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Gender and Sexuality

The American Musical—both inherently and because of the genre's historical development—has proven to be an especially fruitful venue for exploring the dynamic interplay of gender roles and sexuality. Thus, for example, to ground larger themes within personal relationships, a musical might "gender" those themes according to audience expectations and preexisting stereotypes; in chapter 4, I discussed how that has tended to work with the theme of idealism, especially in alliance with codes of chivalry. And, only slightly less often, musicals have deliberately challenged audience expectations in one way or another, making a space for exploring alternative formulations. In this, not surprisingly, they typically run parallel to contemporary societal developments, whether by engaging with emerging ideas and attitudes (either negatively or positively) or by attempting to advance alternatives more aggressively, through bringing them out in the open within a mainstream venue of demonstrated persuasive power.

Indeed, it is the nature of their persuasive power that makes musicals an important site for exploring many aspects of personal identity, since—as noted frequently in earlier chapters—musicals provide material for *performance*, material that may be performed not only by the cast of the show but also, eventually, by those in the audience who might want to appropriate or adapt that material to their own needs. Gender roles and sexuality are, above all, *performed* attributes of personal identity and so constitute a central dimension of how people are defined, both onstage and off.[1] In musicals—that is, *on* stage—frictions between larger themes and the individual characters who embody them are frequently highlighted, providing nuance to those themes and sometimes calling them into question, but always imparting a sense of immediacy to the presented persona *as a person*. Moreover, the specific actress or actor who performs each character will matter tremendously, in a reciprocating relationship, so that the performer's public persona and the specific characters he or she plays will inflect each other in intimate ways. Thus, Julie Andrews's Guenevere in *Camelot*, grounded in both the part as written and her stage persona at that time (post–*My Fair Lady* but pre–*Mary Poppins* and pre–*Sound of Music*), was to a large extent—probably necessarily, and certainly usefully—a modern sensibility blended into an existing mytho-historical character, truly believable as neither but providing more grounding for each perspective than could be achieved through a stricter allegiance to one over the other.

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Nearly always in stage portrayals, and especially in musicals, exaggeration is central to how specific attributes of a character or theme are presented, especially regarding gender and sexuality. At the same time, modes of exaggeration (even putting aside the dimension of camp) point vividly and sometimes divisively to different constituencies, among both performers and audience members. Exaggeration in performance has tended, historically, to remove women performers from the accepted boundaries of respectability, often tainting them—if only through the emphasis on personal display that often results from such exaggeration—with associations of sexual license and promiscuity. For male performers as well, this element of unseemly personal display, which is nearly endemic to performance in a musical, not only may lead to presumptions about a performer's promiscuity (historically not as problematic for a man), but also may call into question his "masculinity" (read: heterosexuality); within the more closeted theatrical environment that held sway until the later decades of the twentieth century, presumptions of male homosexuality carried at least the same taint as an actress's presumed promiscuity, so that for a man a reputation for heterosexual promiscuity could actually be an asset, simply because it shielded him from imputations of homosexuality. For an audience, exaggeration in performance, especially in terms of gender roles and sexuality, has functioned in at least three ways. For some, it has provided a liberating model, a demonstration of how one might more aggressively control and challenge the boundaries that traditionally circumscribe one's own gendered, sexual self. For others, it has provided a voyeuristic glimpse into alternatives that may be both relished and—precisely because of the element of exaggeration in their presentation—satisfyingly put aside as morally flawed, however intriguing. And, for still others, exaggerations in these dimensions created a special realm in which performance as such was privileged, sliding easily into camp but not necessarily so; this special realm was centrally important for many closeted gay men, especially pre-Stonewall (that is, before 1969), and became a particular locus of gay affiliation thereafter.

Aside from the ways in which musicals, in general terms, emphasize gender and sexuality through performance and presentation, many musicals take up these elements as particular themes, and it is with these that we will be primarily concerned in this chapter. In broadly historical terms, musicals of this kind have shifted focus, especially since Stonewall, from a preoccupation with what we might think of as "bad girls" to "bad boys," that is, from stigmatized female roles and modes of sexual expression to stigmatized male roles and modes of sexual expression, generally (but not always) reduced to licentious behavior or display for women and the suggestion of homosexuality for men. Standard tropes of representation of sexual deviance in twentieth-century America, in fiction and film as well as onstage, have included some combination of the following, generally drawing to some extent on each:

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1. the partial celebration of such alternatives for their spirit of independence and liberating effect;
2. a fostering of increased understanding of alternativity, by encouraging audiences to look beyond presumptively defining features to the mixtures of good things and bad things that define all human beings, considered as individuals; and
3. the ultimate punishment of alternativity.

