Times*, October 13, 2002.

Culture is a living thing, constantly changing and evolving; intercultural work has always existed, as artists have incorporated new influences through migration, conquest and commerce.”⁴ Hwang’s adaptation efforts are further explored in Chapter Three.

When it comes to modern production of the “big five” Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, three of the five shows present major, seemingly irreconcilable, issues in terms of content. *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*, while each having major commercial productions in the last twelve years, present moral issues to the modern audience member. *Carousel* grapples with the issue of domestic violence and reinforces gender stereotypes. *South Pacific* presents a candid view of homegrown prejudice, comments on imperialism and appropriation, and contains simplistic portrayals of Asian characters. In *South Pacific*, the island’s Asian inhabitants either speak in broken English or they do not speak at all. *The King and I* faces similar issues in portraying native people. The historical figure, King Mongkut of Siam, is painted as a barbaric king who speaks in broken English; the real-life Mongkut is revered for bringing Western ideas of science and technology to Siam.⁵ In addition to *The King and I*’s issue of representation, the piece is imbued with misogyny and seemingly positions its white heroine as a savior to a cast of non-white characters. The remaining two out of five, *Oklahoma!* and *The Sound of Music*, have also received major revivals, but content issues have been considered in distinctive ways. *The Sound of Music* stands as the moral musical of the lot, and is known to many as a sweet, if not saccharine,

⁴ David Henry Hwang, “A New Musical by Rodgers and Hwang.” *The New York Times*, October 13, 2002.

⁵ Atsuro Morita, “In between the Cosmos and ‘Thousand-Cubed Great Thousands Worlds’: Composition of Uncommon Worlds by Alexander von Humboldt and King Mongkut.” *Anthropologica* 59 (2): 228–38.

inconsequential film. *Oklahoma!* has its own issues with representation and gender stereotypes, but modern productions have embraced content challenges as opportunities. To answer the tough questions, and to produce problematic works, it is first important to closely examine each text both on a thematic level, and line by line. From a modern perspective, certain lines of dialogue, songs, and plot points may raise red flags. However, a modern perspective coupled with historical context may show that morality prevails.

Carousel

Carousel, Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical treatment of Molnar's *Liliom*, opened on Broadway in 1945. Even in its place in history, *Carousel* presented text that was problematic. Todd Purdum, author of *Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway Revolution*, discusses the writers and the problem of *Carousel*. Purdum says, "They would not have talked about it in the terms we do today, but they knew they were grappling with a hero who had many unsympathetic elements."⁶ Rodgers and Hammerstein's adaptation of the Hungarian play posed a seemingly irreconcilable problem, inherent in the original and any adaptation—the leading man was an abusive husband. However, Hammerstein's libretto was conscious of this. Purdum asserts that, "Hammerstein intentionally made Julie a stronger character than Billy. When a robbery goes awry, Billy kills himself rather than face the consequences."⁷ While the musical does not present an infallible leading man, Purdum says that "The sting of Billy's behavior is still there . . . but Rodgers and Hammerstein made him human, and the show endures."⁸ However, a more

⁶ Michael Riedel, "Why 'Carousel' Was a Problem before #MeToo." *The New York Post*, April 12, 2018.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

thorough investigation of *Carousel* reveals pages of text that may potentially pose issues for a twenty-first-century audience.

In the play's second scene, *Carousel's* portrayal of female relationships, stigma, and dated gender roles appear to be the work's major dilemma in terms of modern production. Just after the opening "Carousel Waltz," the audience sees Julie Jordan, and her friend Carrie Pipperidge, chased from the carousel by its proprietor, Mrs. Mullin. In the scene, Mrs. Mullin poses accusations against Julie that call stereotype and stigma into question:

MRS. MULLIN. [*Entering from D.S.R. "In no mood to be trifled with," crosses to JULIE*]. I got one more thing to tell you, young woman. If y'ever so much as poke your nose in my carousel again, you'll be thrown out! Right out on your little pink behind!

JULIE looks at CARRIE with a "What did I do" look.

CARRIE. You got no call t'talk t'her like that! She ain't doin' you no harm.

MRS. MULLIN. [*To CARRIE*]. Oh, ain't she? Think I wanta get in trouble with the police and lose my license.⁹

Mrs. Mullin's mention of the police surprises Carrie and Julie. As far as they know, Julie Jordan hasn't committed any crime. After Mrs. Mullin claims that Julie let Billy "fool" with her on the carousel, she makes her way to a conclusion about Julie and Carrie. After Carrie and Julie tell Mrs. Mullin to go back to the carousel and leave them alone, Mrs. Mullin says, "I don't run my business fer a lot o'chippies!"¹⁰

The phrase "chippies" may not be in the modern audience member's own vernacular, but context tells us that "chippy" is a slang term meaning "prostitute." In recent years, stigma against sex workers has come to our attention as a social issue. The stigma against sex workers presents several inherent issues in terms of the nature of the work itself, the agency

⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 9.

of women who sell sex, and social implications, both realized and anticipated. From a feminist standpoint, sex work can be viewed as a liberation from the traditional role of a female in society, or may further objectify women as the fulfilment of male desire and nothing more. This dilemma often leaves female sex workers excluded from feminist spaces entirely. While stigma against sex work persists, sex workers must face “numerous barriers to justice, social services, and healthcare.”¹¹ While Mrs. Mullin’s choice of words may be perceived as a perpetuation of stigma and stereotype, the use of “chippie” may also be synonymous with “tramp” or “hussy.” Even without directly accusing Julie of prostitution, Mrs. Mullin’s objection to Julie on the grounds of her sex is discriminatory. Referring to a woman as a “tramp” or “hussy” is outdated and objectionable to a modern audience member. While any context of the term is unacceptable, Mrs. Mullin is not a character in *Carousel* that must play by the rules. She is a woman exempt from the moral-compass role. Later in the scene, we find out more about the true nature of Julie’s work.

After Julie and Carrie’s ejection from the carousel, Billy Bigelow joins the women on a tree-lined path. Billy learns that the two women work at Bascombe’s Cotton Mill, and that whoever stays with Billy will lose her job. Carrie explains, “All Bascombe’s girls hev to be respectable. We all hev to live in the Mill Boarding House, and if we’re late they lock us out and we can’t go back to work there any more.”¹² Carrie leaves Julie with Billy, Julie sacrificing her job to stay. Shortly after Carrie leaves the two on the tree-lined path, a

¹¹ Eric Sprankle , Katie Bloomquist, Cody Butcher, Neal Gleason, and Zoe Schaefer. 2018. “The Role of Sex Work Stigma in Victim Blaming and Empathy of Sexual Assault Survivors.” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy: Journal of NSRC* 15 (3): 242–48.

¹² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 13.

policeman and Mr. Bascombe cross paths with Julie and Billy. The policeman recognizes Julie as one of Bascombe's girls, as perhaps Mrs. Mullin did. When the policeman points this out to Mr. Bascombe, Bascombe gives Julie the chance to walk back with him to the boarding house and maintain her employment. However, Julie still chooses to stay. On his way out, Mr. Bascombe remarks to the police officer, "You see Timony! There are some of them you just can't help."¹³ After Mr. Bascombe leaves, the policeman and Billy share a brief, but tense exchange:

POLICEMAN. [*Looks down at BILLY, starts to go, then turns to BILLY and speaks*].

You! You low down scallawag! I oughta throw you in jail.

BILLY. [*Very tough*]. What for?

POLICEMAN. [*Eases to bench. After a pause*]. Dunno. Wish I did!¹⁴

The exchange of dialogue, while providing a button to the scene and impetus for the policeman's exit, may play as a representation of corrupt police power to the twenty-first century audience. The 2018 Jack O'Brien-helmed revival featured an African-American actor (Joshua Henry) as Billy Bigelow, and a white actor (Nicholas Belton) as the policeman. The casting and the text, set against the backdrop of the audience's understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement, may pose issues inconceivable to the original authors.

While much of act one's second scene includes sexism and stigma in conflict, a notable moment relies heavily on the antiquated trope of female preoccupation with romantic relationships. After Julie meets Billy on the carousel for the first time, and a mutual attraction is sensed by Carrie, she pushes the subject:

CARRIE. [*Looking sly*]. Julie, I been bustin' t'tell you somethin' lately.

JULIE. Y'hev?

¹³ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 15-16.

CARRIE. Reason I didn't keer t'tell you before was 'cause you didn't have a feller of yer own. Now y'got one, I ken tell y'about mine.¹⁵

In the song that follows, Carrie describes her “feller,” Mister Snow, to Julie. She describes Mister Snow as fisherman that “can't seem to lose the smell of fish!”¹⁶ But perhaps the biggest surprise in Carrie's musing is that she and Mister Snow would like to be married. In pondering what her marriage to Mister Snow will be like, Carries says to Julie:

He'll carry me 'cross the threshold,
And I'll be as meek as a lamb.
Then he'll set me on my feet
And I'll say, kinda sweet
[Spoken]. “Well Mister Snow, here I am?”¹⁷

The admission of Carrie's relationship to Julie on the grounds of Julie having her own romantic pursuit places a great deal of importance on a female's romantic relationship. In hiding the relationship due to Julie's lack of suitor, Carrie presumes that Julie wants, or even needs, a “feller” of her own. In addition to the weight of romantic relationships, Carrie speaks about her impending nuptials in a way that perpetuates dated gender roles within a marriage. Particularly, Carrie's assertion that she will “be as meek as a lamb,” may represent a misogynist viewpoint when considering the lyric was written from the male perspective. The subplot involving Carrie Pipperidge's relationship with Enoch Snow is built on outdated views of marriage, and traditional gender roles within marriage.

A month later at Nettie Fowler's Spa on the Ocean Front, Enoch Snow makes his first appearance during a reprise of Carrie's “Mister Snow.” In the scene directly preceding the

¹⁵ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 13.

song, Carrie tells Julie and the other girls that she and Mr. Snow are to be married in church next Sunday. Upon Enoch's arrival, he tells Carrie of his great business plans for a sardine empire. He plans to build his current business into a fleet of ships, buy a cannery, and buy a house. Enoch tells Carrie that canned sardines will make them all rich, implying children. Enoch's mention of children in the song "When the Children are Asleep" is met with trepidation on Carrie's part.

ENOCH. [*Crossing to her on music interval. Blissfully proceeding with his dream*].
The first year we're married we'll hev *ONE* little kid,
The second year we'll go and hev *ANOTHER* little kid,
You'll soon be darning socks fer eight little feet—
CARRIE. [*Cross R.—front of bait box. Enough is enough*]. Are you buildin' up to
another fleet?
ENOCH. We'll build a lot more rooms,
Our dear little house will get bigger.
CARRIE. And so will my figger!¹⁸

Enoch's assumption that the pair will start a family, and Carrie's apprehension presents an outdated representation of marriage and family. However, this moment may also stand as proof of Carrie's agency. While the song concludes with Carrie giving into the idea of having children, and act two proves that she does, her outspoken hesitation shifts the dynamic and solves the problem. Enoch's proposition is merely his own dream, rather than a patriarchal demand of his bride.

Perhaps the largest stain on the reputation of *Carousel* is the issue of domestic violence. In 2018, when Jack O'Brien staged his Broadway revival of *Carousel*, critics and audience members were skeptical. In Laurie Winer's exploration of *Carousel* in the #MeToo

¹⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 30.

movement, she refers to *Carousel* as “the wife-beater musical.”¹⁹ From a modern perspective, depicting domestic violence on stage is not the issue. For instance, modern musicals such as *Bright Star* (2014) or *Waitress* (2015) bring the issue of domestic violence to the stage without major controversy. It is Julie’s acceptance of abuse at the hands of Billy Bigelow, to the point of telling her daughter that “It is possible, dear, fer someone to hit you—hit you hard—and not hurt at all,”²⁰ that mars *Carousel*. However, an exploration of the text, the forward momentum of the drama, and the moral message of the piece tells us that Julie, and a few characters affiliated with Billy, are the only characters excusing Billy’s abuse. From the first mention of Billy hitting Julie, to the finale of the show, other characters (primarily Carrie) in the piece admonish Billy and urge Julie not to accept her fate as a battered wife.

The first mention of Billy’s abuse comes in the third scene of act one, months after Billy and Julie’s first meeting. Carrie and Julie reunite at Nettie Fowler’s Spa on the ocean front. In the exchange, Julie admits that Billy hit her. While Carrie protests, Julie merely excuses Billy’s abuse.

JULIE. Billy don’t know any trade. He’s only good at what he used to do . . . So now he jest don’t do anythin’.
CARRIE. Wouldn’t the carousel woman take him back?
JULIE. I think she would, but he won’t go. I asked him why and he won’t tell me . . .
Last Monday he hit me.
GIRLS gesture “oh”
CARRIE. Did you hit him back?
JULIE. No.
CARRIE. Whyn’t you leave him?
JULIE. [*Very sincere*]. *I DON’T WANT TO*

¹⁹ Laurie Winer, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*, After #MeToo.” *Vulture*, April 11, 2018.

²⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 69.

CARRIE. I would. I'd leave him. Thinks, jest because he's Billy Bigelow he can do whatever he likes. Don't support you! Beats you! . . . He's a bad'n.

JULIE. [*Catches CARRIE'S hand and warmly defends him*]. He ain't *WILLIN'LY* er *MEANIN'LY* bad.

CARRIE. [*Afraid she is hurting JULIE*]. Mebbe he ain't . . . that night you set on the bench together—he was gently then, you told me.

JULIE. Yes, he was.

CARRIE. But now he's always actin' up—

JULIE. [*To CARRIE*]. Not alw'ys. Sometime he's gentle . . . even now. [*To front.*] After supper, when he stands out here and listens to the music from the carousel—somethin' comes over him—and he's gentle.

CARRIE. [*Big sigh, completely carried away*]. What's he say?

JULIE. [*Big sigh*]. Nothin'. He jest sets and gets kinda thoughtful . . . Y'see he's unhappy 'cause he ain't workin'. That's really why he hit me on Monday.

CARRIE. [*Comes down to earth. Plants "Snow" character*]. *FINE* reason fer hittin' you. *BEATS* his wife 'cause he ain't *WORKIN'*.²¹

Despite Carrie's objection, Julie still excuses Billy's action. Not only does Julie excuse Billy's abuse to Carrie, but Billy is pardoned by those around him as well.

In a few moments of text, the audience sees both Mrs. Mullin and Jigger Craigin (Billy's friend and accomplice in the robbery), in instances that call character into question. Mrs. Mullin's key interaction with Billy shows her directly avoiding the issue of Billy's abuse, whereas a key moment with Jigger simply exposes his predatory nature. In the third scene of act one, Mrs. Mullin comes to speak with Billy and the following exchange occurs.

MRS. MULLIN. Are you goin' to be sensible and come back?

BILLY. And leave Julie?

MRS. MULLIN. You beat her, don't you?

BILLY. [*Exasperated*]. No, I don't beat her. What's all this damn fool talk about beatin'? [*Turns to her.*] I hit her once and now the whole town is—the next one I hear—[*He raises his R. back hand to smack her.*] I'll smash—

MRS. MULLIN. [*Backing away from him*]. All right! All right! I take it back. I don't want to get mixed up in it.²²

²¹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 25.

²² *Ibid.* 35.

Mrs. Mullin avoids the issue rather than standing up for Julie or chastising Billy for his actions. However, from the text we may infer that this action is simply not in Mrs. Mullin's character or that she was unable to stand up due to Billy's physical threat against her. Early in act two, a moment between Jigger and Carrie both exposes Jigger's predatory nature and liberates him of moral responsibility.

JIGGER. Sit down here with me a minute. I want yer advice. [*He takes CARRIE'S arm and leads her D.R.*]

CARRIE. [*As she crosses*]. Now, look here Mr. Craigin, I ain't got no time fer no wharf yarns or fish stories. [*Sits on Basket.*]

JIGGER. [*Squashing out his cigarette, sits beside her. Suddenly throws his arms around her*]. You're sweeter than sugar and I'm crazy fer you. Never had this feelin' before fer anyone—

CARRIE. [*Tries to push him away*]. Mr. Craigin!

JIGGER. Ain't nothin' I wouldn't do fer you. Why jest to see yer lovely smile—I'd swim through beer with my mouth closed. You're the only girl fer me. How about a little kiss?

CARRIE. [*Rising, crosses D.R.*]. Mr. Craigin, I couldn't.

JIGGER. [*Riding, crosses down to her*]. Didn't you hear me say I loved you?

CARRIE. I'm sorry fer you, but what can I do? Enoch and me are goin' to be cried in church next Sunday.

JIGGER. [*Dramatic, hand on heart*]. Next Sunday I'll be far out at sea lookin' at the icy grey water. Mebbe I'll jump in and drown myself!

CARRIE. Oh, don't!

JIGGER. Well, then give me a kiss. [*Grabbing her arm. Good and sore now.*] One measely kiss!

CARRIE. [*Pushing his arm away. Loud and pert*]. ENOCH WOULDN'T LIKE IT.

JIGGER. I DON'T WANT TO KISS ENOCH.

CARRIE. [*Drawing herself up resolutely*]. I'll thank you not to yell at me, Mr. Craigin. If you love me like you say you do, then please show me the same respect like you would if you didn't love me.²³

This moment between Jigger and Carrie casts Jigger in a negative light. His predatory nature eliminates Jigger from the moral responsibility. Thus, neither Jigger nor Mrs. Mullin can reprimand Billy's behavior or advocate for his victim.

²³ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 46.

Even in Billy's death, Julie pardons his actions and Billy is incapable of acknowledging his abuse. Just before Billy commits suicide, Julie sings "What's the use of wond'rin'" in which she concludes that a woman's responsibility is to love her man, whether he is good or bad. As Julie cradles Billy's dead body in her arms, she remarks, "You weren't a goody boy—you were bad, and quick tempered and unhappy. But sleep peaceful now. I knew why you hit me. I always know everythin' you were thinkin'."24 Even after agreeing with Carrie that he is better dead, Julie still pardoned his abuse. On the other side of life, Billy still denies that he beat his wife. In an exchange with the Starkeeper, Billy shows no remorse.

STARKEEPER. Why are you ashamed you loved Julie?

BILLY. I ain't ashamed of anything!

STARKEEPER. Why'd you beat her?

BILLY. [*As if to say "What else could I do"*]. I didn't beat her—I wouldn't beat a little thing like that—I hit her.

STARKEEPER. [*Smiling*]. Why?

BILLY. Well, y'see—we'd argue. And she'd say this and I'd say that—and she'd be right—so I'd hit her.

STARKEEPER. Hmm! Are you sorry you hit her?

BILLY. [*Crossing down to C.*] Ain't sorry fer anythin'—25

These vital scenes show the audience that neither Julie nor Billy are able to accept Billy's actions as abuse. Later in the second act, when Billy is given a chance to return to earth, the most egregious act of abuse occurs.

In order to redeem his actions, and to earn his place in heaven, Billy is sent to earth to perform a kind act. The Starkeeper suggests that Billy do something for his daughter—who is now fifteen years old. Upon Billy's arrival, he finds his daughter, Louise, who is somewhat

24 Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 57.

25 *Ibid.* 61.

of an outcast. She is tormented by the Snow children for the sins of her father. After seeing her beleaguered by the other children, Billy reveals himself to Louise. He tells Louise that he knew her father, and that he was a handsome man. During their conversation, Billy offers a gift to Louise. Billy pulls a star out of his pocket, frightening Louise, and tensions soon escalate:

LOUISE. What's that?

BILLY. Pst! A star. *[He points up to the sky with R. hand to indicate whence it came. Then takes her by the R. wrist.]*

LOUISE is terrified now.

LOUISE. *[Backing U.R.]* Go away!

BILLY. *[As she backs away from him].* Darling please—I want to help you.

LOUISE. *[Tries to pull arm away].* Don't call me darling—Let go my arm—

BILLY. I want to make you happy—take this—

LOUISE. No!

BILLY. Please!

LOUISE pulls away from him, holding out her R. hand to keep him away from her.]

Please—dear—

LOUISE. No! Go away!

Impulsively, involuntarily, he slaps her hand. She is startled. Looks at her hand, then at him and runs off into the house.

LOUISE. Mother!²⁶

While attempting to right his wrongs, Billy once again commits an act of abuse. Billy's heavenly friend pronounces the mission a failure, saying to Billy, "Whenever things don't turn out the way you want, all you ever do is hit someone you love."²⁷

After the heavenly friend admonishes Billy, Louise brings her mother outside to search for the man that hit her. In the next moment Louise asks her mother, "But is it possible, fer someone to hit you hard like that—real loud and hard—and not hurt at all?"²⁸

²⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 68.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 68.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 69.

and Julie responds, “It is possible, dear—fer someone to hit you—hit you hard—and not hurt at all.”²⁹ While this moment is the cause of controversy and question when it comes to modern production, it does not represent the climax of the plot or the moral message of the piece. As previously stated, Nettie Fowler holds the moral-compass responsibility. Her wisdom in Julie’s hour of need represents the true message of *Carousel*:

When you walk
Through a storm
Keep your chin up high,
And don't be afraid of the dark.
At the end
Of the storm
Is a golden sky
And the sweet
Silver song
Of a lark.
Walk on
Through the wind
Walk on
Through the rain
Tho' your dreams be tossed and blown,
Walk on, walk on,
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone!³⁰

Julie walks on through her trials, and comes out a stronger character than Billy. While she does not stand up against Billy, this is common behavior for a victim of domestic or intimate partner violence. The National Domestic Violence Hotline cautions that victims may make excuses for a partner in an abusive relationship. In a National Domestic Violence Hotline blog post from September 2013, common excuses such as “It’s *my* fault. I made a mistake and did something that upset them,” “They’re just stressed/tired/having a bad day/kidding,”

²⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers, *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Carousel* (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1956), 69.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 58.

“They aren’t usually like this,” and “They didn’t hit me that hard. It could be worse”³¹ are cited. These common excuses almost identically mirror dialogue spoken by Julie throughout the play. While Billy still stands a flawed man ultimately Purdum asserts, “It is Julie who endures, who prevails.”³²

South Pacific

In 1949, Rodgers and Hammerstein once again took Broadway by storm. This time, the duo adapted James A. Michener’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Tales of the South Pacific* into a musical play. In its time, the recent Pulitzer Prize for Michener’s novel, and the emotional appeal of a country not far removed from the second World War, catapulted *South Pacific* to instant success. The box office enjoyed healthy sales, *South Pacific* Enterprises sold tropical merchandise at the theatre, and the musical went on to win ten Tony Awards. In 2008, the musical enjoyed its first Broadway revival with Bartlett Sher at the helm. While modern productions of *South Pacific* have enjoyed similar success, the musical poses problems in its dealings with masculinity and gender roles, portrayal and appropriation of native cultures, and ultimately presents major characters who wrestle with deeply embedded prejudice. In examining the distinct narratives and subplots in *South Pacific*, several moments that accurately depicted attitudes of the time, or were true to Michener’s experience, become problematic to our modern sensibilities.

With *South Pacific*’s wartime setting, masculinity and the gendered relationships of men and women in service is an unavoidable theme. Throughout the course of the action,

³¹ “Excuses, Excuses...” 2013. *National Domestic Violence Hotline* (blog). September 12, 2013.

³² Michael Riedel, “Why ‘Carousel’ Was a Problem before #MeToo.” *The New York Post*, April 12, 2018.

misogynistic behavior reinforces the ever-present issue of toxic masculinity. In an editorial for *The New York Times*, author Maya Salam cites researchers, saying that toxic masculinity is defined as “suppressing emotions or making distress, maintaining an appearance of hardness, [or] violence as an indicator of power (think: “tough-guy” behavior).”³³ Salam asserts that the term “toxic masculinity” has been used for generations, within women’s studies classes, but in modern times the term is more widely used. Certain scenes, interactions, and thematic elements in *South Pacific* present toxic masculinity at play.

Early in act one, the stage is set for Sailors, Seabees, and Marines to lust after the young Navy nurses, and the female inhabitants of Bali Ha’i. In one of *South Pacific*’s early musical numbers, the men lament the absence of relationships with women. The song, “There is Nothing Like a Dame,” not only displays women as objects to fulfil male desire, but men’s urges for women are portrayed as uncontrollable. In the first verse of the song, the women are likened to mere objects or luxuries. The men sing:

SEABEE. (*Singing*). We got sunlight on the sand,
We got moonlight on the sea.
SAILOR. We got mangoes and bananas
You can pick right off a tree.
MARINE. We got volley ball and ping pong
And a lot of dandy games—
BILLIS. What ain’t we got?
We ain’t got dames!³⁴

As the musical number progresses, the nurses enter the scene. They jog to the tune of a “husky” nurse calling, “Hut two, three, four! Get—your—exercise!”³⁵ As the men can’t help

³³ Maya Salam, “What Is Toxic Masculinity?” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2019.

³⁴ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 28-29.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 31.

but stare, Stewpot and the Professor share a few lines of dialogue. Stewpot remarks that “Some of them nurses—the officers can have them.”³⁶ To which the Professor replies, “They got them!”³⁷ This furthers this idea that women are to be possessed by men. Today’s audiences are especially perceptive to this dynamic in male/female relationships portrayed on stage. However, the idea of uncontrollable lustful urges is another separate issue also presented in the song. The men sing:

MARINE. We feel restless,
We feel blue.
SEABEE. We feel lonely, and in brief,
We feel every kind of feelin’
PROFESSOR. But the feelin’ of relief.
SAILOR. We feel hungry as the wolf felt
When he met Red Riding Hood—
ALL. What don’t we feel?
STEW POT. We don’t feel good!³⁸

The number’s conclusion furthers the idea that man’s uncontrollable urge may be satisfied simply by “puttin’ him near”³⁹ a woman. In today’s context, the “boys will be boys” mentality behind overt and insatiable desire is a hot topic in news, fiction, and other media sources. However, the age-old trope of male desire is not the only instance of toxic masculinity in *South Pacific*.

Early in the musical, Luther Billis is established as the comedic relief. An aspect of his trajectory is his inclination toward money-making ventures. At the beginning of act one, the audience sees Billis’s current business venture. A homemade washing machine bears a

³⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 34.

³⁷ Ibid. 34.

³⁸ Ibid. 30.