The latter, in particular, is a distressingly consistent component of the mix, common to most dramatizations of sexual alternativity and carrying with it a number of possible rationales and ramifications.

Within mainstream narrative fictional genres in America, bad girls and homosexuals (especially the latter) tend to die in the end, often but not always as a token of their redemption. There are, of course, exceptions, but these tend to affirm rather than deny the imperative; thus, if *Camelot*'s Guenevere is spared the flames for her sexual sins (which are of the heart only, since they remain unconsummated in the original musical), she is severely rebuked and punished, as is Aldonza in *Man of La Mancha*. More typical are the fates suffered by Satine in *Moulin Rouge* (see chapter 2), Frenchy in the 1939 film *Destry Rides Again*, and countless homosexuals as portrayed in films, even before their homosexuality could be openly identified as such.[2] Often, it is hard to tell precisely *why* they die, only that they generally *do* die, with their deaths serving as a kind of dramatic purging. Specific rationales, often only implied, range from

1. a sense of divine justice, since these characters have sinned against Heaven and/or nature (thus, perhaps, as a moral lesson, along the lines of "see what happens"); to
2. a sense of realism, since sexual "deviants" of this kind cannot survive as such in their respective worlds (thus, perhaps, as an object lesson, along the lines of "see how far we still have to go"); or, perhaps, to
3. a sense of redemptive Christian sacrifice or saintly martyrdom, especially when such characters otherwise occupy the moral center of their narratives, so that they die, as did Christ, for the sins of others.

Intriguingly, within the latter rationale alternative sexuality functions much as idealism often does (see chapter 4), especially when that alternative sexuality is understood to be an essential component of the self, as is increasingly the case in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, any idealism centered around the imperative to remain true to one's own self and vision must logically accord expressed sexuality the highest of moral standings, even though such consistency flies in the face of specific moral codes (such as fundamentalist Christianity). In any case, the above mix of rationales is

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not always easy to sort out, and probably often deliberately so, since confusion in this regard allows the same artifact to be appreciated and understood from a similar variety of often incompatible perspectives. This is especially true in Hays-era films, which officially had to punish their sinners, or in musicals, which have historically played both sides of a number of attitudinal fences, many of the latter operating on the boundaries that separate diverse categories associated with gender and sexuality.

I have selected the specific musicals in this chapter in response to a number of considerations. I have sought a historical spread across the decades following World War II, a time frame that traverses the historical divide of Stonewall, after which homosexuality comes to some extent to displace feminine promiscuity as the principal carrier for this kind of theme. I have also sought a spread regarding how these issues are understood and dealt with, so that none of the chosen musicals should seem to resemble any of the others too closely. And I have used this opportunity to find a place in this two-volume study for musicals by important contributors to the genre I may have otherwise overlooked (thus, especially, Irving Berlin, Jule Styne, and Cy Coleman). Among the early grouping, *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946) addresses gender roles in charting a path from a "state of nature" to civilization, with its heroine adopting a variety of potential identities along the way; *Gypsy* (1959) explores the ways in which theatrical presentation, and self-presentation more generally, contribute to the formation of self, in the context of a feminized oedipal conflict; and *Sweet Charity* (1966) takes almost the opposite tack from *Gypsy*, first naturalizing identity by casting it as a given thing and inescapable, and then exploring the ways in which that essentialized identity connects and doesn't connect to its outward performance, the visible dimensions of role-playing and expressed sexuality.

Before we then cross the historical divide between the bad girls and the bad boys, I will mark the division with an interlude, to address a number of collateral issues: how key musicals (*Cabaret*, *Chicago*) have helped us abandon the "bad-girl-always-gets-punished" scenario; how persistent the "homosexuality-must-be-punished" trope proved to be in the mid-1970s (*A Chorus Line*, 1975); and how the long tradition of a closeted camp dimension in musicals figured into the mix (*The Wizard of Oz* and the film version of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* [1953]). Finally, after this transitional interlude, I will take up *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (both the 1975 film and the phenomenon), with its uninhibited celebration of difference couched within a "retro" punishment scenario (with the latter serving as its own site for celebration, since it provides yet another opportunity for outré performance), and consider the postmodern *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (1998; film version, 2001), which presents its quest for wholeness amid the various fragmentations—of self, of society—that have followed modernity, within both figurative and explicitly sexualized terms.[3]

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Annie Get Your Gun (1946), like *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948; see chapter 6) is often understood in terms of the long shadow cast by *Oklahoma!* (1943) and *Carousel* (1945), as part of a scenario in which veteran Tin Pan Alley songwriters Irving Berlin (*Annie Get Your Gun*) and Cole Porter (*Kiss Me, Kate*) attempted to write "integrated" musicals following the lead of Rodgers and Hammerstein.[4] This scenario has perhaps unduly reinforced the mythmaking that has surrounded the team of Rodgers and Hammerstein, who produced *Annie Get Your Gun* and persuaded Irving Berlin to write the songs after Jerome Kern, their first choice, died unexpectedly. Yet it is also true that *Annie* and *Kate* are far and away the most fully realized and frequently performed musicals written by Berlin and Porter;[5] moreover, by the late 1940s, in the wake of Rodgers and Hammerstein's success, both composers felt they had something to prove.

Berlin was semiretired and initially reluctant to take on *Annie Get Your Gun* because, in part, he was uncertain he would be up to the challenge. But star Ethel Merman was already aboard, since it was for her that veteran writers Dorothy and Herbert Fields conceived the show from the beginning, and Rodgers's own deep respect for Berlin provided additional encouragement. Yet, despite the consensus that Berlin rose admirably to the challenge, and despite the huge success of the resulting show both in its initial run and later, *Annie Get Your Gun* is not fully up to the "integrated" standard established by Rodgers and Hammerstein at their best. Berlin's score for *Annie* succeeds admirably on two main fronts, by responding in kind to the "folk-musical" dimension of *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* and in providing a slate of individually outstanding songs. But the score does not really measure up to the higher aesthetic standard established by Rodgers and Hammerstein, which *Kiss Me, Kate* and many later musicals would continue to advance. Moreover, Berlin's songs, in some important respects, stand apart from the show, often exhibiting a sophistication foreign to the characters who sing them—a criticism especially applicable to many of Annie's songs. Perhaps better "integration" in this sense could have been achieved had Dorothy Fields written the lyrics (as had been the plan when Kern was slated to be the composer), but Berlin—one of Tin Pan Alley's most respected lyricists—always wrote his own lyrics. Nevertheless, this particular flaw also worked to the advantage of the show's presentation of Annie as someone whose brazen, almost masculine self-assurance commands center stage throughout, since her appropriation of verbal tokens of sophistication (rhyming "Vanderbilts" with "kilts" in the early "Doin' What Comes Natur'lly," for example, in combination with a degree of sexual innuendo outside her own experience) combines with the powerfully simple device of the list song to overwhelm all potential challengers.

Like *Oklahoma!*, *Annie Get Your Gun* draws on mythologies of America's West, but those mythologies are not what is at stake in the show, which presents itself, thematically, somewhat more abstractly, as a conflict between

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an imperiled way of life, reenacted as entertainment, and a number of elements that threaten to destroy it for good.[6] Annie herself becomes the center because she embodies important elements from each side of the conflict. She is, to begin with, already a daunting set of contradictions: a primitive aspiring to civilization, a tomboy aspiring to womanhood, a person of superb capabilities who is abjectly incompetent in the one dimension of her life that seems to matter, and a person who is refreshingly, straightforwardly honest but who ends up being punished for precisely that virtue (along with the virtue of competence). But in pushing Annie to the center of things, the show displaces larger themes with more personal ones, so that we care much more about how reconciling these contradictions will affect Annie herself than about what implications her success or failures might portend for the wider world. Similarly, *Annie Get Your Gun* concerns itself with the principal themes of another of the great models for "book" musicals, *Show Boat* (1927), in probing the relationship between reality and fantasy and in confronting (if fairly weakly) the issue of race in America, offering as well a corrective to *Oklahoma!* in making Indians (rather than blacks, as in *Show Boat*) the principal racial "other" in the show.[7] Yet neither of these themes is sufficiently elaborated, in musical terms, to be anything more than a component of the personal story that occupies the foreground.