³⁹ Ibid. 35.

sign reading, “Twisted Air Hand Laundry, Luther Billis Enterprises, Special Rates for Seabees.”⁴⁰ Nellie Forbush, a patron of Billis’s laundry enterprise, picks up her neatly folded and pressed laundry. The interaction depicts Billis’s masculinity coming into question, due to the nature of his work.

NELLIE. Have you done what you promised?

BILLIS. Yes, Miss Forbush. *(He pulls out a newspaper package from a hiding place in the roots of a tree and hands it to her)* I did it all last night. *(With an alarmed look at his comrades, as she starts to unwrap it)* You don’t have to open it now! *(But NELLIE opens the package, much to BILLIS’ embarrassment. It is her laundry, neatly folded.)*

NELLIE. Oh. You do beautiful work, Luther! *(Two men painfully cling to each other and turn their heads away. BILLIS tries to outglare the others in defensive defiance)* You’ve even done the pleats in my shorts!

BILLIS. Aw, pleats aren’t hard. You better run along now and catch up to your gang.

NELLIE. Pleats are *very* hard. How do you do such delicate work at night, in the dark?

BILLIS. There was a moon!

STEWPOW. *(In a syrupy voice)* There was a moon!

BILLIS. *(He turns to the men, realizing that they have heard this, and shouts defiantly)* A full moon!⁴¹

Within the stage directions, Billis shows embarrassment over his laundry job, and as a result is defensive in front of the other men. Stewpot’s mockery of Billis’s comment about the moon only makes the defensive front stronger, and the scene is awkwardly resolved. The torment over Billis’s delicate laundry job assumes that a man should not be capable of delicate pleats, especially not under a full moon. The other men taunting Billis over his side job is another example of toxic masculinity, and the perpetuation of gender roles/stereotypes.

Later in act one, Lieutenant Cable, Captain Brackett, and Commander Harbison meet Nellie Forbush regarding Emile de Becque. Upon her departure, Cable and Brackett have an

⁴⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 21.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 32-34.

interaction that contains a bit of ageism on the part of Cable, and is underscored with a supreme sense of “tough-guy” behavior.

HARBISON. I’m afraid we aren’t going to get much out of her. She’s obviously in love with him.

CABLE. (*To HARBISON*) That’s hard to believe, sir. They tell me he’s a middle-aged man.

BRACKETT. (*Rising from his desk chair. Smoldering*) Cable! It is a common mistake for boys of your age and athletic ability to underestimate men who have reached their maturity.

CABLE. I didn’t mean, sir . . .

BRACKETT. Young women frequently find a grown man attractive, strange as it may seem to you. I myself am over fifty. I am a bachelor and, Cable, I do not, by any means, consider myself—through. (*To HARBISON who is suppressing laughter*) What’s the matter, Bill?

HARBISON. Nothing, evidently!⁴²

This scene is important to examine through the lens of Maya Salam’s definition of toxic masculinity. In only a few lines, it is clear to see the appearance of hardness, power dynamics, and “tough-guy” behavior at play. The remark against Emile’s age is a casual instance of ageism on the part of Lieutenant Cable. Ageism is defined as prejudice toward aging or the aging process. While prejudice in the matter of age has been traditionally linked with senior citizens, modern exploration of the issue tells us that young people also face discrimination based on age. The moment provides a laugh in a musical comedy, but the discriminatory action and “tough-guy” response may read in a different way to a modern audience, that is attuned to the ideas of ageism and toxic masculinity.

In a musical play brimming with servicemen and women, set against the backdrop of pre-war ideas of gender roles, examples of toxic masculinity pervade the script. The main moments of concern have been explored, but small, passing moments are noted throughout.

⁴² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 61-62.

For instance, at the Thanksgiving Follies Captain Brackett is invited to make remarks toward the end of the program. During Brackett's remarks, the stage directions indicate that he "fingers the comic-paper skirt of one of the girls."⁴³ In the next breath, Captain Brackett introduces the next song to be performed by "Bosun Butch Forbush" and "petite Mademoiselle Lutheria." The scene and song to follow reverse gender dynamics as we have previously seen them in the play, Nellie adopting the masculine persona, and Luther Billis the feminine. In "Honey Bun" Nellie Forbush reclaims her femininity, adopting the role of girl-crazy sailor. She sings:

My doll is as dainty as a sparrow,
Her figure is something to applaud.
Where she's narrow, she's as narrow as an arrow
And she's broad where a broad should be broad!

A hundred and one
Pounds of fun—
That's my little Honey-Bun!
Get a load of Honey-Bun tonight!

I'm speakin' of my
Sweetie Pie,
Only sixty inches high—
Ev'ry inch is packed with dynamite!

Her hair is blonde and curly,
Her curls are hurly-burly.
Her lips are pips!
I call her hips:
"Twirly"
And "Whirly."
She's my baby,
I'm her Pap!
I'm her booby,
She's my trap!
I am caught and I don't wanta run

⁴³ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 126.

‘Cause I’m havin’ so much fun with Honey-Bun!⁴⁴

“Honey Bun” places Nellie in a position of power, to satirize and critique the male objectification of women. In the scene following, the show has concluded and Luther Billis is up to no good. The stage directions indicate that,

The girls come off the stage and file into their dressing shack. BILLIS follows them in. After a few moments he comes hurling out, minus his wig. A few seconds that, the wig is thrown out by one of the girls in the dressing room.⁴⁵

The notion of Billis entering the women’s dressing room, with our understanding of his sexual desire, may seem predatory in production. This moment may also stimulate conversation about gender expression, gender identity, and the societal struggle surrounding them both. In times when we are attuned to the difference between crossdressing, drag, and gender identity, the scene may play as a conflation of those important distinctions. All the while, the action of a cis-gendered man entering a women’s dressing room in wig and costume may make an unintentional comment about the gendered debate surrounding public restrooms. While the bit of action may have been originally written to bring a laugh to the scene, modern audiences might not be laughing.

In tracking the sub-plot involving the character of Luther Billis, we see instances of toxic masculinity, opportunism, and cultural appropriation. In his dealings with Bloody Mary, Luther Billis attempts to manufacture the same goods, and to exploit a religious ceremony for monetary gain. In this exploration of Billis’s story line, it is first important to mention that artifacts and merchandise sold by the Tonkinese, and the ceremony may not be

⁴⁴ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 127-128.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 132.

accurate in its representation. However, Billis's intention to sell the same goods as Bloody Mary, to exploit a traditional ceremony, and eventually his acknowledgement of ignorance, remain unchanged given the context.

Early in act one, Billis offers Bloody Mary a load of grass skirts. She and the native workers manufacture and sell them, but Billis boasts that he and his men made them in half the time. Billis proposes that Mary could sell the skirts for five dollars apiece, and offers the lot to her for eighty dollars. However, she only offers ten dollars. This leads to the first mention of Mary's boar's tooth bracelet, and subsequently, the ceremony on Bali Ha'i.

BILLIS. (*Following BLOODY MARY*) Now look here, Dragon Lady—(*Whatever he was about to say is knocked out of his head by the sight of the bracelet. BILLIS is an inveterate and passionate souvenir hunter*) What's that you got there, a boar's tooth bracelet? Where'd you get that? (*He points to the twin-peaked island*) Over there on Bali Ha'i?

MARY. (*Smiling craftily*) You like?

BILLIS. (*Taking bracelet and showing to G.I.'s who have huddled around him*) You know what that is? A bracelet made out of a single boar's tooth. They cut the tooth from the boar's mouth in a big ceremonial over there on Bali Ha'i. There ain't a souvenir you can pick up in the South Pacific as valuable as this . . . What do you want for it, Mary?

MARY. Hundred dolla'!

BILLIS. Hundred dollars! (*Shocked, but realizing he will pay it, turns to the boys and justifies himself in advance*) That's cheap. I thought it would be more.⁴⁶

Once Billis introduces the idea of a ceremony on Bali Ha'i and the boar's tooth bracelet, reaching the island is established as Billis's objective.

Later in the scene Billis says, "That damned Bali Ha'i! Why does it have to be off limits? You can get everything over there. Shrunken heads, bracelets, old ivory."⁴⁷ Since the island is off-limits, and the ordering of boats is outside of Luther's rank, he must enlist the

⁴⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 25-26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 27.

help of Lieutenant Cable. Billis attempts to persuade the Lieutenant to take him to Bali Ha'i, he explains the boar's tooth ceremony to Cable, saying:

But, another thing goes on over there—the ceremonial of the boar's tooth. After they kill the boar they pass around some of that coconut liquor and women dance with just skirts on . . . (*His voice becoming evil*) and everybody gets to know everybody pretty well . . . (*He sings*) Bali Ha'i will whisper—(*BILLIS starts dance as he hums the melody seductively. Then he stops and talks*) It's just a little tribal ceremonial and I thought you being up in the shooting war for such a long time without getting any—recreation—I thought you might be interested.⁴⁸

To sell Cable on the excursion, Billis paints this portrait of the ceremony on Bali Ha'i.

However, as an outside observer to this tradition, Billis's perspective must be called into question. His attitude toward the ceremony, and taking Cable along with him, is opportunistic and takes advantage of a cultural event without reverence of the true meaning of the boar's tooth ceremony. The libretto does not acknowledge the cultural significance of the boar's tooth ceremony.

While the traditional ceremony on Bali Ha'i is Billis's ultimate objective in his search for souvenirs, the economic revolution caused by Bloody Mary is discussed in scenes prior to Luther's trip. In a scene with Billis, Captain Brackett, Bloody Mary, and others—the issue of Navy members participating in the pseudo-tourist economy is addressed.

BILLIS. (*Making an impressive announcement*) The natives can now go back to work on the farms. The demand for grass skirts can now be met by us Seabees!

BRACKETT. Dressmakers! (*Starting to blow up*) Do you mean to tell me the Seabees of the United States Navy are now a lot of—

BILLIS. If you don't like the idea, sir we can drop it right here, sir. Just say the word. Just pretend I never brought it up.

HARBISON. (*Reflectively*) Luther Billis.

BILLIS. Yes, sir?

HARBISON. Nothing. Just making a mental note. I want to be sure not to forget your name.

⁴⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 42-43.

(Pause, during which BILLIS slowly and dejectedly retires. BRACKETT turns to MARY.)

BRACKETT. I want to see you pick up every scrap of this paraphernalia now! And, for the last time, carry it way down there beyond that fence off Navy property.

(MARY stands firmly planted and immovable! . . . CABLE walks to the kiosk and collapses it.)

CABLE *(With decisive authority)* Come on, everybody! Take all this stuff and throw it over that fence.

(The men quickly obey, BILLIS ostentatiously taking charge in front of the two officers.)

BILLIS. *(To men)* All right—take it way down there. Off Navy property!

CABLE. *(Strides over to MARY and points off)* You go too!

MARY. *(CABLE can do no wrong in her eyes)* All right, Lootellan. Thank you.⁴⁹

In this scene, the economic commentary present also alludes to American imperialism. The instance of Brackett asking Mary to remove herself from Navy property reads in a new way that the authors could not have foreseen. In modern times when the idea of imperialism and the issues of immigration are being explored in the theatre, and other artistic mediums, the scene takes on a new importance. Rather than a comical moment, Mary's "planted and immovable" stance may be perceived as an act of protest, and ultimately, she gives in.

After Mary's dismissal from Navy property, Billis and Stewpot are seen attempting to manufacture their own versions of Mary's goods. Specifically, the two men are attempting to pass off an orange as a shrunken human head.

BILLIS. Did you tell those guys at the shop to stop making those grass skirts?

STEW POT. Sure, they just turned out one of these. *(He hands him a small, dark object)* What do you think of it?

BILLIS. *(Studying it a moment)* That don't look like a dried-up human head. It looks like an old orange painted with shoe-polish.

STEW POT. That's what it is.

BILLIS. Go back to the shop and tell them to try again. If I order a dried-up human head, I want a human head . . . dried up!⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 46-47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 53.

In viewing Billis's actions from a modern standpoint, he is making a counterfeit version of a relic that may hold religious or cultural significance. There is no indication from Billis, or any other character in the text, as to the significance of the shrunken head. The libretto relies on Michener's account of the South Pacific, as most historical accounts of shrunken heads are from the Amazon.⁵¹ Showing little reverence for the boar's tooth ceremony, Billis travels to Bali Ha'i against orders and takes part in the ceremony (presumably to the dismay of the natives). While he waits for Cable to arrive at the boat, Billis pleads with Mary:

BILLIS. Hey, Mary—Please ask those Boar Tooth ceremonial fellows not to be sore at me. I didn't think those girls would do a religious dance with only skirts on. If somebody had told me it was a religious dance. I wouldn't have gotten up and danced with them.⁵²

Billis's comment acknowledges his own ignorance of the ceremony's religious significance. From a modern perspective, Billis exploited the local culture for monetary gain. What was once written as a comedic relief, in performance risks making him into an unsavory antagonist.

Amidst the exploitation and appropriation of native traditions and commerce, the portrayals of Bloody Mary and Liat, as Tonkinese women, may read as inauthentic. The language that others use in reference to Mary, and the linguistic liberties taken with her dialogue, call the entire depiction into question. In the case of child-like Liat, she is simply an under-developed character with little agency. Questions of accurate representation reach beyond linguistics and agency. Mary's commerce and presence on the naval base makes cultural comments both in the context of the 1950s, and presents new ideas to a 21st century

⁵¹ Tahir Shah, "A Price on Their Heads." *Geographical*, November 2001.

⁵² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 96.

audience. A closer examination of Bloody Mary and Liat, especially in relation to Lieutenant Cable, may also bring morality into question.

In the second scene of act one, the Sailors, Marines, and Seabees sing a serenade to Mary, the object of their amusement. The line, “Bloody Mary is the girl I love,”⁵³ is interspersed with remarks such as, “Her skin is tender as DiMaggio’s glove”⁵⁴ and “Bloody Mary’s chewing betel nuts—And she don’t use Pepsodent.”⁵⁵ During the song Bloody Mary is introduced to the audience. The stage directions indicate that she is “small, yellow, with Oriental eyes.”⁵⁶ They go on to describe Mary’s costume:

She wears black sateen trousers, and a white blouse over which is an old Marine’s tunic. On her head is a peach-basket hat. Around her neck is a G.I. identification chain from which hangs a silver Marine emblem.⁵⁷

Once Mary is introduced, the interaction between Mary and a Marine sheds light on her function as a comedic character to amuse the military men on the island. In the following dialogue, Mary’s handle of English, and characterization as a money-hungry woman are exploited for a laugh:

MARY. (*Looking straight out at the audience*) Hallo, G.I.! (*She holds up a grass skirt*) Grass skirt? Very saxy! Fo’ dolla’? Saxy grass skirt. Fo’ dolla’! Send home Chicago. You like? You buy? (*Her eyes scan the audience as if following a passer-by. Her crafty smile fades to a quick scowl as he apparently passes without buying. She turns back toward the MARINE for approval*) That good?
MARINE. That’s great, Mary! You’re learning fast.

⁵³ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

MARY. (*Calling off again*) Stingy bastard! (*She cackles gaily and turns back to the MARINE*) I learn fast. . . . Pretty soon I talk English as good as any crummy Marine. (*Calling off once more*) Stingy bastard!⁵⁸

In addition to the sailors making fun of her ability to speak English, her business model is represented in a way that may not be authentic. As previously stated, Mary sells shrunken human heads. The practice holds cultural and religious significance in parts of the Amazon, however, Michener's account of the South Pacific includes the sales of shrunken heads. Mary sells the shrunken heads to the men for "fifty dolla":

MARINE. What is that thing?

MARY. (*Holding the small object in her hand*) Is head. Fifty dolla'.

MARINE. (*Revolted*) What's it *made of*?

MARY. Made outa head! Is real human.

MARINE. (*Fascinated*) What makes it so small?

MARY. Shlunk! Only way to keep human head is shlink 'em.⁵⁹

The portrayal of Mary poses issue in her business practice and her linguistic portrayal. Not only does Mary speak in broken English, she uses the same few phrases, and commonly mispronounces words. For instance, instead of "Lieutenant," Mary simply says, "Lootellan." Mary's song in Act Two, "Happy Talk" has been criticized as a "pidgin" number.⁶⁰ In the song, she sings:

Happy Talk,
Keep talkin' Happy Talk!
Talk about tings you'd like to do.
You got to have a dream—
If you don' have a dream
How you gonna have a dream come true?⁶¹

⁵⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 19.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 22.

⁶⁰ Lawrence Downes, "Bloody Mary Is the Girl I Love." *The New York Times*, April 4, 2008.

⁶¹ Ibid. 120.

However, the issues surrounding the character of Mary may not end with her simplistic and inauthentic portrayal. The plot involving Mary, Liat, and Cable, raises even more questions regarding authentic portrayal and morality, when examined through a modern lens.

From first sight, Bloody Mary is enamored with Lieutenant Cable. Upon his entrance, Mary remarks to Cable, “Hey, Lootellan. You damn sexy man!”⁶² However, as the play progresses, it becomes exceedingly clear that her fascination with Cable is not for her own benefit. While Luther Billis is attempting to convince Cable to make a trip to Bali Ha’i, Mary is also hoping that Cable will make his way over. Mary insists that the island is calling Cable. Once Cable is convinced and arrives on the island, Mary’s intentions are obvious. Billis and Cable arrive on Bali Ha’i, Mary intervenes, saying, “I take you with me. Come, Lootellan. You have good time.”⁶³ She sends Billis to the boar’s tooth ceremony, and leads Cable away.

Mary leads Cable to a “native hut” where she introduces him to a young girl. She is described in the stage directions as:

A girl, perhaps seventeen. Her black hair is drawn smooth over her head. Like BLOODY MARY, she wears a white blouse and black trousers. Barefooted, she stands, silent, shy and motionless against the wattled wall, looking at CABLE with the honest curiosity and admiration of a child.⁶⁴

We learn that the girl’s name is Liat, and that she is Tonkinese. According to Mary, she only speaks a few words of English, but speaks French very well. Once Mary leaves Lieutenant Cable and Liat alone, her plan is set into motion. After the two are left in darkness, and a

⁶² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 37.

⁶³ Ibid. 89.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 90.

reprise of “Bali Ha’i” is played by the orchestra, the lights restore on Liat and Cable as a shocking revelation is made:

(The light comes up on the hut again and moonlight now comes through the opened doorway where CABLE stands. He has no shirt on. LIAT is seated on the floor, gazing up at him silently; her hair hangs loose down her back. CABLE smiles down at her.)

CABLE. *(Trying to puzzle something out in his mind)* But you’re just a kid . . . How did Bloody Mary get a kid like you to come here and . . . I don’t get it! *(Suddenly realizing that she has not understood)* Cette vieille femme . . . votre amie?

LIAT. Ma mère.

CABLE. *(Horried)* Your mother! Bloody Mary is your mother! But she didn’t tell me.

(LIAT, to divert him from unpleasant thoughts, suddenly throws herself in his lap; they kiss. The sound of a ship’s bell is heard in the distance. They sit up. LIAT looks panic-stricken.)

LIAT. Non, Non!⁶⁵

Despite Liat’s protests, Cable returns to the boat and leaves Bali Ha’i. Upon Cable’s departure from the island, he seems to be in a romantic daze. His disposition does not go unnoticed by Bloody Mary, who is pleased that Cable has taken such a liking to Liat.

In act two, upon Liat and Cable’s reunion, Bloody Mary makes it her mission to ensure marriage between the two lovers:

LIAT. *(Calling offstage)* Ma mère! C’est lui!
(She turns and, like a young deer, glides over to the amazed CABLE and embraces him before the equally amazed EMILE. MARY waddles on.)

CABLE. *(Holding LIAT tight)* I thought I was dreaming.

LIAT. *(Laughing)* Non.

(She holds him tighter)

CABLE. *(He holds her away from him and looks at her)* What are you doing over here?

MARY. *(Grimly)* She come in big white boat—bigger than your boat. Belong Jacques Barrere. He want to marry Liat. *(To EMILE)* You know him. *(EMILE nods. She turns back to CABLE)* Is white man, too. And very rich!

⁶⁵ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 93.

CABLE. (*To LIAT*) Is that the old planter you told me about? The one who drinks? (*His eye catches EMILE'S. EMILE nods. CABLE cries out as if hurt*) Oh, my God! (*He turns angrily to MARY*) You can't let her marry a man like that.

MARY. Hokay! Then *you* marry her.

EMILE. (*Angrily, to MARY*) Tais-toi! Il est malade! . . . Tu comprends? (*MARY is temporarily silenced. EMILE turns to CABLE and his voice becomes gentle and sympathetic*) Lieutenant, I am worried about you. You are ill. Will you allow me to see you back to the hospital?

CABLE. You're worried about me! That's funny. The fellow who says he lives on an island all by himself and doesn't worry about anybody—Japs, Americans, Germans—anybody. Why pick out *me* to worry about?

EMILE. (*Stiffly*) Forgive me. I'm sorry, Lieutenant.

(*He leaves. MARY goes to CABLE to make one last please for her daughter's dream.*)

MARY. Lootellan, you like Liat. . . .Marry Liat! You have good life here. Look, Lootellan, I am rich. I save six hundred dolla' before war. Since war I make two thousand dolla' . . . war go on I make maybe more. Sell grass skirts, boar's teeth, real human heads. Give all de money to you an' Liat. You no have to work. I work for you. . . . (*Soft music is played*) All day long, you and Liat be together! Walk through woods, swim in sea, sing, dance, talk happy. No think about Philadelia. Is no good. Talk about beautiful thing and make love all day long. You like? You buy?

(*She sings. Throughout the song, LIAT performs what seem to be traditional gestures*)

Happy Talk,

Keep talkin' Happy Talk!

Talk about tings you'd like to do,

You got to have a dream—

If you don' have a dream

How you gonna have a dream come true?⁶⁶

She goes on to describe a blissful life that Liat and Cable may lead together, citing the beautiful serenity of Bali Ha'i as a backdrop for their life together.

In terms of the depiction of Bloody Mary and Liat, their portrayals could be described as inauthentic from a modern perspective. Bloody Mary appears to be a caricature of a Tonkinese woman from the white male perspective. Her linguistic portrayal, as well as her business practice, and willingness to surrender her own daughter to Cable seem antiquated and nonrealistic. Liat's childlike admiration of Cable, and her deep love for him ring untrue,

⁶⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 118-120.

given their inability to communicate. From a modern perspective, Mary's scheme to join Cable and Liat in marriage may even play as human trafficking in action. According to Emily Russell, Executive Director of the Missouri Attorney General's Human Trafficking Task Force, many human trafficking cases today are committed by parents sexually exploiting their children for money.⁶⁷ Human trafficking is a global issue, running rampant in the most ordinary places. A modern audience, who may be familiar with this crisis, may view Mary's intentions as dishonorable or disturbing.

In an opinion piece for *The New York Times*, Lawrence Downes writes about Loretta Ables Sayre's portrayal of Bloody Mary in the 2008 revival. Downes refers to the subplot involving Cable, Mary, and Liat as cringe worthy, calling Bloody Mary a "mother-pimp." However, Bartlett Sher, and Ables Sayre insist that Downes misses the point, saying, "Bloody Mary is a woman trapped—on a tiny island with no way out and no rescuers expected. She pushes Liat to Cable as if to a life preserver."⁶⁸ Downes asserts, "Seen this way, Bloody Mary is flawed and human, not cardboard. And when she sings 'Happy Talk,' it's not a ditty. It's soaked in sadness, a desperate plea to Cable to imagine life with Liat. When he rejects it, the curse Bloody Mary spits at him—'Stingy bastard!'—carries the full weight of a mother's anguish."⁶⁹

The proposed marriage between Liat and Cable serves as the subplot to the romance of Emile de Becque and Nellie Forbush. In act two, the confluence of both plots serves as the climax of the musical. Lieutenant Cable's defiant assertion that "you've got to be carefully

⁶⁷ Jill Szoo Wilson, "The Crime of Human Trafficking, with Emily Russell." *Small Town Big Stories*. May 27, 2019.

⁶⁸ Lawrence Downes, "Bloody Mary Is the Girl I Love." *The New York Times*, April 4, 2008.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

taught” stands as the moral message of the musical. While Nellie and Cable both struggle with the same sense of deeply imbedded prejudice, the difference lies in their acknowledgement of the issue. In examining the main romantic plot of *South Pacific*, and the conclusion of the subplot involving Bloody Mary, Cable and Liat, the moral conclusion may be reached. While aspects of *South Pacific* have become outdated, and representations have proved to be inauthentic, the issue of prejudice still rings true today.

Early in act one, it is established that Nellie’s trips to Emile’s estate are not unnoticed by her peers and superiors. While Nellie’s relationship with a local Frenchman is of interest to most, Lieutenant Cable and Captain Brackett have special stake in communication with Emile. To successfully perform an operation on a neighboring island, Brackett and Cable seek the assistance of Emile de Becque. In gathering intelligence, the two speak with Nellie Forbush. However, the conversation goes to show that they know more about Emile than Nellie does. Up until this point, Emile has not yet disclosed details about his prior marriage and children to Nellie. Upon Nellie’s departure, Cable comments saying “He’s kept a few secrets from her, hasn’t he?”⁷⁰ Brackett replies, “Well, you don’t spring a couple of Polynesian kids on a woman right off the bat!”⁷¹ Captain Brackett’s comment both implies the underlying prejudice, and foreshadows Nellie’s reaction and conflict.

Later in act one, Nellie and Cable run into each other as Nellie reads a letter from home. As she discusses the letter from her mother with Cable, Nellie speaks out against prejudice, in a way:

NELLIE. My mother’s so prejudiced.

⁷⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 61.

⁷¹ Ibid.

CABLE. Against Frenchmen?

(She smiles to acknowledge that she gets the allusion, then pursues her anti-maternal tirade.)

NELLIE. Against anyone outside of Little Rock. She makes a big thing out of two people having different backgrounds.⁷²

Nellie is clearly established in this moment as being anti-prejudice. However, her actions throughout the play prove otherwise. For instance, just after her meeting with Captain Brackett and Lieutenant Cable, and her subsequent conversation with Cable during the letter scene, Nellie has decided to end her courtship with Emile. She tells the other nurses that she wants to end the relationship before it even gets started. Nellie cites the reason for ending the liaison: she doesn't know anything about him and wants to break it off before going any further. This defiant action may represent an intolerance toward different ideas. The influence of Brackett, Cable, and her own mother has turned Nellie from Emile. In the musical number, "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outa My Hair," Nellie exhibits a small-minded world view towards differing thoughts and opinions. She speaks of men, more specifically—Emilie, in metaphor:

NELLIE. You can't light a fire when the wood's all wet,

GIRLS. No!