For example, Annie—like Magnolia in *Show Boat*—forms an alliance with a disenfranchised group by borrowing its musical styles, a kind of appropriation that is both innocent and respectful in itself, and is taken that way by representatives of that group in the show. Yet those representatives carry different weight in the two shows. The black population in *Show Boat* occupies its own musical space with a persuasiveness that derives additional support from casting policies that avoided blackface for most of the principal roles (but not for the shows within the show). In *Annie*, on the other hand, the Indians do not sing except in a manner approximating the deliberately fraudulent "In Dahomey" number in *Show Boat*, replete with every operative cliché for whites representing Indians in "redface": elaborate, colorful costumes with lots of leather fringe and feathers, face paint, buffalo-horn "jewelry," tribal dances, drum music, and so on. Even in this, the Indians mainly serve as backup for Annie on all levels—vocally, visually, and psychologically. Moreover, the lyric for Annie's "I'm an Indian Too" mixes respect with blatant disrespect, and the song's musical style degenerates easily into parody; indeed, its melody is actually presented *as* a parody, within the conditions set up by the show itself. Thus, the song's opening melody uses repetition and simplification to "dumb down" the musical phrases of the Indians' "Ceremonial Chant," which immediately precedes it (the latter is on the left; boldface indicates a phrase taken up in repetition, and italics a melodic simplification):

♫5.1

Dukta **Dukta**	Like the **Seminole, Navajo, Kickapoo,**
	Like those **Indians,**

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s'*na hey mo ring ta*	*I'm an Indian too.*
Cha wa ooh eh	
Hoo eh eh.	**A Sioux, ooh-ooh! A Sioux, ooh-ooh!**

As for the lyrics—probably the principal reason the song has often seemed too obnoxious in its reductive stereotyping to include in recent revivals—they offend not only through their lists of ridiculous-sounding Indian names ("Big Chief Hole in the Ground," "Falling Pants, Running Nose," "Big Chief Son of a Bear"), but also through their projection of Annie's future life as an Indian ("Looking like a flour sack with two papooses on my back").

While the crux of the show's plotting from an audience's perspective is Annie's presumption, as a woman, to be superbly capable in the hyper-masculine role of trick-shot artist and marksman (markswoman?), the show is structured around her more broadly scaled quest to define her identity in gendered terms.[8] That identity is put into question by the entire set of contradictions listed here, which her "masculine" shooting ability brings into particular focus by highlighting the main barrier to her marrying established marksman Frank Butler. Yet, what he offers seems at first the dullest of alternatives, despite her immediate attraction to him, since he couches his own prescription for marriageable womanhood in language that is doubly quaint and utterly pompous ("The Girl That I Marry"). Even here, however, Annie's attraction is based squarely on *her* needs, since Frank Butler is, with some specificity, everything she is not: masculine yet fancily dressed and attractive, and well at ease with his place in the world, especially regarding sex.[9] But his lyrics are infantilizing in their reduction of women to roughly the status of flowers or pets: his future wife will "have to be / As soft and as pink as a nursery," "wear satins and laces and smell of cologne," "wear a gardenia," "purr like a kitten / [and be] A doll I can carry." And while the rhythmic energy of the show's songs derives, in general terms, from that of ragtime-inspired Tin Pan Alley—thus, using syncopated duple meter, a style of song that Berlin helped refine during the first decades of the century—Butler's "The Girl That I Marry" marks his womanly ideals as sentimental and behind the times even within the *musical* context of the show, simply by presenting them within a straightforward, slow waltz tempo, the very idiom that was being displaced at the turn of the century (and the only example of this type in the show, except for the very end of "Anything You Can Do").[10] ♫**5.2**

For her part, Annie has already introduced herself as a child of nature, who wears enough of nature on her person that her "Doin' What Comes Natur'lly" can come across almost as a minstrel number. Thus, the dirt on her face (and on the faces of her troupe of younger siblings, who sing backup) substitutes for minstrelsy's blackface—in what Robert Walser calls "hick-face"[11]—and reinforces the other primitivist elements in the song, such as the snap figure on "Doin'" in the title phrase and the song's rudimentary refrain structure (within, however, an AABA Tin Pan Alley structure).[12] On

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Figure 5.1. In the first act of *Annie Get Your Gun*, Annie (Ethel Merman) sings "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun" in rueful acknowledgment that she is a far cry from the "soft and pink" girl that Frank Butler has just described in "The Girl That I Marry." (Photograph courtesy of Miles Kreuger and the Institute of the American Musical, Inc.)

the other hand, the song also links her to Frank Butler even before they meet, as his "I'm a Bad, Bad Man," heard just earlier, is couched in a similar form and style, although he interacts differently with his "backup" group of young girls (who would in a later age have been called groupies).[13] But their next set of paired songs, "The Girl That I Marry" and "You Can't Get a Man with a Gun" (see figure 5.1), plays strictly to the contrast between them and sets up her quest to prove herself worthy of his love. As this quest leads her to align herself with a succession of marginalized groups, however, it becomes clear that Annie belongs "natur'lly" to none of them. Her friendship with Sitting Bull and his tribe will provide her support and, eventually, a winning strategy for securing Frank, but her "Indian" song, "I'm an Indian Too," argues against its own ostensible point, being more about how she is *not* an Indian and never could be one. And she is, initially, as uncomfortable with joining the show people, who try hard to sell her on the advantages of show business in what has since become the de facto anthem of that profession, "There's No Business Like Show Business." (Importantly, however, this is precisely the group that will provide her the semblance of a "natural"

♫5.3 ♫5.4

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background, perhaps owing to the theatrical tradition for "pants" roles.) But still less is she a natural for the ultrafeminine role she attempts to assume in response to Frank Butler's "The Girl That I Marry."

Oddly, the musical marker for Annie's "true" identity that persists throughout the show is African American in derivation. Late in the first act, she sings a bluesy number as a lullaby for her younger siblings ("Moonshine Lullaby," to be sung in a "Slow Blues Tempo")—not quite a blues, but approximating the genre in style and some aspects of its thirty-two-bar form, harmonies, and melodic inflections.[14] Later, in the second act, she sings a ♫5.5 song that seems to cross-breed two familiar jazz-based Gershwin songs, "I Got Rhythm" (a Merman signature tune from the 1930 *Girl Crazy*) and "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin'" (from *Porgy and Bess*, 1935)—the latter, of course, written for Porgy himself, defining his contented status as a black man, poor in worldly goods but nevertheless rich in blessings (although Annie's "I Got the Sun in the Morning" seems closer to "I Got Rhythm" in terms of its musical profile). Despite its oddness, this peculiar affinity between Annie and ♫5.6 musical styles associated with blacks—never explicit, yet always suggested— ♫5.7 seems vaguely appropriate for several reasons. First, it marks her as a simi- ♫5.8 larly marginalized "primitive," someone unconnected with any particular group in the show (whose main racial "other" is the American Indian), and who thus has difficulty fitting in. Second, the connection offers her access to an idiom that is richer and suppler than most of the other musical styles in the show, making her differences from the other characters as attractive as they are problematic. And, third, the historical blending of these idioms into Tin Pan Alley allows them to occur "natur'lly" in a show that does not otherwise refer substantively to black America.

Of the other musical "identities" in the show, the most encompassing is not Annie's black-derived idiom but rather the brash, often phony, often sentimental idiom of show business. We hear the latter throughout, not only in "There's No Business Like Show Business" but also, most significantly, in the opening number, "Colonel Buffalo Bill" and in the later "Wild West Ballet."[15] In effect, we hear the transmutation of Indianist music into a phony "show business" variety of exotic primitivism when Annie converts their tribal music—which we are seemingly expected to hear as "authentic," at least aspirationally—through parody, into her show song, "I'm an Indian Too." While this dynamic of absorption may seem problematic in an abstract sense, the show endorses this brash "show-business" idiom on at least two levels: as a mode of useful presentation and as mediation between an inner "authentic" self and an outer persona. Thus, "No Business Like Show Business" extols at some length the ability of "show people" to perform no matter what internal turmoil they may be undergoing ("they smile when they are low")—a form of "virtuous dishonesty" whose mastery will eventually allow Annie to "have her cake and eat it, too," to stay more or less who she is, but also marry Frank Butler. Thus, what Annie needs to learn is not quite ♫5.9