NELLIE. You can't make a butterfly strong,

GIRLS. Uh-uh!

NELLIE. You can't fix an egg when it ain't quite good,

NURSES. And you can't fix a man when he's wrong!

NELLIE. You can't put back a petal when it falls from a flower,

Or sweeten up a feller when he starts turning sour—⁷³

⁷² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 66.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 73.

When Emile shows up at the end of the musical number, Nellie's view shifts. When she is confronted with questions, and no longer has the influence of the group, Nellie seems far more open to new ideas. Particularly, she and Emile discuss political philosophy:

NELLIE. Do you think about politics much . . . And if so what do you think about politics?

EMILE. Do you mean my political philosophy?

NELLIE. I think that's what I mean.

EMILE. Well, to begin with, I believe in the free life—in freedom for everyone.

NELLIE. (*Eagerly*) Like in the Declaration of Independence?

EMILE. C'est ça. All men are created equal, isn't it?

NELLIE. Emile! You really believe that?

EMILE. Yes.

NELLIE. (*With great relief*) Well, thank goodness!⁷⁴

Emile explains his sordid past to Nellie, and she begins to understand his perspective. Nellie remarks, "Born on the opposite sides of the sea, we are as different as people can be,"⁷⁵ to which Emile agrees. He extends a party invitation to Nellie, which she proudly accepts. When one of the nurse's comments on Nellie's quick change of position, Nellie says, "I expect every one of my crowd to make fun of my proud protestations of faith in romance!"⁷⁶ Nellie faces her peers in exclaiming that she is in love with a wonderful guy.

After the party at Emile's estate, the two are left alone. Over glasses of champagne, the two ruminate over their romance. They celebrate their similarities, Nellie saying that she and Emile are both fundamentally the same kind of people. Amidst their champagne-soaked musings, Henry (Emile's hired hand) follows Ngana and Jerome into the room. Emile

⁷⁴ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 77.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 79.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 81.

introduces them to Nellie and they are sent to bed. The question of their presence leads to a shocking realization, on Nellie's part:

NELLIE. (*Turning to EMILE*) Oh, aren't they adorable! Those big black eyes staring at you out of those sweet little faces! Are they Henry's?

EMILE. They're mine.

NELLIE. (*Carrying out what she thinks is a joke*) Oh, of course, they look exactly like you, don't they? Where did you hide their mother?

EMILE. She's dead, Nellie.

NELLIE. She's— (*She turns*) Emile, they are yours!

EMILE. Yes, Nellie. I'm their father.

NELLIE. And—their mother . . . was a . . . was . . . a . . .

EMILE. Polynesian. (*NELLIE is stunned. She turns away, trying to collect herself*) And she was beautiful, Nellie, and charming too.

NELLIE. But you and she. . .

EMILE. I want you to know that I have no apologies. I came here as a young man. I lived as I could.

NELLIE. Of course.

EMILE. But I have not been selfish. No woman ever hated me or tried to hurt me.

NELLIE. No woman could ever want to hurt you, Emile. (*Suddenly, feeling she must get away as quickly as she can*) Oh, what time is it? I promised to get that jeep back!

(*She looks at her wrist watch*) Oh, this is awful. Look at the time!

(*She grabs her coat. EMILE tries to stop her.*)

EMILE. Nellie, wait, please. I'll drive you home.

NELLIE. You will do no such thing. Anyway, I couldn't leave the jeep here. I've got to get it back by—

EMILE. Don't go now, Nellie. Don't go yet, please.

NELLIE. (*Rattling on very fast*) Yes, I must go now. This is terrible! I won't be able to face the girls at the hospital. You can't imagine the way they look at you when you come in late . . . I'll call you back, Emile.⁷⁷

In Michener's novel, the scene plays out differently. The musical has altered the vernacular, but the sentiment remains. However, through our modern perspective, it is beneficial to return to Michener's work to understand the gravity of the situation. Once introduced to Emile's children (in the novel he has four daughters, with different mothers), Nellie is appalled but remains collected. The novel speaks even further as to her ingrained prejudice,

⁷⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 106-107.

saying, “Emile De Becque, not satisfied with Javanese and Tonkinese women, had also lived with a Polynesian. A nigger! To Nellie’s tutored mind any person living or dead who was not white or yellow was a nigger.”⁷⁸ Nellie leaves the estate, closing act one.

In act two, backstage at the Thanksgiving Follies, the Emile and Nellie plot converges with the Bloody Mary, Cable, and Liat subplot in the climactic confrontation of prejudice and its life-altering implications. After Bloody Mary has told Cable about the marriage proposal from Jacques Barrere, and proposes marriage between Liat and Cable, Cable presents Liat with a family heirloom:

CABLE. Liat, I want you to have this. It’s a man’s watch but it’s a good one—belonged to my grandfather. It’s kind of a lucky piece, too. My dad carried it all through the last war. Beautiful, isn’t it?

(LIAT has taken the watch, her eyes gleaming with pride.)

MARY. When I see you firs’ time. I know you good man for Liat. And she good girl for you. You have special good babies.

*(Pause. CABLE looks tortured.)*⁷⁹

However, as Mary fulfils her “wise woman” responsibility, she has moved the action forward. Her mention of “good special babies” reminds Cable, and the audience, of the racial differences between the two. The idea of mixed race children brings reinforces the themes of deeply imbedded prejudice, and the role of the group collective in this prejudice. Cable decides he cannot go through with marrying Liat. Bloody Mary takes her away to Barrere, never to be seen by Cable again. As they leave, a few men remark:

(Meanwhile, several of the men come one, dressed for the finale of the show. They are looking back over their shoulders at LIAT and MARY whom they must have just passed.)

⁷⁸ James A. Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 111.

⁷⁹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 122.

PROFESSOR. Hey! Did you get a load of that little Tonkinese girl?
(*They continue up to the stage door as they speak.*)
MARINE. Yeah.⁸⁰

Amidst the sting of Liat leaving Cable's life, and the racial conflicts already presented, the comment seems distasteful. From a modern point of view, the fetishizing of Liat on the grounds of her race/ethnicity is also objectionable.

After "Honey Bun," Nellie retreats backstage, only to find Lieutenant Cable up out of his hospital bed:

NELLIE. (*Accusingly*) Joe! You're trying to get over to Bali Ha'i. That little girl you told me about!
CABLE. (*Nodding thoughtfully*) Liat. I've just seen her for the last time, I guess. I love her and yet I just heard myself saying that I can't marry her. What's the matter with me, Nellie? What kind of guy am I, anyway?
NELLIE. You're all right. You're just far away from home. We're both so far away from home.⁸¹

Nellie saying to Cable that they are both so far away from home poses the question, what does Nellie mean by home? In a society that frequently engages in nuanced conversation about racism, sexism, ageism, and other sorts of prejudice and stigmas, "home" may represent a state of inaction. So far in the script, Nellie and Cable's action are driven by homegrown values and the collective conscious of people just like them. Nellie was ready to wash Emile out of her hair due to difference in opinion, until the security of the hive-mind was no longer a factor.

As Nellie tries to escape her moral dilemma, Lieutenant Cable reaches his ultimate conclusions about his prejudice:

EMILE. You have asked for a transfer, why? What does it mean?

⁸⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 123.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 133-134.

NELLIE. I'll explain it to you tomorrow, Emile. I'm—
 EMILE. No. Now. What does it mean, Nellie?
 NELLIE. It means that I can't marry you. Do you understand? I can't marry you.
 EMILE. Nellie— Because of my children?
 NELLIE. Not because of your children. They're sweet.
 EMILE. It is their Polynesian mother then—their mother and I.
 NELLIE. ...Yes. I can't help it. It isn't as if I could give you a good reason. There is no reason. This is emotional. This is something that is born in me.
 EMILE. (*Shouting the words in bitter protest*) It is not. I do not believe this is born in you.
 NELLIE. Then why do I feel the way I do? All I know is that I can't help it. I can't help it! Explain how we feel, Joe—
 (*JOE gives her no help. She runs to the door of the dressing shack.*)
 EMILE. Nellie!
 NELLIE. (*Calling in*) Dinah, are you ready?
 NURSE. Yes, Nellie.
 NELLIE. I'll go with you.
 (*The other nurse comes out and they exit quickly. EMILE turns angrily to CABLE.*)
 EMILE. What makes her talk like that? Why do you have this feeling, you and she? I do not believe it is born in you. I do not believe it.
 CABLE. It's not born in you! It happens *after* you're born . . .
 (*CABLE sings the following words, figuring this whole question out for the first time*)
 You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
 You've got to be taught from year to year,
 It's got to 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 hate all the people your relatives hate—
 You've got be carefully taught!
 You've got to be carefully taught!⁸²

Cable and Emile's discontented state leaves them facing a life-altering decision. Now that Emile's future with Nellie is no longer a consideration, and Cable is trapped by his learned

⁸² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 135-137.

prejudice, Cable proposes the two follow through with the certain-death mission discussed in act one. As Emile and Cable embark on Operation Alligator, Cable perishes during the mission. Metaphorically speaking, his inaction led to his demise. On the other hand, with war afoot and Emile's life on the line, Nellie realizes her folly:

NELLIE. 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 . . . (*She laughs bitterly*) 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! Just together— The way we wanted it to be the first night we met! Remember? . . . Remember?⁸³

The end of the musical sees Nellie retreating to Emile's estate, to care for his children, presuming he is dead. However, Emile miraculously lives through the certain-death mission. The play, ending with Nellie and Emile together, assumes that despite the opinions of others and Nellie's own prejudice, the two will work together to move beyond the societal construct. In Downes's opinion piece titled "Bloody Mary is the girl I love," the author poses, "Maybe it's not *South Pacific* catching up with the times, but the other way around."⁸⁴

The King and I

Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1951 collaboration, *The King and I*, still receives major revivals in much of the English-speaking world. The musical's nearly 70-year history is fraught with controversy. Banned in Thailand, *The King and I* is criticized for its inauthentic portrayal of King Mongkut. The real King Mongkut was an academic, well versed in European languages, and an advocate for women.⁸⁵ Over the years, the role of the King has

⁸³ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *South Pacific*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1949), 158.

⁸⁴ Lawrence Downes, "Bloody Mary Is the Girl I Love." *The New York Times*, April 4, 2008.

⁸⁵ Ian Buruma, "Thailand's Banned 'King.'" *The New York Review of Books*, May 19, 2015.

not only been inaccurately depicted, but inaccurately cast. Beginning with the Russian-born actor, Yul Brynner, who portrayed the King in the original Broadway production and 1956 film adaption, the King has often been played by Caucasian actors. Even as recently as 2014, white actor Teddy Tau Rhodes played the role in Opera Australia's revival.⁸⁶ In examining the history of *The King and I*, and the original libretto, issues involving slavery, the role of women, and inauthentic portrayal of the Siamese court are noted.

Getting to the root of the cultural portrayal of the Siamese court, it is first important to survey the linguistic portrayal of Siamese characters, and other religious and cultural assertions made in *The King and I*. In addition to the King's trope of repeating himself thrice ("Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera"), and instances of simplified English (the court is learning a second language, after all), a Western idea of Siamese dialect is written into the play. Early in act one, after Anna's arrival to Siam, there is a scene in which Anna, Tuptim, and the King discuss Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and further discuss the politics of American president Abraham Lincoln.

TUPTIM. [*Eases in to R. of ANNA*] Madam, you have English books I can read?

ANNA. Of course I have.

TUPTIM. I wish most to read book called "The Small House of Uncle Thomas". Is by American Lady, Harriet Beecha Stowa.

KING. [*Steps forward*] A woman has written a book?

ANNA. A very wonderful book, Your Majesty. An American book. [*A meaning look at LADY THIAN*] All about slavery.

KING. Ha! President Lingkonk against slavery, no. [*ANNA nods.*] Me, too. Slavery very bad thing.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Dee Jefferson, "Is the King and I Racist, and Is It Time It Was Put to Rest?" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 9, 2014.

⁸⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 13.

Textual moments such as “Harriet Beecha Stowa” and “President Lingkonk” stand as white ideas of Siamese English. While the simplification and mispronunciation of names, words, or other phrases may appear as offensive caricature, exoticism and ethnic dialect were hallmarks of early 20th-century theatre in America. Theatre practitioners from Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart to Eugene O’Neill employed the device in their major works.

In addition to linguistic concerns, the musical’s libretto deals with the collision of Christianity and Buddhism. While Buddhism pervades the script, only a few moments within the play deal with doctrine. The two occasions that Buddhist beliefs are discussed at any sort of depth both revolve around the miracle of creation. After Anna has been teaching for a while, the King and Prince Chulalongkorn discuss one of her lessons in which the students are taught about the globe. Chulalongkorn says to the King, “Yesterday we are taught that the world is a round ball which spins on a stick through the middle,” he continues by presenting the alleged Buddhist interpretation of the world, “Everyone knows that the world rides on the back of a great turtle, which keeps it from running into the stars.”⁸⁸ The king concedes that he is unsure of the truth. Later in act one, Christianity and Buddhism conflict once more over the origin of the world:

KING. [*Impatiently. Sits up.*] Moses! Moses! Moses! [*Taps bible.*] Here it stands written by him that the world was created in six days! [*Closes bible.*] You know and I know it took many ages to create world. I think he shall have been a fool to have written so. [*To front.*] What is your opinion?

ANNA. Your majesty, the bible was not written by men of science, but by men of faith. [*The KING considers this, removes glasses, places them on bible.*] It was their explanation of the miracle of creation, which is the same miracle—whether it took six days or many centuries.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 36.

In the face of this conflict, Anna offers a middle ground. While the King and Anna's differing religions may conflict, they can all agree on the miraculous nature of the natural world. In examining Buddhist beliefs on creation, as well as the world turtle myth, the assertions made in *The King and I* seem to be an author's interpretation. While the turtle theory is recognized in the world, it is primarily a Hindu idea popular in India and parts of China.⁹⁰

In *The King and I*, issues surrounding slavery and the role of women are closely intertwined. Not only do these central themes intersect in the Tuptim and Lun Tha subplot, but slavery and the role of women define the characters of the royal wives, namely Lady Thiang. Slavery and women's issues are also at the root of central conflicts between Anna and the King. From the musical's first scene at the court of Siam, audience members see Tuptim delivered to the King as a gift from the Prince of Burma:

KRALAHOME. [*As TUPTIM enters.*] He bring you present from Prince of Burma.
KING. Am I to trust a ruler of Burma? Am I to trust this present they send me, or is she a spy?
AMAZONS *back off R. taking palanquin with them.*
TUPTIM. I am not a spy . . . My name is Tuptim. You are pleased that I speak English?⁹¹

Throughout the play, Tuptim's trajectory comments on the role of women and the issue of slavery simultaneously. While Tuptim is subservient to the King, she secretly meets with her lover Lun Tha. Tuptim's most striking commentary on slavery comes with her adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the second act of the play, Tuptim's ballet is performed. Amid her

⁹⁰ Jay Miller, "Why the World Is on the Back of a Turtle." *Man*, New Series, 9, no. 2 (1974): 306–8.

⁹¹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 10.

epilogue, Tuptim asserts her view of slavery, saying, “But I do not believe Topsy is wicked critter. Because I too am glad for death of King. Of any King who pursues a slave who is unhappy and wish to join her lover. And your Majesty, I wish to say to you...”⁹² A sudden reminder of her position silences Tuptim.

Early in the play, characters begin to reference Anna as “sir.” Everyone from the Interpreter and Kralahome, to the royal wives. Finally, at the court of Siam, Anna questions Lady Thiang as to why she is referred to as “sir”:

ANNA. *[Turning.]* Lady Thiang, why do you call me “sir”?

THIANG. Because you scientific. Not lowly, like woman.

ANNA. *[Incredulous.]* Do you all think women are more lowly than men? *LADY THIANG crosses to WIFE’s group and in mime, accompanied by MUSICAL Siamese, translates this to them. They all nod happily.* Well I don’t.⁹³

Not only is the assertion made that women are “more lowly than men,” all of the royal wives earnestly believe their statement. In several other instances throughout the musical, the King exhibits a misogynistic point of view. Late in the night, Anna visits the King at the request of Lady Thiang. According to Lady Thiang, Anna is to advise the King without making it seem like advice. Attempting to open the conversation with the King, he quickly admonishes Anna on the grounds of sex:

KING. Tonight my mind is on other matters—very important matters.

ANNA. *[Warmly]* Anything you want to discuss with me?

KING. *[Reacts “yes” then thinks better of it]* Why should I discuss important matters with woman?

ANNA. *[Rebuffed]* Very well, Your Majesty. I shall go back to my room. May I say goodnight? *[She curtseys.]*

KING. *[As ANNA moves]* Goodnight!⁹⁴

⁹² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 56.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 14.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 37-38.

Later in act two, after hosting the British, the King criticizes the modesty of Anna's attire:

KING. Ah! ANNA is down L. The smock has been removed and she is revealed in her ball gown. The KING has crossed R. to inspect the WIVES, he is surprised by the gasp of delight from the WIVES and turns to look at ANNA. He crosses down level to her, looks at her bare shoulders. This is what you are going to wear?

ANNA. [Crossing KING to R.C.] Why, yes, Your Majesty. Do you like it?

KING. This is what all the other visiting ladies shall look like?

ANNA. Most of them . . . I believe.

KING. You are certain this is customary? Points to her left shoulder, her right shoulder and almost points to the cleavage, but quickly puts his hands behind his back. Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera . . .

ANNA. Yes, I am certain it is customary. What is so extraordinary about bare shoulders? Why, your own ladies—

KING. Ah, yes. But is different! They do not wear so many . . . coverings up on other parts of body, and therefore—

ANNA. [Like any woman who is all dressed up and meets unexpected criticism] Therefore what?

KING. [Crossing to L.C.] Is different.

ANNA. [Easing to D.R.] I am sorry His Majesty does not approve.⁹⁵

These two incidents merely bookend a minor struggle between the King and Anna throughout the play. The musical's plot relies on the shifting power dynamic of gender, position, and intellect. The underlying gender struggle between the two characters comes to climax when the King and Anna discuss their view of the female position in "Song of the King":

KING. A woman is a female who is human.
Designed for pleasing man, the human male.
A human male is pleased by many women,
And all the rest you hear is fairy tale.

ANNA. [Sings.] Then tell me how this fairy tale began, sir.
You cannot call it just a poet's trick.
Explain to me why many men are faithful,
And true to one wife only—

KING. They are sick! [Makes L. circle turn to U.L. Foot on books L of dais.]

ANNA. [speaking] But you do expect women to be faithful.

KING. Naturally.

⁹⁵ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 46.

ANNA. Why, naturally?

KING. Because it is natural. It is like old Siamese rhyme:

[He sings]

A girl must be like a blossom
With honey for just one man.
A man must live like honey bee
And gather all he can.
To fly from blossom to blossom
A honey bee must be free,
But blossom must not ever fly
From bee to bee to bee.

[KING crosses to C., opens book of poetry]

ANNA. You consider this *sensible* poetry, Your Majesty?

KING. *[Putting on glasses which are set in book]* Certainly. But listen to this, from your own poet Alf-red Tenny-son. *[He quotes from the book.]*

“Now fold the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake . . .
So fold thyself my dearest, thou, and slip
into my bosom . . .”

[Snaps book shut. Looks sternly at ANNA.] English girls are so—acrobatic?

ANNA. *[Crossing KING to D.L.C.]* Your Majesty, I don’t know if I can ever make it clear to you . . . We do not look on women as just human females. They are—Well, take yourself for instance, you are not just a human male.

KING. *[Removes his spectacles]* I am King.

ANNA. Exactly. So every man is a king and every woman a queen, when they love one another.

KING. This is sickly idea. *[Crosses D.R. places book on D.S.R. corner of dais.]*

ANNA. It is a beautiful idea, Your Majesty.⁹⁶

Once their difference in opinion is clearly established, the ultimate conflict between Anna and the King must be resolved.

While the role of women, the issue of slavery, and misogynistic power dynamics are prominent issues in *The King and I*, perhaps the more problematic (and more important) theme is the conflict of East and West. *The King and I* has been criticized for inherent British imperialist themes, as Anna sets out to civilize the King. Early in the play, Siam is

⁹⁶ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 60-61.

characterized as a dangerous place. Captain Orton warns Anna before she leaves his ship, “I wonder if you know what you’re facing, Ma’am—as an Englishwoman here in the East.”⁹⁷

Their conversation is interrupted by Anna’s son, Louis:

LOUIS. Look, mother! They’re closer! *[With amazement he gets a better view]*

Mother! The Prime Minister is naked!

ANNA. *[Crossing down to R. of LOUIS]* Hush Louis. That’s not a nice word. He’s not naked. *[She looks again]* Well, he’s half naked.

LOUIS. *[Front]* They all look rather horrible, don’t they, mother?⁹⁸

Louis’s observation is both a testament to the stark difference between the British and the Siamese, but also may play as insensitive toward another culture’s manner of dress. Further, Anna’s concurrence with his comment and Louis’s assertion that they “all look rather horrible” establishes the Siamese as the “other.”

Once Anna arrives at court, differences in culture are noted in meeting the King and his royal wives. However, cultural assertions are presented as laugh lines, and may not truly represent 19th-century Siamese customs. For instance, when Anna asks the King how many children he has, the King responds “I have only sixty-seven altogether.”⁹⁹ He explains further, saying “I begin very late. But you shall not teach all of them. You shall teach only children of mothers who are in favour with King.”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, when Anna is introduced to Lady Thiang, she is quick to tout the English taught to her by a missionary:

KING. Madame Leonowens. This is Lady Thiang, head wife.

[ANNA turns to her, hand extended to shake, LADY THIANG smiles, bows then faces front, takes a deep and sings.]

THIANG. *[singing]* There is a happy land, far, far away,
Where saints in glory stand, bright, bright as day.

⁹⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 4.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 12.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

[Turning to MRS. ANNA, repeats handshake business, then facing front speaks.]
THIANG. In the beginning God created the—heaven and the—earth. *[Turns to ANNA.]* Mis-on-ary.
ANNA. A missionary taught you English.
THIANG. Yes, sir. Mis-son-ary.¹⁰¹

Lady Thiang's elementary English, and her recitation of passages from the Bible, highlight the imperialistic undertones and Western perspective inherent in the libretto and its source material. Finally, in Anna's introduction to the royal wives they are confounded by her crinoline hoop skirt:

[The WIVES enter from R.L. and U.S., surround ANNA and pull her up onto dais. Two WIVES (2 and 3) take ANNA'S gloves. WIFE 7 takes her handbag.]
ANNA. For goodness sake! What is the matter? What are they trying to do for me?
[Three of the WIVES (8, 6 and 9) have formed a semi-circle round LADY THIANG R.C. kneeling in front of her.]
THIANG. They think you wear big skirt like that because you shaped like that.
ANNA. *[Lifts skirt]* Well, look, I'm not.¹⁰²

This instance may play as an inauthentic representation of the royal wives. The action of surrounding Anna and pulling up her skirt, as well as the earnest belief that Anna is shaped like her skirt, assumes that the wives are either uncivilized and unintelligent, or intellectually curious. This motif appears throughout.

Later in act one, a scene in the schoolroom also assumes ignorance on the part of the Siamese. However, the true theme of confluence between the East and West is articulated. In introducing the daily lesson, Anna calls upon Lady Thiang to begin:

ANNA. Lady Thiang, will you start.
[ANNA hands pointer to LADY THIANG, then sits on stool, L. of map.]
THIANG. *[Using pointer].* Blue is ocean. Red—Siam. *[Enthusiastic applause from CHILDREN at Siam's great size.]* Here is King of Siam. *[Indicates armored figure.]* In right hand is weapon, show how he destroy all who fight him. *[More applause]*

¹⁰¹ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 13.

from CHILDREN.] Green—Burma. [LADY THIANG looks disapprovingly at TUPTIM, then meaningly to front. TUPTIM looks away.] Here, is King of Burma. [Indicates naked figure.] No clothes mean how poor is King of Burma. [Children giggle.]

ANNA. [Rising, takes pointer.] Thank you, Lady Thiang. Will you take my place? [THIANG sits L. of map.] The map you have been looking at is an old one. Today we have a surprise. Louis, will you pull that cord for me? [LOUIS rolls down an 1862 world map in Mercator projection. The CHILDREN gasp.] A new map—just arrived from England. It is a present to us from his Majesty your King.

WIVES AND CHILDREN. [Bowing dutifully]. The Lord of light.

ANNA. Er—yes—the Lord of light.¹⁰³

Not only does the content of Lady Thiang's lesson cast her in an inauthentic light, but Anna's undermining of the lesson plays as intellectually superior. Additionally, Anna's sarcastic "Lord of Light" statement may play as insensitive to Siamese culture. While the initial lesson in the school room scene may call depiction of Siamese characters into question, the East meets West message is clear in "Getting to Know You." The musical number stands as an anthem to the theme and ultimate outcome of the plot. While Anna is in Siam to teach the Siamese children, she learns just as much (if not more) from the Siamese.

After a confrontation with the King in the classroom, Anna muses over her thoughts of the King. Alone in her room, Anna's song "Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?" exhibits a feeling of superiority. Not only between Anna and the King, but rather West and East. In the song, Anna criticizes the King for his keeping of slaves and misogyny, calling the King a "libertine." Additionally, Anna states that she does not like polygamy "or even moderate bigamy,"¹⁰⁴ ultimately asserting that Wales is a civilized land where men, like the King, are kept in "county gaols."¹⁰⁵ During her soliloquy, Anna concludes that her ultimate

¹⁰³ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 22.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 31.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

duty is to the children. Her rant is interrupted by Lady Thiang. In the scene between Lady Thiang and Anna, *The King and I*'s ultimate problem is posed—Siam must prove to the English that they are civilized people:

THIANG. Mrs. Anna, will you go to King?

ANNA. Now? [*THIANG nods.*] Has he sent for me?

THIANG. [*Pause.*] No. But he would be glad to see you. [*ANNA scornful, moves away to R.*] He is deeply wounded and. No one has ever spoken to him as you did today in schoolroom.

ANNA. [*Crossing to R.C.*] Lady Thiang, no one has ever behaved to me as His Majesty did today in the schoolroom!

THIANG. [*Crosses R. to MRS. ANNA.*] And there is more distressing thing. Our agents in Singapore have found letters to British Government from certain people whose greedy eyes are on Siam. They describe King as barbarian. And suggest making Siam protectorate.

ANNA. [*Steps in to THIANG.*] This is outrageous! He is many things I do not like, but he is not a barbarian.

THIANG. Then you will help him?

ANNA. You mean—advise him?

THIANG. [*tactful. Eases to L.C.*] It must not sound like advice. King cannot take advice. And if you go to him, he will not bring up subject. You must bring up.

ANNA. [*Eases R. before speaking.*] I cannot go to him. It's against all my principles. Certainly not without him having asked for me.

THIANG. [*Crosses R. to ANNA.*] He wish to be new-blood King with Western ideas. But it is hard for him, Mrs. Anna. [*Eases to C.*] And there is something else—Princess Tuptim. I do not tell King this for his sake. This I will deal with in my own way. But for these other things, he need help, Mrs. Anna.

ANNA. [*Turns to her.*] He has you.

THIANG. I am not equal to his special needs. He could be great man. But he need special help. He need you . . . 106

The scene, and subsequent song “Something Wonderful,” not only perpetuated the female as inferior, but the need for a white savior is presented as the only solution to Siam’s problem.

106 Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 33-34.

In meeting the King, his knowledge of the world (or lack thereof) is once again presented as a comical moment in the play. In the scene, Anna is instructed to dictate a letter from the King to “President Lingkong” of America:

KING. To his Royal Presidency of the United States in America, Abra-hom Lingkong, etcetera—you fix up. It has occurred to us—*[He stretches out prone. Head pointing downstage.]* It has occurred to us that if several pairs of young male elephants were turned loose in forests of America, after a while they would increase—

ANNA. *[Her head snaps up]*. Your Majesty—*just male elephants?*
[Their heads turn to each other, eyes meet, the KING refuses to accept his bloomer.]

KING. You put in details! *[Rises, crosses to D.R. ANNA rises at the same time]*.
Tonight my mind is on other matters—very important matters.¹⁰⁷

In discussing the important matters on the King’s mind, Anna and the King hatch a plan to entertain the English in a Western way, thus proving that the Siamese are not barbarians. The language surrounding this plan, as well as the idea in and of itself, present Anna as a white savior to a cast of non-white people. Anna encourages the King to “put his best foot forward” for the British. This expression sets up a joke at the expense of the King’s ignorance. Anna says:

This is the only way to get the better of the British. Stand up to them. Put your best foot forward. *[The KING bewildered, raises each foot in turn, looks at them.]* This is just an expression, Your Majesty. It means . . . dress up in your best clothes. Show them your most intelligent men, your most beautiful women. Edward admires beautiful women.¹⁰⁸

In pondering what Siam’s best foot forward means, the King wonders about his people’s manner of dress. To this, Anna responds, “We shall dress them up, European fashion.”¹⁰⁹ The King is pleased with Anna’s idea and soon wakes up the court to begin preparations for the

¹⁰⁷ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 37.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 38.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 39.

visiting English. He says to Anna, “I shall command Chinese artists to paint their faces very pale. And you shall educate them in European custom and manners for presentation.”¹¹⁰ As plans are made, and the Siamese are put to work, Anna stands in command of the effort. Anna’s teaching the Siamese of European customs, and the event’s ultimate success play as a troubling example of British imperialism. The civilization of the “other” is cause for concern from our modern perspective.

Amidst preparation, the royal wives offer their opinion of the Siamese adoption of European customs in anticipation of the visiting English. In the act two opening number, the royal wives partake in a musical indictment of the imperialistic action:

THIANG. *[Sings.]* To prove we’re not barbarians
They dress us up like savages!
To prove we’re not barbarians
We wear a funny skirt!
Ah.....h!

WIVES. To prove we’re not barbarians
They dress us up like savages!
To prove we’re not barbarians
We wear a funny skirt!

[During this THIANG inspects dresses GIRLS are wearing.]

THIANG. Western people funny,
Western people funny,
Western people funny,
Of that there is no doubt,
They feel so sentimental
About the Oriental,
They always try to turn us
Inside down and upside out!

[GIRLS take off shoes for THIANG to inspect. THIANG crosses to D.L. WIVES limp about the stage in agony, unaccustomed to wearing shoes.]

WIVES. Upside out and inside down!¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein’s The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 39.

¹¹¹Ibid. 44.

While the use of the term “Oriental” is no longer acceptable, and the inversion of “upside down and inside out” may play as ignorance, the musical number stands as a critical Eastern perspective of the West. This moment furthers the idea that the central theme of the musical is not a superior culture, but rather two different cultures that get to know one another.

The ultimate conflict between Anna and the King comes to a climax near the end of the play. After the successful evening with the English, Tuptim is captured as she tries to escape Siam with her lover. As her punishment, the King will beat her. In the final showdown between Anna and the King, a cultural divide is noted:

ANNA. *[Eases up level with dais R.]* I cannot believe you are going to do this dreadful thing.

KING. You do not believe, eh? Maybe you will believe when you hear her screaming as you run down the hall.

ANNA. *[Up by books, R. of dais.]* I’m not going to run down the hall. I’m going to stand here and watch you!

KING. Hold this girl. *[The two WHIPPING GUARDS move in, lay each side of TUPTIM. Each guard takes an arms and tenses his feet against her. Point her head downstage so that her bare back is exposed to the whiplash.]* I do this all myself.

ANNA. *[As KING moves down to TUPTIM.]* You are a barbarian!

KING. *[Backs upstages, C.]* Down! Down! Down! *[The GUARDS crouch even lower, turning their faces away from TUPTIM]* Am I King, or am I not King? Am I to be cuckold in my own palace? *[Crosses R., mounts dais, glares at ANNA.]* Am I to take orders from English schoolteacher?

ANNA. *[Crosses up level].* No, not orders—

KING. *[Raises whip, almost as if to strike her].* Silence! I am King as I was born to be, and Siam to be governed in my way! *[Hands KRALAHOME the whip and commences to tear off his jacket.]* Not English way, not French way, not Chinese way, my way. *[Throws jacket across MRS. ANNA’s skirt, snatches whip back from the KRALAHOME.]* Barbarian you say. There is no barbarian worse than a weak King *[crosses D.L.]* and I am strong King. You hear? Strong. *[When he has crossed downstage L., he raises whip, ANNA steps in slightly, watches him, he cannot meet her gaze. Runs upstage C. where again he raises the whip, ANNA again moves in closer, their eyes meet and hold, a few moments of mental battle, slowly the whip drops. Then, the battle won by ANNA, the KING gives her an agonised look and runs off 1 E.L. When the KING has gone, the KRALAHOME drops D. to C., claps his hands, and the GUARDS drag TUPTIM back to the wings, and stand holding her. PHRA ALACK crawls forward on his hands and knees and speaks.]*

PHRA ALACK. The man—the lover has been found. *He is dead. [Exit 2 E.L.]*
 TUPTIM. Dead . . . Then I shall join him soon . . . soon.
[The KRALAHOME steps to L., clasps his hands. TUPTIM dragged off by the GUARDS, the two GUARDS at the door follow her off 1 E.L. We hear a scream.]
 ANNA. I shall never understand you—you or your King. I shall never understand him.
 KRALAHOME. *[Crossing to her with cold hatred.]* You! You have destroyed him. You have destroyed king. *[There are two loud beats on the tympany, ANNA collapses onto the dais]* He cannot be anything that he was before. You have taken all this away from him. You have destroyed him. You have destroyed King.¹¹²

Anna's declaration that the King is a barbarian ultimately leads to his demise. The destruction of the King, based on his inability to beat Tuptim, is a reductive plot device. Given the historical nature of the piece, and the inaccurate depiction of the King, this serves as the largest problem of the piece. While Anna and the King reconcile moments before the death of the King, the sting of his failure in the Western sense is present.

From Anna Leonowens' original tale, the story pervades film, literature, television, and theatre. Margaret Landon's fictionalized version of the story was published as a novel in 1944. From there, a film adaptation was made in 1946, the stage musical premiered in 1951, Rodgers and Hammerstein's work was adapted for the screen in 1956, a short-lived television series ran in 1972, an animated film adaptation of the stage musical was released in 1999, and a non-musical film was released in 1999. In turning to Anna Leonowens original work for answers, and Margaret Landon's subsequent novel, both texts may be considered unreliable. Since the publication of Leonowens' *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870) and *The Romance of the Harem* (1873), her stories have been discounted as fabrication. In fact, Anna's deception may be chronicled in *The King and I*. This idea is

¹¹² Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers. *Rodgers and Hammerstein's The King and I*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1951), 64-65.

explored in depth in Floy Skloot's "Some Things Nearly So, Others Nearly Not: *The King and I* and Me." Skloot asserts that while Hammerstein would not have recognized the fraudulence of Leonowens' works, Anna's deception is ever present in *The King and I*. From "I Whistle A Happy Tune" to "Shall We Dance," Anna's musical numbers "routinely celebrate various acts of subterfuge."¹¹³ The unreliability of Leonowens' account only furthers questions of representation, authenticity, and cultural reverence.

Moving Forward

In a survey of the "Big 5" musicals of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, major issues are noted in *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*. The other two musicals, *Oklahoma!* and *The Sound of Music*, are not without their own issues, but modern productions have explored, and essentially solved the problems. In examining each as a 21st-century theatre goer, questions of race, gender, and other social issues are noted throughout the catalogue. In pondering the critical and historical relevance of the Rodgers and Hammerstein catalogue in the 21st-century, there seem to be two schools of thought. Pioneered by David Henry Hwang's work on *Flower Drum Song*, adaptation may answer questions for future productions. While *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I* have major problems to modern sensibilities, each musical has received a major Broadway revival in the 21st-century. In examining adaptation and directorial vision, a new understanding may be reached. In addition to exploring adaptation and direction, education may also work to inform the conversation around problematic motifs. Academia's embrace of works such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and continued explorations of "problematic" authors such as Edith

¹¹³ Floyd Skloot, "Some Things Nearly So, Others Nearly Not: The King and I and Me." *Southwest Review* 96 no. 2 (2011): 167–80.

Wharton or Ernest Hemingway, may inform 21st-century theatre's continued embrace of Rodgers and Hammerstein as cultural touchstones. In conclusion, 21st-century theatre goes may distinguish the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein as living theatre, rather than antiquated museum theatre, through an exploration of adaption and education.

CHAPTER 3

When You Know the Notes to Sing

In Act One, Scene Four, of *The Sound of Music*, Maria Rainer teaches the Von Trapp children to sing. After teaching the children solfeggio in her own unique way, Maria says, “Do re mi fa so and so on are only the tools we use to build a song. Once we have these notes in our heads we can sing a million different tunes.”¹ In learning the basics for any musical composition, the children search for meaning in the music. Maria states that the children must establish their own meaning, saying, “When you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything.”² In the 21st century, classic works from previous generations have become blueprints in which we attribute our own meaning through adaptation and direction. From Chekhov to Gershwin, New York audiences have seen multiple new script adaptations and reimagined productions of classic works. In the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon alone, three works—*State Fair* (1945), *Cinderella* (1957), and *Flower Drum Song*—have had newly-adapted librettos written for Broadway productions. Other musicals, such as *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*, have prompted directors to explore them in new ways for modern revivals. In modern times when audiences are attuned to new sensibilities, adapting and reimagining classic musicals may wrestle with questions of problematic material in modern production.

¹ Oscar Hammerstein II, Richard Rodgers, Howard Lindsay, and Russel Crouse. *The Sound of Music*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1960), 27.

² *Ibid.* 28

In examining adapted librettos, such as *State Fair*, *Cinderella*, and *Flower Drum Song*; as well as modern directorial approaches to works such as *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, and *The King and I*, different methods are noted. Varying degrees of success and failure seem to directly correlate to one abstract criterion: does the work remain true to its original spirit? Should a tale of political strife be woven into a timeless celebration of Cinderella's reversal of fortune? Does a politically-corrected *Flower Drum Song* have the same impact as an adaptation one degree removed from its relevant source material? Do modern productions of *Oklahoma!* work best as an indictment of the American dream, or an optimistic celebration of the 21st-century frontier? A review of critical response to modern production, paired with a dramaturgical investigation of libretti with moral discourse, source material, and cultural moment in mind, may prove that the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein transcend their time. While conventions of the theatre have certainly changed, and the theater-going audiences have come to learn more about diversity and inclusion, the resounding message of morality and goodwill may prevail. When critically approached with reverence to the trails blazed by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, their musicals may still stand as monuments to morality and good old-fashioned optimism. Furthermore, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals teach us where we have come from, and where we have yet to go, in the American musical theatre and the world at large.

In examining the libretti of major Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals through the lens of a 21st-century audience member, both major plot points and minor syntax are noted as problematic to our sensibilities. In exploring the issues, matters such as ethnic dialogue and misogynist micro-aggressions may be easily remedied through adaptation. The idea of adaptation is not entirely unexplored in the Rodgers and Hammerstein catalogue, but the "big

five” musicals have remained untouched. Two major productions have brought Rodgers and Hammerstein properties, with newly adapted libretti, to the Broadway stage. *State Fair*, adapted from Phil Strong’s novel of the same name, was first brought to the screen in 1933 (starring Will Rogers). In 1945, between their Broadway productions of *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, Rodgers and Hammerstein penned a musical film adaptation. While the musical film was made and remade, and stage adaptations sprang up regionally as early as 1969, the musical did not make its Broadway debut until 1996. The production received mostly negative reviews, with critics calling it a retrograde, nostalgic replication of the film. The new book was written by Tom Briggs and Louis Mattioli, and while they made certain necessary changes to adapt *State Fair* for the stage, the authors failed to break new ground. With nothing new to say, and a score padded with second-rate Rodgers and Hammerstein tunes, the stage adaptation was not a success.

The next Broadway engagement of an adapted Rodgers and Hammerstein property was Douglas Carter Beane’s new version of *Cinderella* in 2013. The original *Cinderella* was a CBS television musical event broadcast in the spring of 1957. The production starred Julie Andrews in the title role, and proved to be a tremendous success. In Todd Purdum’s *Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Broadway Revolution*, the author recalls the impressive viewership of *Cinderella*. Purdum describes deserted streets and quiet businesses, as an impressive 107 million viewers tuned into the broadcast.³ After the 1957 broadcast, there were two more television remakes of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s

³ Todd S. Purdum, *Something Wonderful: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Broadway Revolution*. (New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company, LLC, 2018).

Cinderella: one in 1965 starring Lesley Ann Warren, and one in 1997 starring Brandy Norwood and Whitney Houston. While stage versions have been performed regionally and abroad since 1958, the musical did not make its way to Broadway until 2013. Adaptations over the years have interpolated Rodgers and Hammerstein songs from lesser musicals, such as *Me and Juliet* (1953), as well as songs by the individual writers from previous collaborations, such as “The Sweetest Sounds” from *No Strings* (1962) and “Falling in Love with Love” from *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938). While adaptations and changes to *Cinderella* have been minor, mostly adding music to create an entire evening of theatre from a television event, Douglas Carter Beane’s 2013 adaptation is more substantial than a slight revision.

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s original incarnation of *Cinderella* approached the work in a simple, honest way. Without involving too many subplots, or burdening the evening with an excessive score, the duo crafted a musicalization of the classic rags-to-riches story. However, Douglas Carter Beane approaches the story with irreverent comedy and a political slant. In addition to its revolutionary subplot involving activists and corrupt monarchs, *Cinderella* attends two balls! Rather than simple romance with the Prince, *Cinderella* uses her momentary dance to unveil injustice and political corruption in the kingdom. Additionally, one of *Cinderella*’s stepsisters (called Gabrielle in this version) has become a sympathetic character with her own romantic subplot. Musically, two songs cut from *South Pacific* were included: “Now Is The Time” and “Loneliness of Evening,” one *Allegro* reject: “Me, Who Am I?,” and a Rodgers and Hammerstein tune from the musical film, *Main Street to Broadway* (1953): “There’s Music in You.” The production received mixed reviews, with

praise for Laura Osnes's portrayal of Cinderella and William Ivey Long's costumes, major criticism was noted for Beane's political adaptation.

Hwang's *Flower Drum Song*

Perhaps one of the most high-profile adapted productions from the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon is the 2002 Broadway revival of *Flower Drum Song*, with a new book by Asian-American playwright, David Henry Hwang. While the original *Flower Drum Song* was criticized for its inauthentic portrayal of Asian characters, David Henry Hwang thought the material was worth revisiting. In his preface to the published version of the new libretto, Hwang says that he was inspired to revisit *Flower Drum Song* after seeing the 1996 Broadway revival of *The King and I*. Hwang says of the production, "I found myself struck by the production's desire to recreate authentically the Siamese setting of Anna and the King."⁴ Hwang's adaptation process is thoroughly chronicled in his own writing, as well as David H. Lewis's *Flower Drum Songs: The Story of Two Musicals*. Hwang writes of a love and reverence for the original, yet his adaptation was not as warmly received as the original musical or as its better-known film adaptation. Critics opined that Hwang's politically-correct update did not retain the spirit of the original. Furthermore, Hwang has since penned the book to a new musical titled *Soft Power*, which satirizes the problematic stereotypes of Golden Age musicals. In examining the original *Flower Drum Song* in comparison to Hwang's adaptation, major dramaturgical differences are noted.

⁴ Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, and David Henry Hwang. *Flower Drum Song*. (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2003), x.

The original *Flower Drum Song* opened in New York in 1958. The musical is based on C.Y. Lee's novel *The Flower Drum Song*, which tells the story of a Chinese refugee (Wang Chi-yang) who lives in San Francisco with his two sons and his sister-in-law, Madam Tang. Much to the dismay of Wang, Madam Tang continually encourages him to assimilate. Wang's eldest son (Ta), is chronicled in the novel as enjoying various love affairs. First, he pursues a girl named Linda Tung (who is a free-wheeling showgirl), but Ta leaves her after the truth of her promiscuity is revealed. He then has a brief affair with Linda's seamstress-friend, Helen Chao. When Ta moves on from Helen, she kills herself. Finally, Wang decides that he must order a picture bride for his son. Ta eventually falls in love with the girl his father arranged for him (May Li). Together, they earn money by singing flower drum songs on the street. The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical mostly retains the plot points, but the story is filtered through their indelible American optimism, and their desire for commercial success (following the sure-bet love story of Ta). In the musical names are changed—Madam Tang becomes Madame Liang, Linda Tung becomes Linda Low—but their trajectories remain similar. In eliminating Helen's suicide, Hammerstein (along with Joseph Fields, his co-librettist) crafts a love triangle, or rather quadrilateral, with no tidy resolution. Helen's evening with Ta is depicted, with no insinuation of sex. The skimmed-over plot point provides the impetus for the ingénue love-ballad "Love Look Away." Linda Low's love interest is written into the musical as a character named Sammy Fong. Together, Sammy and Linda make their living in a night club. Sammy owns and operates, while Linda entertains (singing and stripping). May Li (now Mei-Li) is introduced with her father at the beginning of the play, as she is promised to Sammy Fong as his picture bride. Sammy Fong tries to pass off Mei-Li to Ta, so that he may carry on with Linda Low. All the while, Ta and Madam

Liang are taking citizenship classes, and Wang is refusing to assimilate. The plot comes to its climax when Ta and Mei-Li finally recognize their love for each other, but Sammy and Mei-Li are being forced by the family association to go through with the arranged marriage. The denouement depicts Mei-Li insisting that she cannot go through with the marriage, as she has entered the country illegally (she refers to herself as a “wetback”). This leaves Ta and Mei-Li to marry, with East and West uniting.

The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical seeks to explore inter-generational themes of tradition and assimilation as the immigrants clash with their first-generation American children. The original production sought out to cast Asian actors in the roles, which was unprecedented at the time. The 1961 film-of-the-same name also featured a predominately Asian cast, another major Hollywood film would not follow suit until 1993 with Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*. The original Broadway production was successful and while the film version lost money at the box office, it garnered five Academy Award nominations. However, as time wore on, the musical was becoming more and more difficult to produce. Initially, the all-Asian cast was what made the musical difficult for regional theatres and school productions. Over the years, as the nation has grown and learned through the civil rights movement, *Flower Drum Song* was seen as an insensitive and inauthentic portrayal of Chinese immigrants. David Henry Hwang recalls the 1970s during which academics and artists alike condemned the work, but as we now know, it remained a guilty pleasure.

David Henry Hwang’s adaptation retains most of the original songs (“The Other Generation” being the only causality), but dramatically changes the plot. Hwang repositions the musical to follow Mei-Li, as she flees the Communist party of China, leaving her deceased father behind. With her flower drum song as the only reminder of home and family,

Mei-Li heads to America—unsure of her future. Once she arrives in San Francisco, Mei-Li arrives at the Golden Pearl theatre, run by Wang and his son Ta. Wang and his late wife performed Peking Opera back home in China, and while he still performs everyday (with Ta stepping into the female roles), the father and son play to empty houses. Once a week, Ta presents a nightclub act in his theatre (featuring Linda Low). In Hwang’s version, Madame Liang is no longer the sister-in-law of Wang, but rather the manager of Linda Low.

Eventually, Liang transforms the Golden Pearl Theatre into the full-time nightclub, Club Chop Suey. The show panders to American audiences with a narrow view of Chinese culture. Eventually, Wang steps into the show adopting a new persona—Uncle Sammy Fong (a play on Uncle Sam). Mei-Li is no longer a picture bride, but a relationship with Ta is inevitable. The new musical removes the original Sammy Fong, as well as Helen Chao. While the love lines are more clearly defined, a character named Chao is introduced as another potential suitor for Mei-Li. Mei-Li’s decision ultimately must be between Chinese immigrant Chao (who pawns her flower drum song for boat fare to Hong Kong) or first-generation American Ta (who buys the drum to return to her). Throughout Mei-Li’s journey, Linda Low attempts to “Americanize” Mei-Li by giving her a cone bra and Western dress, the showgirls eventually perform the number “Chop Suey” dressed as light-up takeout containers, and a bleak view of immigrant-filled Chinatown is presented. Wang is metaphorically haunted by the ghost of his wife, and Mei-Li by that of her father. Memories of their loved ones personify duty to the old country. In a pivotal scene in act one, Mei-Li and Ta perform a duet from the fictional opera, *The Flower Boat Maiden*. During this Mei-Li gives voice to the theme and intention of Hwang’s revision, saying “to create something new,

we must first love what is old.”⁵ Additionally, she asserts “perhaps the old stories are more powerful than you think.”⁶ In the end, Ta’s act of generosity in returning the flower drum song proves both his love to Mei-Li and his reverence for his Chinese heritage. They marry and live performing Chinese opera.

Hwang’s adaptation presents several characters at odds with their Chinese heritage. The characters that long for their home—Mei-Li, Wang, Chao, and the characters desperate to assimilate into American society—Ta, Linda, and Madame Liang. The finale of the show provides an epilogue for the main characters, indicating the resolution of their individual struggles:

HARVARD. My parents are still mad at me for not going to some fancy college. But with the money I made here, I bought my mother a watch. Which’ll at least help to take some pressure off my little brother—the one they named “Rolex.” Anyway, when Madame Liang learned about the wedding, she—

LIANG. —absolutely refused to attend. After all, Ta had quit the club and was performing in Portsmouth Square—with Mei-Li—for donations! But ever since Sammy and I got back from our honeymoon, it’s like I can’t even hold a grudge anymore. One afternoon...

WANG. I went to see their show. Which used the traditions of my old opera days to tell new stories—of life in America. Their work reminded me of when I was young, and still believed in impossible things. So I decided to let them hold their wedding here—at the theatre. And once a week—

LIANG. Mondays.

WANG. I would allow Ta and Mei-Li to perform a special program here, which we would call...opera night.

LINDA. I just landed my first movie role! I play this peasant girl in the Korean War, and when my village gets bombed, I scream. Last week, I got Ta and Mei-Li’s wedding invitations, and knew I had to come. There are so few people who have what it takes to be happy. The rest of us...just stay hungry.⁷

⁵ Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, and David Henry Hwang. *Flower Drum Song*. (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2003), 33.

⁶ Ibid. 34.

⁷ Ibid. 95-96.

Harvard's epilogue speaks to the dramatic flip in Asian stereotype since the original *Flower Drum Song*, no longer is the stereotype that Asian characters are subservient and simple minded, but now the Asian stereotype is that of high-achieving, ultra-disciplined students. Linda Low's epilogue may stand as a comment on the timely discussion of opportunities for actors and actresses of color. Rather than the leading lady, or even the best friend, Linda is cast as a struggling Korean (while she is Chinese). Wang's comments on Ta and Mei-Li's new way to honor the old tradition in the context of a new life, may just meta-theatrically comment on the lasting legacy of the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein. To end the musical, Ta and Mei-Li (joined by other principal characters) comment on their origins, and the new generation of Asian-Americans:

MEI-LI. As I begin my new life, I give thanks to all those who came before me. My father...

TA. ...my mother, and their ancestors before them...

MEI-LI. ...whose legacy was passed down to me the day I was born (*Turns to face the audience*) in Soochow, China.

TA. (*Turns to face the audience*) The day I was born—in Shanghai.

(*As each of the following speak, they step forward to address the audience:*)

LINDA. The day I was born—in Seattle.

WANG. In Hunan, China,

HARVARD. In Stockton, California.

LIANG. In New York City.⁸

While Hwang's adaptation greatly differs from the original musical, he has stated that in revising the work he "wanted to write what Oscar Hammerstein might have wanted to write if he had been Chinese American."⁹ While the 1992 Broadway production of Hwang's adaptation might not have struck a chord with critics, in a time when audiences are grappling

⁸ Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, and David Henry Hwang. *Flower Drum Song*. (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2003), 96-97.

⁹ *Ibid.* 100.

with new questions and when commercial productions are revisiting Rodgers and Hammerstein properties with fresh perspectives, Hwang's adaptation may deserve another chance to speak to a new moment.