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as simple as the broad outlines of the plot would indicate. Outwardly, the ruse that she uses to cater to Frank Butler's vanity, of deliberately throwing the culminating shooting match with him after she realizes that Sitting Bull has altered the sights of her guns, is not a capitulation so much as a demonstration that she can manage the separation of inner and outer truths.

The latter is a matter of performance, in two ways. If, as the scene is played, Frank is obviously aware that Annie is throwing the match, and she is equally aware of his awareness, the deception becomes a shared one and helps form the basis for their resumed relationship. The script here is ambiguous; although it is clear that the deception is a shared secret between Annie and Sitting Bull, only Frank's comment to Dolly ("Shut up, Dolly") betrays his possible awareness. In all other respects the scene is written so as to play equally well at various levels of awareness on the part of the principals, although for Frank to believe that Annie misses every shot from lack of skill seems absurd, and this is especially unlikely in the wake of their classic song of one-upmanship heard shortly before, "Anything You Can Do." But performance matters even more here on a deeper level, because outer truth is, in a sense, *performed* truth. Whatever Annie's capabilities as a shooter, her capabilities as a *performer* (in this sense) demand that she miss, and so she does. Nevertheless, this scenario, of a capable woman catering to her male "superiors" (who are nothing of the sort), can be very hard to accept with equanimity, especially in the wake of the women's liberation movement (which began in earnest more than a decade after *Annie*'s first run) and our steadily growing awareness of the "glass ceiling" that has often prevented women from reaching the same level, in many professions, as less accomplished men. Yet, if the scene is played well, Frank will recognize Annie's capitulation as a kind of gendered role-playing, and so, in accepting her gesture, he will seem implicitly to acknowledge both her skill and her overriding love for him.

This difficult point of balance is achieved (although subsequently lost) earlier in the second act, during a number that Berlin added for the 1966 revival (which again starred Ethel Merman as Annie)—"An Old Fashioned Wedding"—which makes it even clearer that their ability to get along as a couple depends ultimately on their using show business as a common ground. The number unfolds as a combination song, with Frank's slower contribution describing a quaintly old-fashioned attitude similar to that of "The Girl That I Marry." But Frank's sincerity in this case is even more suspect than in his earlier waltz song, since he adapts his tune from an interior phrase of "There's No Business Like Show Business" (thus, "Ev'rything about it is appealing" becomes "We'll have an old fashioned wedding"). For her part, Annie seems to offer a brasher version of her "I Got the Sun in the Morning," heard just before, inverting its sentiment and (to some extent) its affect, so that the music of the latter's title phrase sets the most strident part of a lyric that demands glitzy show business as an alternative to Frank's

♫5.10 ♫5.11

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rustic simplicity (boldface indicates recollections of the repeated-note head of the previous song, "**I got the sun**": ♫5.12 ♫5.13

> **A ceremony with a bish**op who will tie the knot and say:
> **"Do you agree to love and hon**or,"
> Love and honor, yes, but not obey. . . .
> **I wanna wedding like the Van**derbilts have, ev'rything big, not small.

Perhaps because Frank's contrasting projection is so obviously an artifice, it doesn't seem to matter that, when the two are combined, Annie's "Love and honor, yes, but not obey" offers an emphatic counterpoint to the last word of Frank's phrase, "You'll vow to love and honor and **obey**." Of course, it actually *does* matter, which is why the song appears long before their final reconciliation; yet, musically, the combination "works," so that while we understand the conflict to be far from resolved at this point, we are also given a concrete demonstration that it can be (and will be) resolved eventually. ♫5.14