Bartlett Sher's *South Pacific* and *The King and I*

In terms of modern production of the “Big 5” Rodgers and Hammerstein properties, one director seems to be the prime 21st-century interpreter of the golden-age musicals. Tony-nominee Bartlett Sher has, in the last decade, produced two multi-million dollar Broadway revivals of two major Rodgers and Hammerstein works. First, in 2008, Sher directed the first-ever Broadway revival of *South Pacific*, followed in 2015 by a revival of *The King and I*. Both productions were staged at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theatre, under artistic director André Bishop. Both productions were met with critical acclaim, Tony Award nominations, and subsequent national tours and West End productions. In addition to providing the musicals with large orchestras, lavish design, and casts of over 30 actors, Sher approached the musicals with both reverence, and an eye for their contemporary messages. In examining two musical properties with pages and pages of “problematic” text, Sher revisited these musicals with a new perspective. Sher's careful analysis and direction brought the spirit of the original musicals to a contemporary audience.

In his collaboration with André Bishop and Lincoln Center Theatre, Bartlett Sher has struck gold with modern productions of golden-age musicals. The successful collaboration began in 2005, when Sher worked with actress Kelli O'Hara and artistic director André Bishop on the Broadway production of *The Light in the Piazza*. In reviving *South Pacific*, Sher's carefully assembled company of actors and designers delivered a first-rate production—Ben Brantley said “I'm darned if I can find one serious flaw in this

production”¹⁰—Sher’s exploration of the text may be behind the success of *South Pacific* in the 21st century. In addition to imbuing Nellie Forbush with a sense of ambivalence and Bloody Mary with calculation, Sher reinstated crucial moments of text that were cut from the original production. The revival restores a cut song, titled “My Girl Back Home,” which is a duet between Nellie and Lieutenant Cable. A scene leading into the song, which reveals their family prejudices, is also restored.¹¹ Additionally, the pivotal scene at the end of act one in which Nellie learns the truth of Emile’s mixed-race children, restores a word cut from the original libretto—colored. Still a watered-down version of the original sentiment in Michener’s novel, the term elicited strong reactions from the 2008 audience. O’Hara says, "I hear people gasping when I use the word 'colored,' which I expected," she says. "But [in 1949], they didn't even need to say the word 'colored' — they didn't need any of that. The audience knew what the problem was."¹² Sher speaks on the curious nature of the cut material from the initial production, saying that no one knows why certain cuts were made to the original, "But it's interesting that the stuff they cut all seems related to race."¹³ While the original *South Pacific* was presented to an audience still directly touched by World War II, Sher’s 2008 revival brought the issues of prejudice to the Obama era. Sher says, "when all Americans - whether we're Democrats or Republicans, from here or from there - can hear a story that kind of pulls together the noble and good things we did together, where we showed

¹⁰ Ben Brantley, “Optimist Awash in the Tropics.” *The New York Times*, April 4, 2008.

¹¹ Jesse Hamlin, “‘South Pacific’ Coasts on Contemporary Currents.” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, September 20, 2009.

¹² Jeff Lunden, “In Revival, ‘South Pacific’ Still Has Lessons to Teach.” *All Things Considered*. NPR. April 3, 2008.

¹³ Jesse Hamlin, “‘South Pacific’ Coasts on Contemporary Currents.” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, September 20, 2009.

that we could change, we could be different. And I think that's what this story does. We're in such a transformational time now when we don't really feel confident of that - can we change and adapt again, can we get to a more perfect union? Stories in the theater can help remind us of who we are."¹⁴

Following the success of Sher's *South Pacific*, he and Bishop were eager to replicate their success with a revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*. Once again, actress Kelli O'Hara would step into the leading role. While *The King and I* has been criticized for its Orientalism and white-savior complex, Sher's production returned to the roots of the historical episode in which Rodgers and Hammerstein drew their inspiration. In speaking of the true nature of the story, Sher says, "you have a radical story about the education of women in a third-world country. I think it is crucial to have a design that strips away the exoticism that was common in the 1950s, and that helps you boil things down to the issue of the show: the transition from a traditional culture to what really was a modern, industrial culture."¹⁵ In examining identified problematic elements and plot points, the issue of stereotypical women, and Siamese people as a whole, is noted throughout the libretto. Sher works to ensure that "No one is merely a dancer or an extra or an archetype, which may be the greatest defense this show offers against what can come across as cute condescension toward the exotic East."¹⁶

¹⁴ Jesse Hamlin, "'South Pacific' Coasts on Contemporary Currents." *The San Francisco Chronicle*, September 20, 2009.

¹⁵ Chris Jones, "Can 'The King and I' Change with the Times?" *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 2017.

¹⁶ Ben Brantley, "Review: 'The King and I,' Back on Broadway." *The New York Times*, April 16, 2015.

In examining the complicated role of women in the show—Anna, Lady Thiang, and Tuptim—the actresses in Sher’s Broadway revival each speaks to her careful approach to their portrayals. Of Anna, actress Kelli O’Hara said, "All three of us have spoken about how when you don't play it the way you played it in the 50s, then you have to backtrack and make the other parts work. We're actually finding difficulties because of it. Mine is: We come to 'Shall I Tell You What I Think Of You?' and you've already seen me yell at the King. And 'Shall I Tell You...' is not as fulfilling. That's something I'm going to work out for myself and let it speak to the Anna I'm playing."¹⁷ Of the previously subservient Lady Thiang, actress Ruthie Ann Miles says that her meek servant approach was quickly rebuked by Sher. Of her audition, Miles says, “I went in there and [Sher] was like, 'Stop. What are you doing? Lady Thiang is Hillary Clinton. Lady Thiang is Imelda Marcos. Lady Thiang rules this roost, except she doesn't say a word. Think of it that way: Her head is always down. Her eyes are always lowered. But her ears are always going. And she may be the smartest person in the room, but she'll never open her mouth and tell you that.’”¹⁸ Finally, Ashley Park (playing Tuptim in the revival) had this to say of her character,

I always remind myself of this: The three adjectives they used in the very first breakdown for Tuptim were 'beautiful, rebellious and daring...And I don't think that in other approaches, the Joan of Arc mentality of Tuptim has always been at the forefront. I sing 'My Lord and Master' with an irony and a big 'F*ck you' at the end. Through this process we've had to find the humanity in the strength of our characters.¹⁹

¹⁷ Carey Purcell, “A Woman’s World: ‘There’s Room For Us All’ -- The King’s Ladies on Redefining Game-Changers.” *Playbill*, May 11, 2015.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Sher's approach even revered the real-life legacy of King Mongkut. The musical is often criticized as inaccurately portraying the King. While his backwards temperament may not be true to life, Sher sought to infuse the portrayal with as much honesty as possible. Sher speaks of "a struggle within the man who was trying to be a liberal and had been born a conservative; had been born with a conviction that the absolute power of a king should not be questioned, and yet something had given him an interest in Western democracy."²⁰

While Sher's two Broadway revivals of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals have presented *South Pacific* and *The King and I* in conventional productions, he approaches the work with reverence and honesty. Ben Brantley says of the director, "Sher is no strong-armed revisionist. He works from within vintage material, coaxing shadowy emotional depths to churn up a surface that might otherwise seem shiny and slick."²¹ Sher reveres the cultural moment of the musicals, while bringing them to the contemporary stage with an emphasis on morality. Sher says of Rodgers and Hammerstein, "I do not think there was anything in the hearts of Rodgers and Hammerstein that wanted ever to tell anything other than a good, liberal story,"²² He continues, "Questions of democracy and human dignity are central to their works. I try not to answer any of those questions; I try to use 'The King and I' to pose them."²³ In both musicals, Sher celebrates a sense of unity. Both works transcend race, nationality, or political affiliation. Whether a character reaches out to "get to know" another,

²⁰ Jeff Lunden, "Getting to Know The Real Story Was Key to Broadway's 'King and I' Revival." *Weekend Edition Saturday*, NPR, May 2, 2015.

²¹ Ben Brantley, "Review: 'The King and I,' Back on Broadway." *The New York Times*, April 16, 2015.

²² Chris Jones, "Can 'The King and I' Change with the Times?" *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 2017.

²³ Ibid.

or cultures collide against the backdrop of world war, In Sher's estimation—the moral messages speak clearly to a 21st-century audience.

You're Doing Fine, *Oklahoma!*

Rodgers and Hammerstein's first musical collaboration, *Oklahoma!*, has been regarded as a classic Americana musical. Praised for its score and picturesque setting, *Oklahoma!* has spawned new productions that have sought to represent the modern American demographic in the early 20th-century territory. In the last decade alone, five major revivals have brought the musical to the new century. Each production brought its own idea of a modern *Oklahoma!* to the stage. In 2010 the Arena Stage Company in Washington D.C. revived the classic, casting African-American actresses in the roles of Laurey and Aunt Eller. Portland Center Stage in Oregon took the movement one step further in 2011, casting the show with an entirely African-American cast. The next year, the 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle came into some controversy when the role of Jud Fry was cast with an African-American actor. Six years later, the classic musical was once again revived on the West Coast. Oregon Shakespeare Festival's 2018 production, with the blessing of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, cast Curly as a female and Ado Annie as a male (becoming Ado Andy). The production subverted traditional gender stereotypes, and revered the spirit of American optimism set against the backdrop of the LGBTQ+ movement. Finally, a Broadway revival opened in 2019. The production (created at Bard College in 2015 and remounted at St. Ann's Warehouse before its Broadway production) repositioned the musical to speak to the current political climate. Each production opened to varied degrees of praise and criticism, but each posed the question—is *Oklahoma!* still “doing fine” after all these years?

The first production in the wave of *Oklahoma!* opened in 2010 at the Arena Stage Company in Washington D.C. The production was helmed by Molly Smith and appeared to be a conventional production. Reviews were mostly positive, with critics calling *Oklahoma!* a “vision of America and Americans that is full of hope, promise and pluck.”²⁴ Another review praised *Oklahoma!* for its classic escapism, saying “During these times when our country is close to defaulting with no light at the end of the tunnel to stop it – how lucky are we that we can escape into the optimism and joy and Americana that envelopes this joyful production of *Oklahoma!*”²⁵ The key difference between Smith’s *Oklahoma!* and the countless productions before were a few principal casting decisions. Curly was played by a Latino actor, Laurey was played by an African-American actress, and Aunt Eller was played by an African-American actress. In his coverage of the production for *American Theatre Magazine*, David Cote says that the production was an example “of not so much color-blind casting as color-conscious casting, introducing racial subtexts to the story for the Obama era.”²⁶ While the production is certainly remembered for its multicultural casting, another critic offers that “perhaps the most unorthodox thing Smith has done to freshen up an over-familiar show is to have her performers act it with the same conviction they’d bring to Chekhov or Molière.”²⁷

Across the country, Portland Center Stage opened a production in 2011 that featured an all African-American cast. In an audience resource guide, a dramaturgical note explores

²⁴ Jayne Blanchard, “Oklahoma!” *DC Theatre Scene* (blog). November 7, 2010.

²⁵ Joel Markowitz, “Oklahoma! At Arena Stage.” *MD Theatre Guide*, July 15, 2011.

²⁶ David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!,’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

²⁷ Bob Mondello, “Oklahoma! At Arena Stage, Reviewed.” *Washington City Paper*, November 12, 2010.

the rich history of African-Americans in the Oklahoma Territory. The essay begins with an epigraph from politician Edward P. McCabe, which reads, “Oklahoma—the future land and the paradise of Eden and the garden of the Gods...here the negro...can rest from mob law, here he can be secure from every ill of the southern policies...”²⁸ The audience learns of the indelible bond between the African-Americans in Oklahoma, and those displaced by the forced migration, or the “Trail of Tears.” Throughout Oklahoma’s early history, slavery was common practice. While the nature of slavery in Oklahoma is debated (the two schools of thought seem to be divided between indentured servitude and bondage of the deep south), it was eventually overthrown by abolitionists. The black population went on to grow throughout the Land Rush, as the territory moved to become an all-black state. While this movement never succeeded, Oklahoma saw several all-black towns. In terms of social hierarchy, the time in which Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* was set saw social relationships between black and white. The hope for the future and promise of the plains united diverse populations. Portland Center Stage’s production, helmed by Chris Coleman, highlights the historical perspective and asks us what it means to be an American.

Presumably to further the conversation of race in *Oklahoma!*, the 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle opened a production in 2012 that featured African-American actor, Kyle Scatliffe, in the role of Jud Fry. In coverage preceding opening night, the theatre touted a production with “nuanced characters, and also noted that during the time period, the Oklahoma Territory had more free slaves than any other place in the U.S.”²⁹ In addition to the multicultural cast

²⁸ Collin Lawson and Ryan Mooney, eds. “The Guide: A Theatergoer’s Resource.” (Portland Center Stage 2011), 2.

²⁹ *Seattle Magazine*. “5th Ave Theatre Gives ‘Oklahoma!’ an Update,” February 2012.

that “features African Americans cast in roles that traditionally have been played by Caucasians”³⁰ the production featured “dances by Donald Byrd that incorporate square dance and African-influenced moves.”³¹ The production’s director, Peter Rothstein, was quoted in *The Seattle Times* saying, “On one level our ‘Oklahoma!’ will remain a valentine to Americana...The dance numbers soar, the comedy lands. But we also want it to be a more authentic kind of Americana, a more diverse Americana.”³² However, the casting of Scatliffe in the role of Jud Fry proved to be problematic in the eyes of the Seattle audience.

In a blog post reviewing the production, Candace Brown describes a scene outside the theatre in which young audience members took issue with the casting. She writes:

Afterward, outside the theater, a multi-racial group of four young friends, who had come to see the show together, stood around talking. The topic of their conversation was how this new version of “Oklahoma!” has confused and disturbed them. One of them, a beautiful young woman with light brown skin, said she had “a lot of questions” she would like to ask the show’s creators, about the casting. It clearly bothered her a great deal and for valid reasons.³³

In examining *Oklahoma!*, Jud Fry is portrayed as a menacing character. He is a threatening presence to both Laurey and Curly, and he is the only character in the piece to appear drunk. The casting of the role with a black actor “offended some viewers who saw that choice as the perpetuation of the ugly and insulting stereotype of the angry black male, dangerous and menacing.”³⁴ Other moments in the show, when played by an African-American Jud, play with (perhaps) unintended racial commentary. In Misha Berson’s review for *The Seattle*

³⁰ *Seattle Magazine*. 2012. “5th Ave Theatre Gives ‘Oklahoma!’ an Update,” February 2012.

³¹ Misha Berson, Misha. “5th Avenue’s ‘Oklahoma!’: A Multicultural Frontier.” *The Seattle Times*, February 9, 2012.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Candace Brown, “A Review of ‘Oklahoma!’ At Seattle’s 5th Avenue Theatre -- Oh, Not Such a ‘Beautiful Mornin.’” *Good Life Northwest* (blog). February 12, 2012.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Times, she calls attention to the “Poor Jud is Dead” sequence, saying “Curly’s urging the farmhand to hang by a rope inevitably brings to mind racist lynchings — not the mock suicide the satirical lyrics allude to.”³⁵ Further, in an interview for *The Seattle Times*, Rothstein asserts that Laurey and Curly are “complex human beings. They can be ugly at times — Laurey calls Jud a mangy dog that ought to be shot...The words have more weight when there’s a trigger such as race on the table.”³⁶

In Berson’s review of the production, she questions the point of “depicting Jud as a homicidal black brute.”³⁷ She offers that perhaps Rothstein intended the decision to be a psychological one, or even a comment on the racially divided society. However, she ultimately asserts that this production’s Jud “just came through as a provocative but unintentional caricature.”³⁸ However, Rothstein and the rest of the team at the 5th Avenue did not share the same perspective. In Berson’s piece before the production’s opening, the new message of *Oklahoma!* could be boiled down to one idea, “can America pursue the radical optimism of a nation that believes in freedom and equality?”³⁹ Rothstein was also quoted as saying, “If I can make the audience root for Laurey and Curly, and still feel compassion for Jud, that to me is a compelling evening of theater.”⁴⁰ In response to the backlash, the 5th Avenue theatre scheduled a series of talk backs to engage with the community over this

³⁵ Misha Berson, “Provocative ‘Oklahoma!’ Hits 5th Avenue Stage.” *The Seattle Times*, February 10, 2012.

³⁶ Misha Berson, “5th Avenue’s ‘Oklahoma!’: A Multicultural Frontier.” *The Seattle Times*, February 9, 2012.

³⁷ Misha Berson, “Provocative ‘Oklahoma!’ Hits 5th Avenue Stage.” *The Seattle Times*, February 10, 2012.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Misha Berson, “5th Avenue’s ‘Oklahoma!’: A Multicultural Frontier.” *The Seattle Times*, February 9, 2012.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

issue. In the press release to announce the talk back series, Rothstein says, “I never would have imaged that in 2012 a production of this almost 70-year-old musical could cause such a stir. I am a firm believer that great theater inspires dialogue, and I look forward to engaging our audiences on this difficult subject and hearing their reactions to this unorthodox casting choice.”⁴¹ In defense of their casting decision, choreographer Donald Byrd, and the 5th Avenue, said this in their press release:

‘The musical takes place at a time when the Oklahoma Territory was being considered for statehood. In 1907, Oklahoma had more all-black communities than the rest of the country being put together’ In fact, from 1865 to 1920, African Americans created more than 50 identifiable towns and settlements in Oklahoma, some of which still exist today. There was even a movement to make Oklahoma an all-black state. The new 5th Avenue production has been inspired by and captures some of this history.⁴²

In *The Seattle Times*, Berson makes reference to both the Arena Stage iterations and the Portland Center Stage production saying, “A recent ‘Oklahoma!’ at Washington D.C.’s Arena Stage mingled races on the range with a feminist slant. Last fall a smashing rendering at Portland Center Stage, inspired by all-black towns that existed in early Oklahoma, had mostly African-American actors.”⁴³ And while Berson acknowledges the credibility of new perspectives in modern production, she concludes that “one just wishes the detours the 5th Avenue took with this Broadway favorite were more complementary to the whole enterprise.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Goldy. 2012. “Is Oklahoma OK?” *The Stranger*, February 15, 2012.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Misha Berson, “5th Avenue’s ‘Oklahoma!’: A Multicultural Frontier.” *The Seattle Times*, February 9, 2012.

⁴⁴ Misha Berson, “Provocative ‘Oklahoma!’ Hits 5th Avenue Stage.” *The Seattle Times*, February 10, 2012.

In 2018, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival mounted their own new production of *Oklahoma!* The production was helmed by OSF artistic director Bill Rauch. While the production was seemingly rather traditional—in terms of singing, costume, and setting, the production joined the ranks of other adventurous productions of the 1943 musical. In Rauch’s production, Curly was cast as a woman, and Ado Annie as a man. The shift in genders for these principal characters, also signaled a shift in the nature of romantic relationships in the show. The OSF production reimagines the Oklahoma territory as “a frontier utopia where kindness and civility, not sexual identity or ideology, are the criteria for citizenship.”⁴⁵ While the production’s new concept speaks to the original sense of Americana optimism, now set against the backdrop of the fight for marriage equality, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo, the traditional gender stereotypes are reclaimed and reinvigorated.

Curly’s characterization as a caricature of the macho man is subverted in this new casting. In a review of the production for *Oregon Artswatch*, Deann Welker says that Curly’s “tough-guy works and actions are funnier because she’s a girl taking on men.”⁴⁶ However, the shifting gender dynamics of Curly’s character do not always play to comedic effect. Welker asserts “there is even an element of fear for her when she ends up alone in the smokehouse with...Jud.”⁴⁷ Of the “Poor Jud is Daid” scene, Welker says, “It’s funny and ludicrous, sure, but we live in 2018, so it’s hard to watch a woman—even a tough one—put herself in this situation with someone as terrifying as Jud.”⁴⁸ Another instance of the subverted gender stereotype lies in a scene between Laurey and Ado Andy (formerly Annie).

⁴⁵ David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!,’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

⁴⁶ Deann Welker, “Ashland: ‘Oklahoma!’ for Today.” *Oregon Artswatch*, May 6, 2018.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

“When he explains to Laurey that no ‘fellers’ gave him the time of day until he ‘rounded up a little,’ he shoves his rear end out for emphasis.”⁴⁹ Welker adds, “This is a (hilarious) breath of fresh air for women, who have suffered our whole lives at the stereotype of men desiring nothing more than a buxom bombshell.”⁵⁰ Additionally, a there is a noted change in the relationships between Will and Ado. In a piece for *The New York Times*, Laura Collins-Hughes says, “When Will asks for monogamy from the habitually available Andy, for example, it carries a different charge than when, in other productions, Will asks the same of Annie.”⁵¹ In discussing changing dynamics of Laurey’s trajectory, Rauch cites rehearsal conversations that subtly play in the performance. He says, “Why is Laurey living with Aunt Eller? It’s a question that the piece doesn’t address. I know for the actor playing Laurey, her trying to come to terms with her homosexuality is why she’s not living with her parents; that’s why she’s staying with her transgender aunt.”⁵² Rauch says that while audiences may not be aware of these conversations, “there are subliminal ways that we reflect the realities of the racist, homophobic, transphobic world that we live in—even with the main thrust being love and inclusion and acceptance.”⁵³

While the production characterizes the Oklahoma Territory as a utopia of love and acceptance, the sting of homophobia is still present. In OSF’s production, Jud Fry stands as the lone hetero white male in the piece. In this production, Judy Fry “embodies toxic

⁴⁹ Deann Welker, “Ashland: ‘Oklahoma!’ for Today.” *Oregon Artswatch*, May 6, 2018.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Laura Collins-Hughes, “In This ‘Oklahoma!,’ She Loves Her and He Loves Him.” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2018.

⁵² David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!,’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

⁵³ Ibid.

masculinity, threatened by gender nonconformity and sexual difference.”⁵⁴ Collins-Hughes describes the changing nature of the famed Dream Ballet, saying “Laurey is stalked by a new kind of dread—reverberate in surprising ways, even as the show makes an organic case for the notion that love is love.”⁵⁵ At the core of *Oklahoma!*, Jud Fry stands as an antagonist in the simple terms that he prevents the “happily ever after.” While different productions in the new wave of *Oklahoma!* mark different approaches to the character, OSF maintains that Jud is “a problem that must be solved, in order for everyone else to live happily.”⁵⁶ To that affect, Jud’s villainy is “more relevant with this inclusive cast that it’s possibly ever been...It’s not because anyone else wants Jud to go away; it’s because he refuses to accept the way things are changing, despite everyone trying to help him come around.”⁵⁷

In response to the OSF production, Ted Chapin (President of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization), maintains that “Rodgers and Hammerstein took risks with every one of their shows, from ‘Oklahoma!’ in 1943 to ‘The Sound of Music’ in 1959.”⁵⁸ While Chapin insists that the revolution caused by *Oklahoma!* may be hard for us—as a modern audience—to understand, Rauch’s production is a testament to the trail-blazing nature of the frontier tale. In recalling the genesis of his vision, Rauch states that “gender was, if not the last frontier, a place that classic musicals had not explored. And it came from feeling shut out as a gay kid, and a gay adult, from those stories that I love. I love classic musicals but did not

⁵⁴ David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

⁵⁵ Laura Collins-Hughes, “In This ‘Oklahoma!’ She Loves Her and He Loves Him.” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2018.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

feel my own story represented.”⁵⁹ While Rauch seems to be exploring the “last frontier” with his production, his research uncovered a fact of which he previously unaware—Lynn Riggs, author of the musical’s source *Green Grow the Lilacs*, was gay and part Cherokee.⁶⁰ Rauch’s reimagining reveres the original work. *Oklahoma!* captured a zeitgeist of American optimism in 1943, and Rauch’s production brings that same optimism to the 21st century. This time, the chorus belongs to a land of diversity, inclusion, and respect. Chapin asserts that classics should be updated, saying that “for anybody to think they have to be done in exactly the way they were originally done—I mean, that’s sort of Gilbert and Sullivan thinking, ...and Gilbert and Sullivan is kind of dead.”⁶¹ In conclusion, Cote writes of the audience’s ecstatic response to the OSF production, saying:

The sex-positive, giddily LGBTQ vibe was greeted with cheers and laughs from both demos. There was a palpable sense of excitement and sympathy from the crowds, watching Will (Jordan Barbour) and Ado Andy (Jonathan Luke Stevens) sort out issues of trust and lust in their relationship. And when Curly (Tatiana Wechsler) wrapped Laurey (Royer Bockus) in her arms for a big smooch, the kids went nuts. When’s the last time you heard that about Rodgers and Hammerstein?⁶²

In 2019, a new revival of *Oklahoma!* opened on Broadway. The production, helmed by Daniel Fish, had previously been staged at Bard College in 2015 and at St. Anne’s Warehouse Off Broadway in 2018. The new production was called “Sexy *Oklahoma!*” by some, “Dark *Oklahoma!*” by others, and criticized as “Woke-lahoma!” by a select few. The new production sought to “speak to 21st-century audiences with topical relevance”⁶³ as it did

⁵⁹ David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!,’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Laura Collins-Hughes, “In This ‘Oklahoma!,’ She Loves Her and He Loves Him.” *The New York Times*, August 15, 2018.

⁶² David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!,’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

⁶³ Todd S. Purdum, “Oklahoma! Gets a Dark, Brilliant Remake.” *The Atlantic*, April 8, 2019.

in 1943. Todd Purdum, in *The Atlantic*, says “The original *Oklahoma!* opened barely 15 months after Pearl Harbor and was received by wartime audiences not just as a story about incipient statehood...but also as a reflection of the sacrifice—and, yes, the shattering violence—that World War II would require.”⁶⁴ And while the new *Oklahoma!* is filled with blood and darkness, Fish argues that darkness is inherent in the traditional Broadway musical. He says, “When you see a great production of *Dreamgirls*, it is dark and screwed up, and I think when you see great productions of anything Fosse did, it’s dark and screwed up.” He concludes, “I just think I’m trying to respond to the material in as truthful a way as I can.”⁶⁵ However, Fish’s vision was not shared by all.

In reviewing the production for *City Journal*, Judith Miller asserts that infusing revivals with new themes and questions is essential. However, she says “It is one thing to emphasize the darkness that lies beneath this iconic musical’s cheery surface. It is another to turn what Rodgers and Hammerstein intended as a celebration of the American spirit into a sanguinary condemnation of it.”⁶⁶ Terry Teachout, drama critic of the *Wall Street Journal*, takes a similar position. He calls Fish’s *Oklahoma!*, “a travesty, a sneering burlesque of the most influential and beloved Broadway musical of the 20th century.”⁶⁷ Todd Purdum, in his review, makes a case for the Rodgers and Hammerstein purists. He says of the writing team, “They were both famous for insisting that their shows be performed with a frozen-in-amber fidelity to the original productions—even if those originals had been cobbled together with

⁶⁴ Todd S. Purdum, “Oklahoma! Gets a Dark, Brilliant Remake.” *The Atlantic*, April 8, 2019.

⁶⁵ Greg Evans, “‘Oklahoma!’ Director Daniel Fish On Finding Answers In The Dark—Tony Watch Q&A.” *Deadline*, June 4, 2019.

⁶⁶ Judith Miller, “Not O.K.!” *City Journal*, April 19, 2019.

⁶⁷ Terry Teachout, “‘Oklahoma!’ and ‘The Cradle Will Rock’ Review: Playing at Politics.” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2019.

blood, sweat, and caffeine in out-of-town tryouts in New Haven, Connecticut, and in Boston.”⁶⁸ However, Purdum notes Hammerstein’s assertion that “if sex is not at the core of a story, it’s probably not worth telling”⁶⁹ and speculates that Hammerstein may appreciate the overt sexuality of Fish’s *Oklahoma!*. While Fish’s production brought new ideas to *Oklahoma!*, the production incorporated several changes in terms of orchestration, concept, libretto, etc. Of changes in the theatre, Hammerstein had this to say:

Making changes can so easily become an accumulative pastime, not only on the part of one who makes them, but—and this is the main danger—those who follow are likely to be encouraged to make further changes. “Oh!” say they, “you can make changes, can you? Well, now I’ll try my hand.” And after a succession of directors who have not had the sacredness of the original work drummed into them and inviolability of the original conception, all add their own and put their dirty little fingers in the pie and what have you got—Hollywood!⁷⁰

Ultimately, Fish asserts that the musical is “a story about the nature of community, and about the cost of forming a community, and issues of culpability.”⁷¹ While Fish maintains that the production retains every lyric, his *Oklahoma!* is not without its own distinct changes.

Daniel Fish’s *Oklahoma!* was a scaled-back production, returning to the essentials. The Broadway production featured a cast of 12, a score re-orchestrated for seven musicians, and even reduced the famous “Dream Ballet” sequence to one dancer. While changes to the material are present, Fish’s focus is on reframing what we already know. For instance, in commenting on the place of women in the Oklahoma Territory, men still bid on baskets at the fundraiser, but Fish’s interpretation of the scene “suggests convincingly that they are

⁶⁸ Todd S. Purdum, “Oklahoma! Gets a Dark, Brilliant Remake.” *The Atlantic*, April 8, 2019.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!,’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

bidding on the women themselves.”⁷² Fish even empowers the female chorus to “snap phallic ears of corn in half while singing ‘Many a New Day.’”⁷³ While romance and relationships are at the heart of the play, Fish approaches the love scenes with “an edge of hesitancy and doubt.”⁷⁴ In considering Laurey’s decision between Jud or Curly, the dream ballet has been significantly altered. The evolution of the ballet throughout Fish’s productions culminated in a solo dance with a projected video for the Broadway iteration.⁷⁵ The video motif is not only employed in the ballet sequence, but even earlier in “Poor Jud is Daid.” In the scene, the stage goes “completely black, except for the live video projection on the wall of the face of the actor who plays Jud.”⁷⁶ While these production choices greatly differ from previous iterations, Fish’s production also departs from the original by placing a great deal of political emphasis on certain plot points. For instance, in commenting on gun culture, guns are ever-present in the production as props, but also in the design. The death of Jud is changed from an accident with a knife to a scene in which “Jud presents a gun to Curly as a wedding gift, seeming to offer himself up for slaughter.”⁷⁷ In response, “Curly simply points the gun at Jud and fires—point blank—splattering his own and his bride’s faces and white suits with his rival’s blood.”⁷⁸ The result of the change is another political assertion, this time on the nature of our justice system. With the new death scene for Jud, the expedited trial of Curly “feels

⁷² Judith Miller, “Not O.K.!” *City Journal*, April 19, 2019.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ David Cote, “‘Oklahoma!’ Still Okay?” *American Theatre Magazine*, September 7, 2018.

⁷⁵ Greg Evans, “‘Oklahoma!’ Director Daniel Fish On Finding Answers In The Dark—Tony Watch Q&A.” *Deadline*, June 4, 2019.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Judith Miller, “Not O.K.!” *City Journal*, April 19, 2019.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

less like justice and more like rough complicity in vigilantism.”⁷⁹ In addition to Fish’s unique stage, reviews of the production and interviews with the director seem to indicate that there were changes to libretto. In an interview with *Deadline*, Fish says, “I wanted to have the piece move seamlessly from speaking to singing...so we took out a lot of those introductions that lead into a song.”⁸⁰ Additionally, in Terry Teachout’s review of the production, he asserts, “the book has been politically corrected (Ali Hakim, the Persian peddler, is deracinated).”⁸¹

While Fish’s production of *Oklahoma!* may have been considered “polarizing,” the revival went to win the 2019 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. The Broadway production has since ended its run, but will tour the United States beginning in the fall of 2020. Fish’s production tackled problems inherent in the musical (gender stereotypes, perceived misogyny, and the representation of Ali Hakim), but garnered criticism from Rodgers and Hammerstein purists in doing so. In other ways, Daniel Fish’s raises more questions with its new perspective. Contemporary issues such as gun culture, our justice system, and the implication of the community are brought to the forefront of this production. As *Oklahoma!* traditionally stands as a valentine to America, and a reminder of the optimistic American spirit, Fish’s perspective calls the American dream into question.

In conclusion, various adaptation efforts have been noted in the production history of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. Beginning with stage adaptations of lesser musicals

⁷⁹ Todd S. Purdum, “Oklahoma! Gets a Dark, Brilliant Remake.” *The Atlantic*, April 8, 2019.

⁸⁰ Greg Evans, “‘Oklahoma!’ Director Daniel Fish On Finding Answers In The Dark—Tony Watch Q&A.” *Deadline*, June 4, 2019.

⁸¹ Terry Teachout, “‘Oklahoma!’ and ‘The Cradle Will Rock’ Review: Playing at Politics.” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 11, 2019.

such as *State Fair* and *Cinderella*, contemporary artists recognized the staying power of the mid-century classics. David Henry Hwang's revisiting of *Flower Drum Song*, Bartlett Sher's productions of *South Pacific* and *The King and I*, and various productions in the decade-long wave of *Oklahoma!* have all noted various approaches to contemporary audiences' understanding of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. While more questions have been posed than answered, the rich production history within the 21st-century speaks to the lasting legacy of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.

CHAPTER 4

As a Teacher, I've Been Learning

In Act One, Scene Four, of *The King and I*, the Royal children are taught a lesson by their schoolteacher, Anna—she presents a map of Siam for all to see. Lady Thiang points out the blue ocean, a red illustration of Siam, and a depiction of the King of Siam: with a weapon in his hand, he is ready to destroy all who fight him. The image of Siam and its strong King is met with enthusiastic applause from the children, then Lady Thiang turns their attention to a green spot on the map that represents Burma. The spot is small and their King is depicted as naked and poor, the children giggle. They will soon learn that the map they have been looking at is an old one. Anna presents a new map (a gift from the King) and points out Siam, accurately represented by a small white spot. Initially, the children are outraged and Anna must intervene. She explains to the children that Siam means more to her than that small white spot. Anna explains that during her short tenure she been taught by her pupils about the people of Siam, and that she is now an expert in getting to know the children. An interesting parallel is noted between the lesson of the maps and contemporary productions of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals. In times when audiences are learning new lessons about equity, diversity, and inclusion in the theatre, we must critically look at the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein. As the old map evoked a strong meaning for the wives and children, they must work together to understand the new. As a turning point in the history of American musical theatre, the major works of Rodgers and Hammerstein are stalwart fixtures

of the 21st-century stage. As academic artifacts, the contemporary issues noted in the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon may best be addressed through educational exploration.

Academia as a whole—higher education, as well as elementary and secondary education—grapples with the problem of problematic literature. While the scholarly debate is a topic in the study of literature, the movement may also be applied to the academic study of theatre. In an essay that appeared in *The New York Times*, author Brian Morton uses his headline to indict Virginia Woolf for snobbery, Richard Wright for sexism, and Dostoyevsky for anti-Semitism. In his essay, Morton recalls a conversation with a stranger in which the stranger admitted to discarding Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* after seeing that a character was described in an “anti-Semitic” way. Morton asserts that we are seeing more students attuned to social justice, and that their “beautiful passion for social justice leads them to be keenly aware of the distasteful opinions held by many writers of earlier generations.”¹ Morton offers that an old book is a time machine of sorts, and implores the time traveler to understand that their destination will be a foreign land. Readers will encounter places and times with different views, different understandings, and therefore fundamentally-different ways of life. Morton says that instead of shocked or outraged, we should be curious. In the hypothetical travel to Wharton’s New York of 1905 (as depicted in *The House of Mirth*), Morton says, “We’d probably be interested in exploring the question of how one of the most intelligent and fearless minds of her time was afflicted by moral blind

¹ Brian Morton, “Virginia Woolf? Snob! Richard Wright? Sexist! Dostoyevsky? Anti-Semite!” *The New York Times*, January 8, 2019.

spots that are obvious to us today.”² Further, Morton offers that while we should not overlook these “moral blind spots,” readers must examine what Wharton offers.

In the high school English classroom, Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been a recent discussion in terms of timeliness. In an article titled “Why it’s Time Schools Stopped Teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” author Naa Baako Ako-Adjei offers insight into reading the Harper Lee novel as a freshman in high school. The author describes the book as being treated in the same manner as sacred texts, approached with a total sense of reverence from teachers and students alike. While Ako-Adjei acknowledges Lee’s mastery of language, and ability to beautifully personify Maycomb (not unlike Shakespeare, Williams, or Hammerstein), the author ultimately asserts that Lee’s novel is purposefully fraught with caricatures to pander to white audiences. The author notes a “white savior” quality to the work, saying “it’s a particularly forceful rendering of racial injustice, but because it reimagines Southern history, American history, as something far more benign than its reality.”³ Ako-Adjei’s assertion that *To Kill a Mockingbird* no longer belongs in the classroom is based a notion that Lee sanitizes the violence and hardships surrounding racism at the time. On the other side of the debate is the opinion that *To Kill a Mockingbird* should remain in our classrooms for its literary value, and as a portrait of our nation’s past.

While debates concerning the novel’s place in the classroom continue, *To Kill a Mockingbird* continues to make headlines in relation to its educational value. In February of

² Brian Morton, “Virginia Woolf? Snob! Richard Wright? Sexist! Dostoyevsky? Anti-Semite!” *The New York Times*, January 8, 2019.

³ Naa Baako Ako-Adjei, “Why It’s Time Schools Stopped Teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird*.” *Transition*, no. 122 (2017): 182–200.

2020, an audience of 18,000 New York public school students gathered to attend a production of *To Kill a Mockingbird* at Madison Square Garden. The unprecedented theatrical event was produced by Scott Rudin (lead producer of the current Broadway production of Aaron Sorkin's *To Kill a Mockingbird*). The production's director, Bartlett Sher, restaged the play to be performed at the arena. The reimagined staging placed all the sets (the courtroom, the Finch front porch, etc...) in a line at the center of the stadium. Upon their costumed entrance, the cast not only commanded the attention of the school-age audiences—but were met with eager cheers. In Julia Jacobs's article for *The New York Times*, she describes the unique energy of the event, for the room was filled with students who had no qualms about reacting out loud. Jacobs writes that “the middle and high school students groaned when things went badly for the protagonists and cheered shamelessly at insults lobbed at the town's most virulent racists.”⁴ Several of the students in attendance had previously read *To Kill a Mockingbird* in class, but many of them had never seen a play before. While *To Kill a Mockingbird* may be questioned as to its staying power in schools, the influence of the theatrical event on its audience of 18,000 cannot be denied.

In examining the debates surrounding “problematic” literature, and the uses of texts such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* in classrooms, some important underlying questions are noted. What do students benefit from the questioned material? What is at stake for the students that engage with these works? What critical thinking skills do the students employ when absorbing these media forms? In a piece for *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, author Renee Hobbs offers a concise perspective on the present, and potential future, of media

⁴ Julia Jacobs, “‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ Meets an Arena Full of Students.” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2020.

literacy in the information age. To simply define “media literacy,” Hobbs offers a widely-used definition, “accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating messages in a wide variety of forms.”⁵ The author begins her article by offering a survey of educational programs at an innovative magnet school. The school seeks to emphasize six methods of communication—public speaking, dramatics, publishing, media analysis, media production, and telecommunication⁶—through a variety of innovative educational programs. At the school, students are engaging in work such as producing television daily news programs, performing original radio plays, corresponding by e-mail on collaborative projects, and critically responding to various media sources. Their education seeks not only to teach them how to read and write, but how to decipher truth and meaning in everyday media sources.

Ultimately, Hobbs asserts that “a young generation of scholars is also emerging, coming from fields including education, media studies, communication, and literary theory, firing up some of the old debates, introducing new problems, and shedding light on thorny real-world challenges associated with the implementation of media literacy in and out of schools.”⁷

With the problems posed by literature of the past, the tools provided through the study of media literacy, and the undeniable impact of live theatre on students of all ages in mind—a modern understanding of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals may be reached.

While the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein are not generally considered to be theatre for young audiences, the classic film versions are geared toward family audiences. Since the film’s release, *The Sound of Music* has been standard programming for families and students

⁵ Renee Hobbs, “Media Literacy, General Semantics, and K-12 Education.” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 74 (3/4): 518.

⁶ Ibid. 517.

⁷ Ibid. 520.

alike. Similarly, *The King and I* appeals to children with its schoolteacher protagonist and its cast of child characters. The musical was even released as an animated-musical film in 1996. Child actors are continually called upon for roles in *Carousel*, *The King and I*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *The Sound of Music*. Music students across the country may have learned tunes such as “Do Re Mi” from *The Sound of Music* or “Getting to Know You” from *The King and I*. The works of Rodgers and Hammerstein are undeniably linked to the culture of the nation and its young people. Additionally, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization provides another resource for students to get to know the major musicals.

The “Getting to Know” Collection

The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization licenses versions of their shows specifically adapted for pre-high school performance groups. The hour-long musical abridgements of classics such as *Oklahoma!*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*, are known as the “Getting to Know” collection. While the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein have indelible bonds to the American songbook, their influence is certainly seen in home entertainment and education of young people. In examining the musicals that gave us standards such as “Oh What a Beautiful Mornin’” and “Climb Ev’ry Mountain,” their own issues have been noted. *South Pacific* offers the same sting as *To Kill a Mockingbird* in confronting our nation’s history of race relations. *The King and I* offers a historically inaccurate depiction of King Mongkut, that may be considered harmful and inauthentic. Additionally, the musical comments on the issue of slavery and does not shy away from the gritty reality. *Oklahoma!*’s recent production history teaches us that the musical has several things to say in terms of sexuality, community, and traditional gender roles. In turning to the “Getting to Know” series it is important to note the difference between the original libretto

and the student abridgement. What misogynist micro-aggressions are retained? What attempts are made at ethnic dialect? Most importantly, what moral messages are our students being asked to synthesize?

The “Getting to Know” collection is licensed by the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, as well as the Hal Leonard Corporation. The shows in the series are 50 to 70-minute adaptation of classic musicals for pre-high school actors (specifically Kindergarten through 9th grade), edited for content and the music is specifically adapted for young voices. Of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, five are represented in the collection—*Oklahoma!*, *State Fair*, *Cinderella*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*. The other musicals adapted for the collection are titles licensed by the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization, including *Footloose* (1998) and *Once Upon a Mattress* (1959). As the musicals are designed for performance by pre-high school actors, the scripts include resources to guide a young actor through their first theatre production. Each script begins with an introductory section titled “Getting to Know.” The introduction orients students to reading a script (mapping out stage directions, character attributions, lyrics, and dialogue), reading music, orienting themselves on a stage (stage right, stage left, etc...), and gives students a glimpse into the rehearsal process they will embark on (blocking, runs, tech, dress, etc...). Additionally, each “Getting to Know” script includes a brief biography of Rodgers and Hammerstein, as well as a synopsis and production history of the show students will be performing. With all this information introduced, the students are ready to immerse themselves in the script. While the adaptations include the classic music and lyrics, as well as dialogue from the original librettos, major differences are noted.

Getting to Know...*Oklahoma!*

At the beginning of *Getting to Know...Oklahoma!*, the stage direction from theatre lore remains, in a way. Aunt Eller is alone onstage when Curly sings, “There’s a bright, golden haze on the meadow.” However, the echo is not repeated by Curly, but rather the chorus of pre-high school students. Throughout the abridged script, lines of dialogue are attributed to chorus members and classic numbers are sung by the ensemble to ensure students are active in the process. However, Daniel Fish makes the same alteration in his 2019 Broadway revival. The immediate presence of the farmers and cowmen joining Curly to sing “Oh What a Beautiful Mornin’” gives mom an opportunity for a photo, but also sends a clear message about the central theme of *Oklahoma!*—the community. Throughout the play, the ensemble of farmers and cowmen join principal characters in songs that are traditionally solos. Aunt Eller and the ensemble join Curly in “The Surrey With the Fringe On Top,” Bystanders receive solo lines in “Kansas City,” The women join Laurey to sing “Many a New Day,” the ensemble joins Laurey and Curly in “People Will Say We’re In Love,” Female ensemble members sing “Out of My Dreams” to Laurey, and the entire cast participates in a truncated version of the Dream Ballet.

In addition to changes in the musical structure, the play tightens up dialogue and presents nearly every major plot point from the original libretto. While the central conflict of Laurey choosing between Curly and Jud Fry is still present, the darker subplot of Jud Fry is eliminated. Laurey no longer describes to Aunt Eller how uneasy Jud makes her feel, Jud does not terrorize Laurey in the Dream Ballet, and the dispute is ultimately settled when Curly outbids Jud for Laurey’s hamper. The comedic subplot involving Ado Annie, Will Parker, and Ali Hakim is still present, with obvious cuts for time and content. While Ado

Annie still delivers the rousing “I Cain’t Say No,” the song is limited to simply one verse and chorus (as many songs in the abridgement are). Ali Hakim’s frank opposition to marriage, as expressed in “It’s a Scandal! It’s an Outrage!” is eliminated in favor of a more wholesome love triangle. The situation is peacefully resolved, without Ado Annie’s Pa threatening Ali Hakim with a gun. After the message of togetherness is introduced in “The Farmer and The Cowman,” and Curly wins Laurey over in the bidding war, the plot comes to a quick resolution. Without the death of Jud and the implications of the speedy trial, the cast is left to celebrate the community in the rousing title-song finale.

Getting to Know...*The King and I*

In *Getting to Know...The King and I*, the original plot and dialogue are, for the most part, intact. While major cuts are noted, representations of almost every major scene are performed in the abridged edition. The musical begins on a steamer for Siam, as Anna imparts the lesson to “Whistle a Happy Tune” to her young son, Louis. Captain Orton’s initial warnings to Anna about the nature of power in Siam remains. With this idea in mind, the action moves to the palace. In the first palace scene Anna meets the King, the promise of a brick residence adjoining the palace is reneged, and Tuptim arrives as a gift from Burma. While the original musical uses pages of a dialogue and a musical number for Tuptim, the abridgment consolidates this action to a few pages. Directly following the “March of the Siamese Children,” Anna’s first lesson of the maps serves as a segue into “Getting to Know You.” After the schoolroom scene, the hidden romance of Tuptim and Lun Tha is introduced with a truncated version of “We Kiss in a Shadow.” Immediately following, the King’s soliloquy “A Puzzlement” remains, but is trimmed down to express the central idea of uncertainty. Following his scene, the King pays a visit to the schoolroom in which he and

Anna have their fight as to her status as servant. Rather than Anna indulging in “Shall I Tell You What I Think of You?” she is more immediately visited by Lady Thiang. However, in a stunning display of solidarity, “Something Wonderful” becomes an ensemble number. Several of the King’s wives take solos in the song, all assuring Anna of the King’s good intention. When Anna goes to the King, the pair quickly reaches the conclusion that a grand dinner (accompanied by Tuptim’s play) will entertain their English visitors. With no intermission, the quick jump to the evening of the affair is made. The Royal Wives engage in dialogue that expresses their anxieties about the visiting English, and Sir Edward Ramsey is introduced. To tie up the Tuptim and Lun Tha subplot, the lovers share a scene directly before the ballet. Rather than singing their second love duet, “I Have Dreamed,” the pair simply exchange dialogue regarding the plot to escape following the performance.

In a pointed commentary on the evils of slavery, Tuptim and the court dancers perform their ballet version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In this abridgement, the ballet is performed nearly in its entire original form (the “Happy Friends Dance” section being one of the only omissions). As in the original, the scene and song “Shall We Dance?” follows the ballet sequence, but is interrupted by the arrival of a captured Tuptim. In a difficult scene (in terms of content), the King raises the whip to beat Tuptim, but cannot follow through. As in the original script, this ultimately leads to his downfall. *Getting to Know...The King and I* ends with the familiar scene of Prince Chulalongkorn making new decrees as the old King peacefully passes on stage. The abridgement for pre-high school students deals with *The King and I*’s central conflict of slavery with frank depictions of unsettling action in the original. As opposed to *Oklahoma!*, which shies away from its darker subject, *Getting to Know...The King and I* tackles it head on.

Getting to Know...*The Sound of Music*

The Sound of Music appears to be a natural fit for young performers. Since the release of the film version in 1965, *The Sound of Music* has been a cornerstone of family entertainment in American households. The songs and the story are sure to be familiar to students performing the show, and their families in the audience. While the film adaptation is regarded as an innocent and sentimental film, the story is imbued with serious themes. The musical grapples with life-altering grief as Captain Von Trapp and his children deal with the loss of their wife and mother. Captain Von Trapp has dismissed music, and consequently every fond memory of his wife, from his life. Maria embarks on a quest to bring joy to the Von Trapp family in the wake of their grief. Maria grapples with her faith and place in the world. Growing up on the mountain, Maria has always felt called to a life in the abbey, but Mother Abbess feels that God has another calling in mind. While she develops a love for the children and their father, Maria must wrestle with her duties to the religious life. These serious ideas are set against the backdrop of the Nazi invasion. In a time of political strife, every character must decide where his or her allegiance lies, and how best to carry on. A multitude of weighty questions are posed, and the answers are woven into the fabric of this timeless tale.

Through Mother Abbess, central characters in *The Sound of Music* may decide what is good. In a culmination of dramaturgical evolution, Mother Abbess is the Rodgers and Hammerstein “wise woman” in her final form. Not only does she provide momentum for the action to proceed, advising Maria to “Climb Ev’ry Mountain,” but her wise words advise in multiple places. Early in the musical, Mother Abbess gently reminds the other nuns to “talk

to Maria instead of *about* her.”⁸ In the final scene of the musical, Mother Abbess provides wisdom for the Von Trapp family as they flee Austria, saying “You’ll have help. ‘For Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing.’”⁹ The wisdom of Mother Abbess leads the action of the play, answers moral inquiries, and rests on her solid faith. At the time of the original production of *The Sound of Music*, most everyone could agree that the nuns were good and the Nazis were bad. While a 21st-century audience recognizes the atrocities imposed by the Nazi regime, the place of religion in society and piety of religious leaders may be called into question. News outlets continually report on the place of prayer and religion in school, the corrupt dealings of megachurch preachers, and the acts of abuse by religious leaders. On the stage, plays such as *Doubt: A Parable* (2004) by John Patrick Shanley and *The Christians* (2014) by Lucas Hnath, present unfavorable perspectives on religion. Major themes in *The Sound of Music*, and the wisdom of Mother Abbess, depend on faith. In the “Getting to Know” edition of *The Sound of Music*, the religious influence is hard to disguise. While religion in school is hotly debated, *The Sound of Music* may just prove to be an exception.

The “Getting to Know” version of *The Sound of Music* begins with the same Latin “Preludium” as the original musical, albeit a truncated version, followed by the memorable scene on the mountainside. Maria sings “The Sound of Music” and is joined by the ensemble, who are indicated in the stage directions as holding pieces of scenery representing trees, birds, and other sights on the mountainside. Following the musical’s title song is the well-

⁸ Oscar Hammerstein II, Richard Rodgers, Howard Lindsay, and Russel Crouse. *The Sound of Music*. (New York, NY: Williamson Music, Inc., 1960), 12.

⁹ *Ibid.* 101.

known song “Maria,” in which the other nuns ponder Maria’s position in the abbey. The scene prior is trimmed for time, as much of the dialogue is in the “Getting to Know” collection, but the song remains in its entirety. In addition to the named nuns (Sister Berthe, Sister Margaretta, Sister Sophia, and Mother Abbess), female ensemble members join in the song. After Mother Abbess sends Maria from the abbey to the Von Trapp house, the children meet Maria. After being introduced by the authoritarian Captain Von Trapp, Maria is left alone with the children. As in the original, the children ask Maria about her guitar and she leads them in “Do Re Mi.” In the “Getting to Know” adaptation, the song is performed in its entirety. After the “Do Re Mi” scene, Liesl sneaks away to meet Rolf, who makes subtle references to German invasion. The classic duet, “Sixteen Going on Seventeen” is performed. In the following scene, Maria entertains the children who are afraid of a thunderstorm. While the dialogue preceding the song is trimmed for time, the song (“The Lonely Goatherd”) is almost entirely intact. After the thunderstorm scene, the Captain returns from Vienna with Max Detweiler. Their dialogue is considerably cut, as well as the song “How Can Love Survive.” However, their interaction is still interrupted by Rolf, who heils to greet the Captain. Curiously, Baroness Schraeder, who is typically introduced in this scene, is altogether eliminated from the “Getting to Know” version.

From there, the Captain hears the children singing a reprise of the title song and music is reintroduced to the Von Trapp family home. Captain Von Trapp holds a grand party, during which his guests make more allusion to the German invasion. Captain Von Trapp and Maria dance the “Ländler” and for the first time, a mutual attraction is established. The children sing “So Long, Farewell” to the party guests, and the evening culminates in Maria’s unexpected departure. At the abbey, Maria expresses her conflict between God and the

Captain's love. Mother Abbess, joined by the nuns in the final chorus, sings "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." Back at the Von Trapp home, the children sing under Max's direction. Once again, Captain Von Trapp and Max briefly discuss German invasion. Later, Maria returns to the Von Trapp family. Almost immediately upon Maria's return, the Captain asks her to marry him. The wedding scene is eliminated, and the action moves straight to Captain Von Trapp and Maria's return from their honeymoon. Upon their arrival they learn that the children are to sing in the Salzburg Festival, and the Captain is not thrilled at the prospect. Soon, the Captain is paid a visit by Admiral Von Schreiber of the Navy of the Third Reich. Captain Von Trapp is to report immediately to the Navy of the Third Reich, but the Salzburg Festival once again proves to be the perfect alibi. At the festival, the family sings "Edelweiss." After escaping the festival, the Von Trapp family seeks refuge in the abbey. In the classic finale of the show, Mother Abbess sends the family off to their escape. Mother Abbess, joined by the rest of the nuns, sings a reprise of "Climb Ev'ry Mountain."

In examining the adaptations of *Oklahoma!*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music* for the "Getting to Know" collection, different approaches are noted for each adaptation. *Oklahoma!* is stripped of the sinister tones in the Jud Fry sub-plot. Additionally, the love triangle between Ado Annie, Will Parker, and Ali Hakim is cleaned up and simply portrayed as innocent fun. *The King and I* and *The Sound of Music* take a different approach. There is no suggestion of a romantic, or sexual, attraction between Anna and the King (for obvious reason). The lovers, Lun Tha and Tuptim, sing only one of their duets, in favor of focusing Tuptim's story on the issue of slavery. *The Sound of Music* eliminates Baroness Schraeder, closing the love triangle in favor of political commentary. While Max and Baroness Schraeder do not sing the duet "No Way to Stop It" in which they try to convince Captain

Von Trapp to air on the side of self-preservation, the dialogue depicting political tension between Austria and Germany remains. The musicals in the “Getting to Know” collection are tailored to suit young performers. While this may mean transposing keys for young voices, and including the ensemble to ensure more stage time, the adaptations do not shy away from serious thematic material.

Educational Resource Guides

Several Broadway and regional theatres make educational outreach an integral part of their programming and operations. In examining educational resources offered, teacher resource guides seem to be standard. Educational resource guides are meant for teachers who will be bringing their students to see a live theatrical event. These resource guides (specific to each production) offer questions and activities that pertain both to theatrical production, and dramaturgical exploration of the text. In examining educational resource guides from the 2019 Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!*, The Seattle 5th Avenue Theatre’s 2015 production of *Carousel*, and Lincoln Center’s Broadway revivals of *South Pacific* (2008) and *The King and I* (2015), varied approaches are noted. Keeping the “Getting to Know” collection in mind, the aforementioned resource guides each offer insight to the world of theatrical production. Examples from each include sections on theatre etiquette, interviews with actors and creative team members, scene analysis, and general theatre history. Resource guides also explore dramaturgical information including historical context, key terms, and production history. Additionally, some resource guides take advantage of the opportunity to discuss issues posed by the production. *The King and I*’s resource guide dedicates an entire section to “the issues,” where slavery and the place of women in society are discussed. *South Pacific*’s resource guide dedicates a section to explore race and wartime romance. *Carousel*’s resource guide

alludes to the themes of violence, poverty, and gender norms found in the musical. Each resource guide includes pertinent information regarding theatrical production and historical information, provided activities emphasis these learning goals. Resource guides may ultimately prove to be an opportunity to debate issues posed by the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein in an educational environment.

Oklahoma!

The resource guide to accompany the 2019 Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!* offers a unique perspective to students of theatre. While no target age group is specified, the material offers an introduction to the practice of theatre through the lens of *Oklahoma!*. The four sections of this resource guide are as follows: About the Show (including a synopsis, fast facts, and key terms), Pre Show (including activities requiring students to research, compare, and analyze), Process (including trivia, interviews, and production-specific information), and Post Show (including reflection questions and activities). The resource guide (which does not credit an author or editor), does not tie activities or discussion to Common Core standards. The nature of the activities and their introductory-level lessons may imply that the material may be best suited for students in their first theatre courses. The description offered to students describing the new production of *Oklahoma!* as “funny and sexy, dark and terrifying,” may preclude this guide from use by pre-high school teachers. From a survey of the activities and information provided in the *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide, the educational focuses are the practice of theatre and the new perspective of Daniel Fish’s production.

The resource guide’s “About the Show” section includes a synopsis of *Oklahoma!*, fast facts about the musical, and key terms found in the musical’s libretto. The synopsis page is rather short. Unlike the synopsis pages found in the “Getting to Know” collection, this

page offers three sentences setting up the premise of the musical. The rest of the synopsis page offers a paragraph about the original production, and then a paragraph about Daniel Fish’s reimagined production. Rather than giving students a clear plot overview, the synopsis page reads as a press release. The page of fast facts clearly defines the setting and the characters of *Oklahoma!* by offering the when, where and who. Additionally, the fast fact section informs students of *Oklahoma!*’s legacy, breaking down accolades for the original production. The key terms section familiarizes the students with definitions and illustrations of the following terms: bit, box social, Claremore, Dun, fascinators, Federal Marshal, The Little Wunder, lunch hamper, smokehouse, and surrey. To conclude the “Pre Show” section, the first classroom activity is introduced. The activity, called Oklahoma Alphabet Relay, places students in the role of dramaturg. The learning goal outlined at the beginning of the lesson reads, “In this activity your students will be dramaturgs and learn as much as they can about the world of the show in a fast and fun way.”¹⁰ Utilizing markers and posters with letters A-Z written on them, teachers are to lead students in the following steps:

1. Split your class into small teams (there should be no less than 4 people per team.) Start with a poster for each team, each lettered A-Z down the side, with room to write after each letter. Place the posters side by side where students can easily reach and write on them.
2. Give each team 5 minutes to research as much as they can about Oklahoma 1906. The goal is to get as much information about the historical time period as possible.
3. Once the 5 minutes have finished, instruct the teams to put everything away and stand in a line facing the prepared posters.
4. Explain that each team needs to come up with one-word answers to the prompt OKLAHOMA 1906 from A to Z. Working from a single file line, the first person in the line will run to the poster and write a word that starts with the next available letter on the list—starting with A, then B, and so on. The goal is to complete every word on the poster A-Z as quickly as possible. Once groups have finished their list, they are encouraged to cheer on the other groups to finish.

¹⁰ “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide.” 2019. 6.

5. After all the teams have completed their poster, the class gathers where everyone can see the posters to reflect on the activity and the ideas they generated.
6. Go through each list together. Teams can challenge words that other teams wrote and the teams can explain their answer. Teachers will have ultimate say if it counts as a point.
7. The team who finished first and/or has the most points, wins!¹¹

The activity concludes by suggesting that teachers may repeat with new subjects being “musical theatre” or “Rodgers and Hammerstein.” The alphabet relay involves the students in the integral production role of the dramaturg. Much like the “Getting to Know” collection, this activity offers insight to the practice of theatre production.

The resource guides “Pre Show” section provides students with an activity to compare and contrast, an activity to analyze lyrics from the musical, and information on Rodgers and Hammerstein, as well as the new production’s design and direction. This section works to prepare students to attend the 2019 revival with a critical eye, and works to fine tune these skills for a student of theatre. The first activity, called Compare and Contracts, asks students to view images from the original 1943 Broadway production and the 2019 Broadway revival. Once the students make their own observations, the exercise provides the teacher with reflection questions for his/her class. The class discussion is designed to ponder what students expect to see in the upcoming production. Teachers are provided this script to conclude the activity:

Over 75 years after Rodgers & Hammerstein reinvented the American musical, this is OKLAHOMA! as you’ve never seen or heard it before—reimagined for the 21st century. Stripped down to reveal the darker psychological truths at its core, Daniel Fish’s production tells a story of a community circling its wagons against an outsider, and the violence of the frontier that shaped America. Upending the sunny romance of a farmer and a cowpoke, this OKLAHOMA! allows the classic musical—and our

¹¹ “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide.” 2019. 6.

country—to be seen in a whole new light. Funny and sexy, dark and terrifying, “this is the OKLAHOMA! that was there all along.” (*New York Magazine*)¹²

The other activity in the “Pre Show” section, called Analyze the lyrics, provides students with lyrical excerpts from *Oklahoma!* accompanied by reflection questions. After reading excerpts from “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top,” “The Farmer and the Cowman,” “Kansas City,” and the musical’s title song, students are provided with the following discussion questions: What do you notice about the lyrics? Based on the lyrics what do you think is happening in this moment in the play? Why do you think this character’s is singing this song? Who do you think this song is being sung to and why?¹³ Additionally, the “Pre Show” section offers a breakdown of differences between the original production and the Daniel Fish production, specifically commenting on direction, choreography, moments in history, and casting requirements. A page with a short passage about the musical partnership of Rodgers and Hammerstein points out two distinct facts to the students. First, the mention of the other major four works by Rodgers and Hammerstein—*Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*—allows students to contextualize the work. Second, the distinction of *Oklahoma!* as the first “book musical” allows students to understand the musical’s place in theatre history. The “Pre Show” section concludes with a brief view of inspiration images behind the scenic design, accompanied by a statement on the productions unique blend of “dinner theater” and the “American musical.” With historical context provided, and student expectations established, the focus of the resource guide shifts to “Process” and “Post Show” sections.

¹² “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide.” 2019. 7.

¹³ *Ibid.* 12.

The “Process” section gives students even more insight to theatrical production, and offers commentary on an issue unique to Daniel Fish’s revival. Beginning with an actor Q&A, the uncredited author interviews actors Rebecca Naomi Jones (Laurey Williams), Damon Daunno (Curly McClain), Ali Stroker (Ado Annie), and Patrick Vail (Jud Fry). The three questions posed are as follows: What is your favorite part of the show to perform and why? What advice would you give to a student who wants to pursue acting/theater? For a student who is about to see this version of *Oklahoma!*, what is one thing they should think about or know before seeing the show?¹⁴ The next entry in the “Process” section is page outlining brief biographies of Daniel Fish (director), Daniel Kluger (Orchestrations, Arrangements, Music Supervisor), and John Heginbotham (Choreographer). The “Process” section concludes by commenting on the productions use of guns both in the scenic and property designs. Students are asked a series of reflection questions about guns: Why do you think there are guns in this story? What is our responsibility as theater makers when presenting guns on stage? How does the energy of the room change when there is a gun? How can that be used in theatrical storytelling? How do guns perpetuate violence in stories? What does a gun symbolize for each character in this story?¹⁵ The only activity in the “Process” section, titled Let the Words do the Work, asks students to “work with an excerpt from the show playing with how to build tension.”¹⁶ Students are given an excerpt of the scene between Curly and Jud in the smokehouse, and the teacher is asked to follow these steps:

1. Pass out scene excerpts and read out loud for the class to hear.

¹⁴ “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide.” 2019. 15.

¹⁵ Ibid. 19.

¹⁶ Ibid. 17.

2. Have a group conversation about what students' interpretations of the scene are.
 - What do you think is happening?
 - What do you think each character is feeling?
3. Invite students to find a partner and have pairs of students rehearse the scene.
4. Once they have read the scene out loud together, introduce the concept of "dialing it up". Explain that there is a scale from 1-10. 1 being as neutral as possible and 10 being as overly theatrical as possible. Invite students to read their scene at a level 10. Then invite them to read it at a level 1. Reflect on how those two ways of reading changed the scene.
5. Invite student pairs to choose a level between 1-10 and perform their scenes in front of the class. Compare and contrast scenes based on the emotional qualities that students chose.

Modification: you can also choose an emotional quality and students should play the scene at that level.
6. Explain to students that their next goal is to make the tension of the scene as high as possible using theatrical devices.
 - Tempo: what happens if both actors speak very quickly or very slowly?
 - Volume: what happens if both actors whisper?
 - Placement of actors: what happens if the actors are on opposite sides of the room?
 - Lighting: what happens if the scene is performed in the dark?
7. Invite student pairs to perform their scenes again. Compare and contrast scenes again. Compare and contrast scenes and have a conversation with you class about which scenes felt the most tense and why.
8. After working on the scene remind students to specifically watch for this scene when they go see the show and reflect on how tension was built.¹⁷

The "Process" section gives students deep insight to theatrical production. Students are asked to ponder the issues, study the professionals who work on the production, and even participate in an acting activity.

The final section, "Post Show," is the shortest section of the resource guide. The activities provided are based on students having seen the 2019 Broadway revival. The first activity in the section is a simple collection of reflection questions for students to discuss after seeing the show. The reflection questions are as follows:

- Who in the play is considered an outsider? How does the community treat the outsiders? What does this remind you of in your life today?

¹⁷ "Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide." 2019. 17.

- At the end of the play there is a trial. Do you think that trial was fair? Do you think that trial would be different once the territory became a state? Why or why not?
- Why do you think Laurey treated Curly the way she did? Why did she say yes to Jud at the box social? How does Laurey feel at the end of the play?
- What was a moment of the play that stuck with you? What was a moment of the play that surprised you? What was a moment of the play that confused you?
- Why do you think this play is being told right now in this way?¹⁸

The final two activities ask students to reflect on the dream ballet, and to respond to their experience in an artistic way. In the activity titled, Dream or Nightmare Dance, the students are asked to ponder the following questions about the dream ballet:

1. As a class discuss:
 - What were your experiences while watching the 2019 version of the dream ballet?
 - What questions do you have?
 - What surprised you?
 - What is your interpretation of the dance?
2. Watch the original Agnes de Mille dream ballet and discuss:
 - How do the two dances compare?
 - How does each dance represent the time period it was created in?
3. The dream ballet is said to be a manifestation of Laurey's self-conscious. [sic] What if you were to create a dance based on another character's self-conscious? [sic]¹⁹ Now, it's time to be the choreographer. When thinking about your dance consider dream logic versus narrative logic.
 - What style music would you use?
 - What dance would it be?
 - Who would be the dancers?
 - What kind of movements would be in the dance?
4. Share out what people have created.²⁰

In an activity called Collage Creations, students are asked to artistically synthesize their experience, following these directions:

1. Find newspaper articles and writings from the years 1906, 1943 and 2019.

¹⁸ "Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide." 2019. 20.

¹⁹ Perhaps the author meant "subconscious."

²⁰ "Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide." 2019. 21.

- Modification: The teacher can prepare clippings beforehand to expedite the printing process.
2. Cut out words that remind students of their experience seeing the show.
 3. Cut out pictures based on the themes of the show.
 4. Collage an artistic response to the show.
 5. Take a picture of your creation and post it on social media. #oklahomabway²¹

These final reflection questions take advantage of a guided discussion to discuss issues in *Oklahoma!* While the imposing presence of guns, the focus on the unfair trial, and the focus on the community's attitudes toward outsiders may be unique to this production, the concept is applicable across the canon. Other resource guides for Rodgers and Hammerstein production show noticeably different approaches to their presentation of information.

Carousel

The resource guide for the 5th Avenue Theatre's 2015 production of *Carousel* is similar to that of *Oklahoma!* in its introduction to the theatrical experience, but delves deeper into the practice of analysis. Another key difference between the educational resources is the 5th Avenue Theatre's emphasis on Common Core State Standards in their curricular guide. Within the guide prepared by the 5th Avenue Theatre's education and outreach, thematic elements are tied to curriculum and analysis seeks to answer questions posed by the text. Additionally, the guide offers an introduction to theatrical practice by introducing theatre etiquette and the elements of design. In conjunction with their curricular guides, The 5th Avenue Theatre offers a unique opportunity through its Rising Star Project, in which students from the Seattle area were given the chance to perform *Carousel*. At the conclusion of *Carousel*'s professional run in 2015, students were able to step into the show on the 5th Avenue Theatre. With tools presented in the 5th Avenue Theatre's curricular guide, students

²¹ "Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Resource Guide." 2019. 22.

receive an introduction to the theatrical experience, learn historical context, and analyze plot, character, and symbols.

In the introduction to the packet of curriculum resources, Orlando Morales (Director of the Rising Star Project) examines the themes and connections in *Carousel*. Morales specifically points to the themes of personal responsibility and adulthood, cycles of violence and cycles of poverty, symbolism in theatrical productions, gender norms and nonconformity, music and melody as “texts” and narrative, 19th century America vs. post-WWII American vs. present-day America, and community (structure) vs. individualism.²² Morales offers *Carousel* as a classic, and says that while students do not always respond to classics, he believes that *Carousel*’s song and dance may hold the interest of students. This production, Morales hopes, will “serve as a vehicle for analysis, discussion, and connection”²³ among students.

In connecting *Carousel* with the Washington State Common Core Standards, the authors of the 5th Avenue’s curriculum guide identify four major categories in which connections may be made, the first is “Dramatic Text.” The guide poses these questions and activities as starting points:

- Analyze literary aspects of a script.
- Analyze the manner in which an actor delivers the text (incorporating communicative and public speaking learning objectives).
- Song lyrics can be examined for rhyme scheme, structure, and imagery.
- Dramatic action and subtext can serve as alternate ways to approach asking students to make inference based on the text.
- How does this character change over the course of the play?²⁴

²² Albert Evans, Heidi Staub, and Orlando Morales. “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*: The 5th Avenue Theatre 2014-2015 Season Curriculum Resources.” (The 5th Avenue Theatre Education & Outreach, 2015), 2.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 3.

The second area of proposed exploration is “Dance & Movement.” Through this area, students are challenged to examine not only the dance critically, but the blocking and stage directions. Proposed questions and activities are as follows:

- Choreography and fight sequences can be analyzed in terms of style, purpose, and storytelling.
- How was the actor able to express sadness through movement?
- What relationship do you see between the two characters based on how they are standing?
- After reading this script, what direction and blocking would you give your actors?²⁵

The third area of proposed exploration is “Mise-En-Scène.” In other words, all visual design areas. Proposed questions and interdisciplinary connections are as follows:

- Students can be asked to interpret the choices of the designers.
- Styles of analysis and inquiry can be borrowed from Visual Arts.
- How did this production use lighting to reflect the character’s emotion?
- How does this character costume reveal aspects of her character and point-of-view?²⁶

The fourth and final area of proposed curricular exploration is “Music.” The guide makes a point to mention that the structure of the musical play depends on music to move the story forward. Proposed questions and activities are as follows:

- Students can be asked to explain the purpose or effect of music in specific parts of the play.
- Students can analyze melody, style, mood, and rhythm.
- Why does this character begin singing? Would the play be different if he continued in spoken dialogue? Does this character change her mind during the song? How do you know?

²⁵ Albert Evans, Heidi Staub, and Orlando Morales. “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*: The 5th Avenue Theatre 2014-2015 Season Curriculum Resources.” (The 5th Avenue Theatre Education & Outreach, 2015), 3.

²⁶ Ibid.

- Students could also be asked to consider sound effects of the use of “sound design.”²⁷

The various areas of academic explorations, discussion points, and activity prompts are evidence of musical theatre’s interdisciplinary nature. Throughout the curriculum guide, thoughtful questions and exercises are presented for students and teachers.

As a prelude to the performance, students are presented information about Rodgers and Hammerstein and their journey to *Carousel*. Albert Evans (Artistic and Music Associate) writes a section titled “Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Dramatic Masterpiece” in which he outlines the adaptation process the writers employed to turn *Liliom* to *Carousel*. A detailed synopsis is provided. The synopsis, sourced from the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization’s website, condenses the major plot points to five paragraphs for students to read. Following the synopsis is a breakdown of principal characters in *Carousel*. The curriculum guide also offers a few points on character names for students to think about. The authors pose the questions, “What can you infer from any of these character names?”²⁸ Further, students are asked “For each character, what kind of impression does his or her name leave with you?”²⁹

The next section of the curriculum guide offers information pertinent to the theatergoing experience. Beginning with a passage on theatre etiquette, students are versed in the audience member do’s and don’ts. Points cover formalities such as cell phone use, food and drink, reaction to the show, and other disruptions. The content advisories section takes a

²⁷ Albert Evans, Heidi Staub, and Orlando Morales. “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*: The 5th Avenue Theatre 2014-2015 Season Curriculum Resources.” (The 5th Avenue Theatre Education & Outreach, 2015), 3.

²⁸ Ibid. 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

cautious and all-encompassing approach to issues presented in *Carousel*. In warning students about sexual references, the song “June Is Bustin’ Out All Over” is mentioned for its thematic focus on “spring courtship rituals.”³⁰ Additionally, an implied prior sexual relationship between Mrs. Mullin and Billy is mentioned. The guide warns students about violence, both portrayed and mentioned. The acts of violence depicted on stage are limited to Billy’s threatening Mrs. Mullin, his ultimate act of suicide, and the scene in which Billy hits Louise. However, references to violence in the script are numerous, as Billy’s abuse is a main plot point. Additionally, students are warned of minor instances of adult language and consumption of alcohol. The 5th Avenue Theatre’s frank content warnings address several issues identified in *Carousel*’s libretto.

In providing students with historical context for *Carousel*, the guide seems to be limited in comparison to research in Lincoln Center’s guides for *South Pacific* and *The King and I*. However, the information provided helps students contextualize the action of *Carousel*, both geographically and chronologically. The historical timeline in the guide spans 1873 to 1956, and provides students with context for the action of *Carousel* and for its original production. Along the timeline, dates for the fictional events of the story are placed alongside dates marking the premieres of *Liliom* and *Carousel*. Additionally, the dates marking the beginning and end of World War II further contextualize *Carousel*’s place in history. Following the timeline for historical context, a historical map of coastal Maine geographically contextualizes the events of *Carousel*.

³⁰ Albert Evans, Heidi Staub, and Orlando Morales. “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*: The 5th Avenue Theatre 2014-2015 Season Curriculum Resources.” (The 5th Avenue Theatre Education & Outreach, 2015), 7.

The next section of the curriculum guide gives students insight as to the art of theatrical production. Beginning with an interview titled, “Custom Made For You,” author Heidi Staub interviews scenic, lighting, and costume designers about their process and collaboration. The interview does not focus solely on the design for *Carousel*, but rather the general disciplines. However, the pages are inset with costume and scenic renderings from the production team behind *Carousel*. Costume renderings for Billy Bigelow, Julie Jordan, Carrie Pipperidge, Star Keeper, and Mrs. Mullin line the page. Scenic renderings for Nettie Fowler’s Spa, an amusement park, and the base setting also appear. Following the article on design is a character analysis of the couple on the carousel, Julie Jordan and Billy Bigelow. The analysis, penned by Albert Evans, offers textual evidence and poses questions to the reader. In these passages, students of theatre are given insight to specific areas of production, and those areas are tied to curricular standards.

The final section of *Carousel*’s curricular guide introduces students to the idea of “the character beat” and offers an exercise in guided scene analysis. Additionally, the idea of symbolism is introduced accompanied by discussion points for the class. The guide clearly defines a character beat as “the smallest unit of action or motivation.”³¹ The idea is further contextualized for students, the author saying, “In a musical, or film, a ‘scene’ is made of a series of character beats. An ‘act’ is made of a series of scenes.”³² The section further describes a character beat as having three dimensions: objective, obstacle and action. Students are versed in beat changes, character through-line, and super-objective. Following

³¹ Albert Evans, Heidi Staub, and Orlando Morales. “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*: The 5th Avenue Theatre 2014-2015 Season Curriculum Resources.” (The 5th Avenue Theatre Education & Outreach, 2015), 14.

³² *Ibid.*

the lesson in beats, a guided scene analysis asks students to identify the following in *Carousel*'s "Bench Scene": the character's objective, the character's obstacle, and the character's action. In conclusion, the activity asks students to step into the director's shoes. The ending prompt asks, "After analyzing this scene, what direction and guidance would you give an actor before he or she read or performs the text? Write a supported paragraph describing some of your specific choices as a director."³³

The next page in this section introduces students to the idea of symbolism. The authors have defined a symbol as "an object, animate or inanimate, that represents or stands for something else" and symbolism as "the use of symbols to represent an idea or meaning."³⁴ When examining symbols in the 5th Avenue's production of *Carousel*, the page provides stars and light bulbs as examples for the students. Stars are inherent to *Carousel*'s libretto, and the guide asks students to list things that stars can represent. The author goes on to explain that the lighting designer has chosen to represent stars with light bulbs in this particular production. Students are asked what light bulbs may represent in culture, and why a designer would use light bulbs to symbolize stars. The final activity offered by the 5th Avenue's curriculum guide is a discussion on symbolism in *Carousel*. The page offers three prompts that probe students as to thematic symbols in the musical. The first prompt asks students to "Brainstorm a list of things that a carousel can symbolize. Try also to think beyond what a carousel looks like, and also consider how a carousel functions."³⁵ Target

³³ Albert Evans, Heidi Staub, and Orlando Morales. "Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*: The 5th Avenue Theatre 2014-2015 Season Curriculum Resources." (The 5th Avenue Theatre Education & Outreach, 2015), 15.

³⁴ Ibid. 16.

³⁵ Ibid. 17.

responses are provided for the teacher, examples include cycles, infinity, fate, motion, etc. The next prompt asks students, “Why is a carousel the central symbol of this play?”³⁶ Target responses provided might identify the destructive cycles of Billy’s behavior, and the inevitability in other character’s lives. Finally, students are asked “If they story of your life was adapted into a film or a musical full of symbolism, what symbol would become most significant? Explain why using specific examples.”³⁷

The 5th Avenue Theatre’s curriculum guide provides students with exercises in theatrical practice and analysis, all falling in line with state curricular standards. While this guide is light on dramaturgy, students are posed with several deeply analytical questions. Additionally, the guide seems to be tailored to high school theatre students. This guide for *Carousel* mentions several of the issues identified within the libretto. However, discussion questions are not necessarily structured to illicit responses to these problems. While discussion questions and activities are analytical in nature, the learning goals seem to be oriented toward symbolism as a literary device. In any case, the 5th Avenue Theatre’s strong ties to curricular standards ensures that the material is relevant and applicable to teachers and students statewide.

South Pacific

Lincoln Center Theater’s “Study Guide for Teachers” to accompany to 2008 Broadway revival of *South Pacific*, offers a comprehensive view of the musical’s history, thematic elements, and production. Additionally, the beginning of the guide offers

³⁶ Albert Evans, Heidi Staub, and Orlando Morales. “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *Carousel*: The 5th Avenue Theatre 2014-2015 Season Curriculum Resources.” (The 5th Avenue Theatre Education & Outreach, 2015), 17.

³⁷ Ibid.

connections to New York City’s Blueprint (curricular standards) for the arts. Like the guides for *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel*, Lincoln Center Theater’s study guide offers contextual information about Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. The guide also gives a synopsis, character breakdown, information of the setting, and all of the relevant production information present in the aforementioned guides. However, the key difference is this guide’s extensive historical background and discussion questions throughout. Additionally, the study guide includes a penultimate section called “Activities for Further Exploration” which provides unique exercises for different learning styles. Through this guide’s extensive historical background, the issues of race, ethnicity, and wartime concerns are presented to students for group deliberation.

The first section of Lincoln Center’s study guide explains practical ways for teachers to employ the study guide, and establishes curricular ties to New York state standards. The five strands of teaching and learning in theater are identified in five areas:

1. Theater Making: Acting, Playwriting/Play Making, Designing and Technical Theater, and Directing
2. Developing Theater Literacy
3. Making Connections
4. Working With Community and Cultural Resources
5. Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning³⁸

Within these five areas, numerous connections to statewide standards may be established.

Throughout the guide, discussion questions and activities may relate to multiple learning standards. The rest of the guide is divided into five sections. The first section, titled “The Play: About *South Pacific*” gives biographical information on the musicals authors, Richard

³⁸ Victoria Abrash, “Study Guide for Teachers: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2008), 3.

Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, the co-author Joshua Logan, and author of the musical's source James Michener. Historical information on American musical theatre is presented, and Rodgers and Hammerstein are cited as writing the first socially-conscious musicals. Hammerstein's work prior to the partnership is noted as evidence, as well as his social activism. This section also houses the plot synopsis and character breakdowns. Also featured in this section is writing by Laurence Maslon (author of *The South Pacific Companion*), and an interview with Ira Weitzman (Lincoln Center Theater's Associate Producer of Musical Theater).

In the section, "The Play: About *South Pacific*" teachers are provided with the following suggested activities after students learn a bit about the musical's authors, and the brief history of American musical theatre:

1. Using cooperative learning groups or pairs, have students research different aspects of musical theater history. Economics, art, literature, fashion and technology, as well as theater and music, may all factor into the research. Present the material in a report and or make a musical theater mural, or a musical about the history of musical theater.
2. Listen to the CD of *South Pacific*. Have your class list as many observations as they can about the subjects, styles and presentation of the songs. What are the songs about? Do they tell a story? Do they stand on their own? What does the sound of the music tell them? In what ways are they similar to or different from each other?³⁹

Additionally, after reading more about the vast cultural impact of *South Pacific*, teachers are provided these discussion prompts to reiterate the lasting legacy of the cultural phenomenon:

1. If your students have read *South Pacific* or seen the movie, what aspects of the story do they remember best? Was anything confusing? What parts did they respond to the most? What parts seemed least appealing? Were there parts they wished were different? How?

³⁹ Victoria Abrash, "Study Guide for Teachers: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*." (Lincoln Center Theater, 2008), 8.

2. *South Pacific* has been produced constantly, across the country and around the world, from the time of its premiere until today, almost 60 years later. Why do your students think it continues to be popular? What do they think is the play's message?⁴⁰

Direct connections to the five strands of teaching and learning in theater are noted in the suggested exercises.

In the next section of the study guide titled "The Production," teachers are given resources to discuss the current production at Lincoln Center. A subsection called "Why *South Pacific* Came to Lincoln Center" discusses the relevant themes of war, romance, and loneliness, as identified by André Bishop, artistic director. After reading this passage, the follow topics are suggested for discussion:

1. Ask your students to consider the themes explored in *South Pacific*. Think about the impact of encounters with unfamiliar people and cultures; the nature and impact of prejudice; whether 'you've got to be carefully taught' to hate and fear, or how we choose our relationships.
2. Ask your students if they can think of any type of person outside of their own culture, ethnicity or community who their parents might disapprove of their marrying. What might they say? How might you react? Discuss whether their situation is the same or different from that in *South Pacific*.
3. A wide cross-section of Americans joined up to take part in World War II. Discuss the reasons that so many different kinds of people joined up. Ask your students what they think would be worth going to war for, and what they think would motivate someone with a background like Joe Cable, Nellie Forbush or Luther Billis today.⁴¹

In these discussion prompts, students are asked to both synthesize the historical context of the musical, and to ponder the moral themes inherent to the material. Following this passage is a subsection titled "How *South Pacific* came to Lincoln Center Theatre." The passage

⁴⁰ Victoria Abrash, "Study Guide for Teachers: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*." (Lincoln Center Theater, 2008), 13.

⁴¹ Ibid. 17.

outlines the work of the director, designers, and the cast, to similar effect of the design essay in the *Carousel* curriculum guide.

The next section, titled “The Background,” gives teachers and students extensive historical information about the setting of *South Pacific*. The section begins with a detailed timeline which outlines key events in World War II, providing context for the world of *South Pacific*. The timeline goes on to chronicle the publishing of Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*, and the production history of *South Pacific*. Additionally, geographic information about the South Pacific islands is provided. A subsection, titled “Who: The people of *South Pacific*” provides information about American service people, inhabitants of the islands (including natives, Asia migrant workers, and French), and discusses the issues of race and wartime romance. The follow discussion topics are suggested:

1. Ask your students what they know about the U.S. during the 1940’s, when *South Pacific* is set. Where did they get their information and ideas? Do any of the attitudes or events of *South Pacific* seem surprising for the period?
2. Lieutenant Cable and Nellie Forbush both feel that they have to take their parent’s opinions—and prejudices— into account when choosing whom to marry. Ask your students to think about their parents’ expectations and assumptions about their life choices. Can they imagine a circumstance in which their parents might urge them not to marry someone they love? How would they respond?
3. Discuss what external factors may affect the differing opinions of parents and children. Economics? Religion? Culture? Are the factors today different from those in the 1940’s, or are they the same?⁴²

The final section of the study guide for teacher is titled, “Activities.” Here, final discussion questions are posed to students after they see *South Pacific*. The final questions are as follows:

⁴² Victoria Abrash, “Study Guide for Teachers: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2008), 32.

1. What particular feelings did the music in this production give you? Did what you were hearing add to what you were seeing on stage? Was it what you expected to hear? Why or why not?
2. *South Pacific* is set in the islands of the South Pacific during World War II. The production uses a stylized set that transforms from one location to the next quickly. Lighting helps to evoke many different locations and moods, and the costumes are historically accurate and carefully designed. Did you think these were the best production choices? Why or why not? Was it what you expected?
3. Bloody Mary thinks Liat and Lieutenant Cable should marry. He thinks that's impossible. Discuss the gap between their opinions and why they believe what they do.
4. List all of the decisions that Joe Cable makes in the play. Which are good decisions and which are not? Why does he make the decisions he does? What might he have done differently? What would have happened if he had made different choices?
5. Answer the same questions for Nellie Forbush.⁴³

The final activities provided in this section appeal to different learning styles. They are specifically catered to three categories: students who like to listen, look, and for those who like language. The listen category asks students to research and respond to mid-20th century music, or to pen a rap retelling of a scene in *South Pacific*. Activities for those who prefer visual images range from designing their own *South Pacific* poster, or to designing their own sets. Activities for those who like language include debating character choices, writing letters in character, or even imagining what happens after the curtain falls on *South Pacific*.

Lincoln Center Theater's "Study Guide for Teacher: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*" provides students and teachers with comprehensive resources pertaining to both the production and history of *South Pacific*. In considering New York state curricular standards (as presented in the Blueprint), each of the guide's discussion point and proposed activities align with theater standards. Additionally, several activities designed by the guide's author, Victoria Abrash, promote a spirit of interdisciplinary research. The guide's discussion

⁴³ Victoria Abrash, "Study Guide for Teachers: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*." (Lincoln Center Theater, 2008), 34.

of *South Pacific* does not shy away from the issues of race, but rather embraces them as a learning opportunity. Through exploring the theatrical form, the cultural impact of *South Pacific*, the historical context of World War II, and the issues of race, the study guide offers great insight to the possibilities of education's role in discussing problematic production.

The King and I

The teacher resource guide for Lincoln Center Theater's production of *The King and I*, compiled by Nicole Kempfskie, is similar in structure to the guide accompanying *South Pacific*. Classroom activities and discussion points are proposed throughout the guide, which presents a similar set of information in terms of format. The resource guide for *The King and I* presents a synopsis, character breakdown, biographical information about Rodgers and Hammerstein, historical context about Siam in the 1860s, a brief history of American musical theatre, behind-the-scenes perspectives on the production, and tackles the issues inherent in the text. However, *The King and I's* resource guide goes one step further than the others examined in this chapter. *The King and I's* teacher resource guide, in addition to proposing specific classroom activities, ties the activities to specific Common Core standards. The introduction to the resource guide identifies major learning opportunities for students:

- western imperialism and its impact on Asian countries in the 19th century;
- the historical significance of Anna Leonowens and King Mongkut of Siam;
- the work of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein and their contributions to the American theater; and
- the process of reviving a classic musical.⁴⁴

Additionally, the overall goals of the teacher resource guide are established as follows:

- connect to your curriculum with standards-based information and activities;

⁴⁴ Nicole Kempfskie, "Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide." (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 2.

- reinforce and encourage your students to exercise critical and analytical thinking skills; and
- provide you with the resources to have an engaging and educational experience at the theater.⁴⁵

The first section of the teacher resource guide, titled “The Play” gives an overview of the Rodgers and Hammerstein partnership, a synopsis of *The King and I*, and a breakdown of principal characters. The classroom activity provided in this section is titled “American Musical Primer: Introductory Activity.” At the beginning of the activity, students are divided into two groups. One group is to write “Music” on the top of a blank sheet of paper, and the other should write “Theater.” The teacher is asked to give students a few minutes to consider the following questions in relation to their group’s word:

- Where can you see or hear it?
- What are some different styles?
- What are some ways it can engage you emotionally?⁴⁶

Once students brainstorm and share their responses, they move on to the next part of the activity. Teachers should then show the class the first six minutes of Episode 1 of PBS’

Broadway: The American Musical and take notes. Afterwards, teachers are provided these discussion questions:

- Why have musicals been so popular in 20th century America?
- What do they reflect about our country? Whose stories do they tell?
- In what ways is storytelling in a musical different from a play?
- What styles of music and dance do they incorporate?⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Nicole Kempksie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The final part of the introductory lesson asks teachers to show a video excerpt from the film version of *The King and I*, in which Yul Brynner performs the song “A Puzzlement.”

Students should take notes and prepare to discuss the following questions:

- Setting: What is the setting or environment like? Where might it take place? When might it take place?
- People: Who do we meet? What is he doing?
- Style: What is happening that wouldn’t happen in ordinary life?
- Conflict: What is the character conflicted about?
- Theme: Why is he conflicted?⁴⁸

Students should share their observations in a class discussion, and make predictions about what they think *The King and I* is about. To further the analysis of “A Puzzlement,” students should be provided with the lyrics. Lyrics should be read aloud in class, and the following discussion points are provided:

- Some of these lyrics aren’t included in the film version. Why do you think the writers and filmmakers chose to do that? Do you agree with their decision? What important information is lost?
- Why do you think the writers chose to have the King sing this song alone on the stage? How does that inform what he expresses in the song? How might it be different if he were singing it to another character?
- How does this song, which comes early in the show, help to define the King’s internal and external conflicts?⁴⁹

The introductory lesson concludes there, and its Common Core connections are identified:

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1)

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2)⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Nicole Kempfskie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 11.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The treatment of background information in the teacher resource guide for *The King and I* is very similar to that of *South Pacific*. According to an author footnote, information about Rodgers and Hammerstein were lifted from Victoria Abrash's *South Pacific* resource guide. However, the lesson and its curricular ties are stronger and more concrete in Kempskie's guide.

The next section of the teacher resource guide is called "The Backdrop: Dramatizing History." The section begins with a history of Siam in the 1860s, making definite points about Western Imperialism, the cultural advances of King Mongkut, polygyny in Siam, slavery in Siam, and Buddhism. Other points of history about American slavery, the Civil War, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are presented. The chapter then goes on to give biographical histories of Anna Leonowens and King Mongkut. The classroom activities at the end of the section are titled "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* Revisited: Reflection Activity" and "From Page to Stage: Close Reading Activity." In the first activity, students are asked to read a provided excerpt and overview of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and then write a few paragraphs about their first impressions. After this part of the exercise, students are asked to read Katori Hall's essay, "What's in a Name?" from the *Lincoln Center Theater Review*.⁵¹ After the reading, the following discussion questions are provided:

- What was the author's first experience with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?
- What relevance did it have for her as a young African-American girl?
- What relevance does it have for her now?
- How does she use her personal experience with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to explore bigger questions about race?⁵²

⁵¹ Katori Hall, "What's in a Name?" *Lincoln Center Theater Review*, no. 65 (2015): 22.

⁵² Nicole Kempskie, "Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide." (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 20.

The activity is concluded after the students see Lincoln Center’s production of *The King and I*. Students are asked to reflect on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, “What’s in a Name?,” and “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” ballet to write an essay that “explores their own interpretation of the story, and how they personally connect to it.”⁵³ The second activity in the section, called “From Page to Stage: Close Reading Activity” asks students to read the first chapter of Margaret Landon’s *Anna and the King of Siam*. During their reading, students should identify the characters, setting, and conflict. Additionally, teachers should engage students in conversation about the dramatic elements of the chapter, specifically asking, “What are the most exciting, engaging, and emotional moments?”⁵⁴ Following class discussion, the teacher should divide students into small groups and have the dramatize a few pages from the chapter. After students write their scenes, class discussion should focus of musicalizing them, posing the questions: “Would there be singing in this opening scene? If so, what kind of sings? Who would sing them? Would there be dancing?”⁵⁵ Closing discussion should compare student scenes to the opening scene of *The King and I*. The Common Core connections provided in the resource guide are as follows:

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1)

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2)

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3)⁵⁶

⁵³ Nicole Kempksie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 20.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 21.

The next section of the resource guide is titled “The Style: American Musical Theater.” In this section, students are given background information on the evolution of the American musical. Passages distinguish *Oklahoma!* as the first book musical, and discuss the elements that make a book musical. A subsection provides passages and key terms about different elements of musical theatre—music, theater, and dance—further defining functions of production roles in each area. The two classroom activities provided in this section are titled “Musical Moments” Writing Activity” and “The Book Musical: Viewing Activity.” In the writing activity, students are asked to choose a novel, play, film, or short story and follow these steps:

- Choose three moments they would musicalize if they were adapting it into a musical.
- Decide what types of songs they would use in those moments (fast, slow, romantic, dramatic, comic, etc.).
- Decide which characters in the story would sing the songs.
- Decide if there would be dancing in the songs, and if so, what style of dance.⁵⁷

After the students have identified musical moments, they are asked to try their hand at writing a song. Students have two options for creating their musical moment. Students are either tasked with “using a song they already know and rewriting the lyrics to fit their story’s musicalized moment” or “creating a spoken word piece that connects to their musicalized moment.”⁵⁸ After students have created their songs, they may share with the class. The viewing activity, students are asked to review the following the criteria Rodgers and Hammerstein required when writing a musical (previously provided in this resource guide):

- The songs would grow out of the plot.
- Spectacle and dance would only occur when appropriate to the story.

⁵⁷ Nicole Kempfskie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 27.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

- The characters would grow and develop as the play unfolds.⁵⁹

The students should watch the performance of *The King and I* with these criterion in mind, and write a reflection after viewing. The Common Core connections to these lessons are as follows:

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1)

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2)

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3)⁶⁰

The next section of the guide, titled “Behind the Scenes: Reviving a Classic” contains a detailed interview with Ira Weitzman. In this interview, Weitzman gives insight into the production process for Lincoln Center’s *The King and I*. The classroom activity provided gives insight into production, but also the place of classic literature in the classroom. The activity, titled “Back in Time: Design Activity,” begins with students brainstorm what makes something classic. Students are encouraged to consider literature, music, art, film, or any other medium they can imagine. Once this discussion has taken place, students are charged with choosing a classic story they have read, the resource guide provides *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Great Gatsby*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *A Tale of Two Cities* as examples. Once students have chosen a classic story, they are asked to research the author, time period,

⁵⁹ Nicole Kempfskie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 23.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 28.

setting, and cultural contexts of the story. Then, students are asked to discuss the following questions:

- What key questions and themes does your classic story explore?
- Which of those themes are most relevant today?
- What visual images come to mind when you think about the story, questions, and themes?
- What colors, shapes, and symbols do you see?
- What sounds do you hear?⁶¹

Following this class conversation, students are asked to either come up with a scenic design or a costume design. If students choose costumes they must “find three pieces of visual or aural research that they feel captures the essence of their story and its themes and create a page of sketches and notes detailing specific costume ideas for at least three of the main characters.”⁶²If students choose scenic design they must “find three pieces of visual research or music that they feel captures the essence of their story and its themes and create a page of sketches and notes detailing ideas for the furniture, props, and scenic pieces in the play.”⁶³ Once students have completed their research and designs, they will present to the class. This activity is linked to the following Common Core standards:

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1)

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1)

⁶¹ Nicole Kempfskie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 33.

⁶² Ibid. 34.

⁶³ Ibid.

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2)⁶⁴

The final section of the teacher resource guide is titled, “Exploring the Issues.” This section identifies issues and other thematic elements in the play. The section stands as a collection of discussion questions for after students attend Lincoln Center’s *The King and I*. The first theme to be discussed is Leadership and Power. The discussion questions are as follows:

- What are the qualities of a strong leader? What qualities do you think were expected in a strong leader in the 1860s?
- Do you think that King Mongkut is a strong leader? Why or why not?
- Do you think Anna is a powerful woman? Why or why not?
- What internal conflicts does King Mongkut have with power and leadership? What external conflicts and challenges does he face?
- What conflicts do Anna and King Mongkut have with each other surrounding power?⁶⁵

The next theme presented is Modernization vs. Tradition. The discussion questions are as follows:

- In what ways is King Mongkut progressive in his ideas and thinking? In what ways is he bound to tradition?
- Why might King Mongkut and the Kralahome want to maintain Siamese traditions and customs? Why is it important for Siam to make changes?
- In what ways does Anna challenge King Mongkut and the Kralahome’s traditional views?
- What kind of ruler do you think the King’s father was? Why?
- What kind of ruler do you think Chulalongkorn will be? Why?⁶⁶

Next, the issue of slavery is presented. The discussion questions are as follows:

⁶⁴ Nicole Kempfskie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015),.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 35.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

- How does King Mongkut feel about slavery in America? How does he seem to feel about slavery in Siam?
- How does King Mongkut treat his royal wives and servants? What does he expect from them? Why?
- How does King Mongkut initially treat Anna? How does this change throughout the play?
- What are Anna’s views on human dignity and the rights of the women in the palace?
- How does “The Small House of Uncle Thomas” ballet illuminate the issue of slavery in the play? Why do you think the creators used dance to explore this issue?⁶⁷

The following issue presented is a woman’s place in society, the discussion questions are as follows:

- How would you define feminism?
- Is Anna a feminist? What principles of feminism does she uphold and how does she show her interest in the rights of women?
- Where and how does she depart from your idea of feminism?
- How do Lady Thiang and Tuptim view their roles in the royal palace? How do they view Anna?⁶⁸

The final theme in the post-show discussion is friendship despite cultural differences, and the discussion questions are as follows:

- How do the following pairs of characters find common ground despite coming from different cultures? In what ways do they help each other grow and learn?
 - Anna and King Mongkut
 - Anna and Lady Thiang
 - Anna and Tuptim
 - Louis Leonowens and Prince Chulalongkorn⁶⁹

Following the classroom discussion of major themes and issues in *The King and I*, the students should choose a principal character and determine how that character is influenced by one of the aforementioned issues. Students should look for the following:

- What their character *says* about the issue.

⁶⁷ Nicole Kempfskie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 36.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 36.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

- What their characters *thinks* and *feels* about the issue.
- What their character *does* about the issue; the actions they take.
- What the other *characters* say about their chosen character in relation to this issue.⁷⁰

Teachers are provided a handout for this activity in the back of the resource guide.

While the teacher resource guide for Lincoln Center’s production of *The King and I* closely mirrors the study guide for *South Pacific*, the major difference between the two is their relationship to statewide learning standard. While the guide for *South Pacific* makes definite connections to standards, *The King and I*’s guide lays out several classroom activities, and lists the Common Core standards to which they are connected. Additionally, both the resource guide for *South Pacific* and *The King and I* mention the issues in the text, pose questions to the students, and foster careful consideration of thematic implications. *The King and I*’s resource guide takes this idea and exercise one step further by providing specific assignments and classroom activities, directly linked to Common Core standards.

In examining educational resources from the 2019 Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!*, The 5th Avenue Theatre’s production of *Carousel*, and Lincoln Center Theater’s productions of *South Pacific* and *The King and I*, clear through-lines are noted. Each guide provides an introduction to the theatrical experience, a glimpse into the inner workings of a production, and activities to engage students with the work. However, the major difference between each guide lies in their treatment of issues presented in the musicals. *Carousel*’s guide offers content warnings, and discusses the thematic devices addressing issues in the work. *South Pacific*’s guide presents the issue of race, and asks the students to relate issues presented in the show to their own life. *The King and I*’s guide offers historical context, discussion

⁷⁰ Nicole Kempkie, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*: Teacher Resource Guide.” (Lincoln Center Theater, 2015), 37.

questions, and curricular ties to each issue inherent to the script. In future productions of the major works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, the questions posed to 21st-century theatre-goers may be best answered in the classroom.

“By your pupils you’ll be taught”

In exploring the issues posed by Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals in 21st-century performance, educational exploration may be best suited to answer our questions. Through academia’s attitudes towards problematic literature, K-12 education’s newfound opportunities in media literacy, and the vast educational resources that accompany Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, an environment conducive to problem solving may be achieved. The Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization (and other major licensing entities) have capitalized on the opportunity to place classic musicals in the hands of young performers. The “Getting to Know” collection introduces pre-high school students to the art of theatre, with hallmarks of the American musical theatre as their jumping off point. In these abridged versions of *Oklahoma!*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*, the major musical numbers, book scenes, and issues are present. Through an academic exploration of educational resources offered by commercial theatres, strong ties between state mandated curriculum and the discourse surrounding modern production of Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals are noted. Future research may blend the separate ideas of problematic literature, media literacy, and Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals as an educational resource, to respond to issues posed in this thesis. Discussion and classroom discourse surrounding issues inherent to the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals may unveil a new perspective from students across the country. An overview of historical context, theatrical production, and guided discussion

paired with the new generation's passion for social justice may blaze a new theatrical frontier. After all, as the ancient saying goes, "by your pupils you'll be taught."

CONCLUSION

Ten Minutes Ago

At the date of this writing, *Oklahoma!* has been around for 76 years. Oscar Hammerstein II passed away 59 years ago, and Richard Rodgers passed away 40 years ago. *South Pacific* recently celebrated its 70th anniversary with a gala concert. The beloved film version of *The Sound of Music* was released 54 years ago. The last Broadway premiere of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical was six years ago. Approximately 20 years ago, I danced and sang along to my VHS copy of *The Sound of Music*. The musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein have had a lasting impact on the American musical theatre. Introducing audiences to the integrated musical structure, the writing team blazed the trail for major American musicals introducing new forms such as *Company* (1970), *A Chorus Line* (1975), and *Hamilton* (2015). Their music has been an integral part of the American songbook, and serves as the soundtrack of a nation. With confidence, I say that ten minutes ago somebody somewhere hummed a Rodgers waltz. Ten seconds ago, a Hammerstein rhyme passed through their mind. Ten years from now, another decade of Rodgers and Hammerstein productions will have occurred. New directors and students of the theatre will continue to innovate and revisit them.

From this study, it is my hope that several studies will grow. As this study is a survey of the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, each show deserves undivided exploration. Theatre scholars may study *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music* individually, further educating us on the definite truths within each. Proposed studies may include: the Buddhist perspective on religious assertions in *The King and I*, cultural

assertions as to the nature of native goods (shrunken heads, grass skirts, etc.) in *South Pacific*, the truth to Anna Leonowens's tale and its adaptation in *The King and I*, a psychological study of domestic abuse (its victims and perpetrators) in *Carousel*, a critical view of Curly's crime and speedy trial in *Oklahoma!*, and so on. The possibilities are endless, and worthy of academic exploration. Above all, I believe it is important to hear the perspective of women, Asians, and other communities that are integral to this movement in the theatre. While audiences are changing, and shows change with them, it is my hope that adaptation and education efforts will propel the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein to the 22nd century.

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VITA

Gabriel J. Livingston was born and raised in Kansas City, Missouri. He attended the University of Central Missouri, graduating in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre. During his undergraduate career, Gabriel participated in several productions as director, assistant director, or stage manager. He attended the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival for three consecutive years. There, he participated in the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society Scholarship event and the Aspire KCACTF/LORT Arts Leadership Intensive. For his work at the festival, Gabriel received the distinction of Second Place Competition Panel at UCM's Scholar's Symposium and Creative Achievement Day. Other distinctions at UCM include: Initiation into Theta Alpha Phi (National Honors Theatre Fraternity), Initiation into the Order of Omega (Greek Honors Society), Outstanding Student Leadership Award (UCM Office of Student Activities), and recognition from UCM's Office of Multiculturalism and Inclusivity for his work on *A Raisin in the Sun*.

After graduating from UCM, Gabriel began his graduate career at the University of Missouri—Kansas City. While in Kansas City, Gabriel has worked as a director, stage manager, and dramaturg with companies such as Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Smashing Frames Productions, Astra Theatre Company, Louise Hyacinth Productions, and Summit Theatre Group.