The title role in *Annie Get Your Gun* has most often been played by a star considerably older than Annie, whose extended career, typically, has made her an unconventional ingénue. Merman herself had for a long time before the first run succeeded more as a brash comic than as a more conventional romantic lead. Mary Martin, also a star from the 1930s, and who toured in the role to great acclaim following its first run, went on to play the conflicted Nellie in *South Pacific* (1949), the cross-dressing title role in *Peter Pan* (1954, with a celebrated televised version in 1960), and Maria von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* (1959), infusing the latter role with a flavor of unconventional "tomboyish" sexuality.[16] And Bernadette Peters, who successfully revived the role on Broadway in 1999, achieved her definitive stardom in Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984) and *Into the Woods* (1987), both of which involve an elaborate transformation of persona or appearance between the two acts, in the latter case from an ugly witch into a youthful beauty. In each of these cases, within a situation deriving in part from the actress's relative maturity, her Annie has had to convince audiences that advanced maturity and capabilities do not ultimately render unsuitable her coupling with a hunkish and (generally) much younger actor, who is also (generally) much less a star than she. Ironically, it is thus often the actress's very accomplishments in "show business" that set up Annie's abjectness within the show, and thus require her to harness the powers of "show business" anew. Put differently, the role requires a bravura performer who can convincingly—precisely through the bravura of performance turned against itself—depict the denial of that bravura, and present it all as a trajectory of self-discovery.

Gypsy (1959) was based, if loosely, on the self-indulgent *Gypsy: A Memoir*, by Gypsy Rose Lee, the most famous striptease artist ever in America, surpassing even "Little Egypt," who supposedly saved the

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Chicago World's Fair from being a financial disaster with her "Hootchy Cootch" act in 1893. Perhaps more relevant here than her fame is the nature of that fame; alone among those in her profession, she became famous *as a personality* and enjoyed some success as an author and television hostess as well, although her sister (June Hovick, appearing as June Havoc) had a more successful career as an actress.[17] From the beginning of the show's development, however, the dramatic emphasis lay not on Gypsy Rose Lee herself but on her ruthless stage mother, Madame Rose (often referred to as Mama Rose), as a role that might provide Ethel Merman another star turn nearly a decade after her last hit (the 1950 *Call Me Madam*), and following up one of her very few flops (the 1956 *Happy Hunting*). Arthur Laurents based the book for the musical to an extraordinary degree on situations and dialogue from the *Memoir*, although much of the plotting and some of the characters were invented, including Herbie—the family's manager and the love interest for Mme Rose—who was pieced together from a succession of similar characters who populate the *Memoir*. Despite initial reluctance, Laurents was attracted to the property both because of Mme Rose's character and because of the book's hints of lesbianism.[18] That the latter element did not find its way into the final show, at least overtly, may have had something to do with Merman's prudishness (recalling her refusal to sing "Kate the Great" twenty-five years earlier, in *Anything Goes*),[19] but it may also reflect sound theatrical judgment, as many other elements in the show probably work better without this added distraction.

Merman herself had a lot at stake in the project and so did not hesitate to exercise her considerable clout in shaping it. Stephen Sondheim, set to compose the songs for a narrative that undoubtedly had special resonance for him (considering his problematic relationship with his own mother), had to settle for another tour of duty as lyricist when Merman refused to allow a then-unknown composer to write the score. Sondheim was reluctant to accept this demotion, fearing it might "typecast" him as a lyricist and make it even harder for him to emerge as a composer on Broadway; moreover, the demotion was in effect twofold, since it also entailed a shift downward from his last project, from being lyricist for Leonard Bernstein on *West Side Story* (1957) to performing the same function for the less prestigious composer Jule Styne. But Sondheim's mentor Oscar Hammerstein II persuaded him to accept the job, since it provided a valuable opportunity to work with a real star and to collaborate with another first-rate team, including Arthur Laurents and director-choreographer Jerome Robbins, who were among his collaborators on *West Side Story*. Moreover, Sondheim's initial disappointment aside, Styne was an eminently reasonable choice to compose the music, with a well-honed ability to write to a singer's strengths, a fecund creative gift for producing musical material on demand, and a distinct affinity for properties featuring quirky female protagonists (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, 1949; *Bells Are Ringing*, 1956; and, later, *Funny Girl*, 1964).

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The shift in focus from the *Memoir* to the musical—that is, from daughter to mother—entails a useful ambiguity regarding not only the relative importance of the characters in the show but also the title itself. *Gypsy*, the main title of the *Memoir*, was the only real option for the title of the musical, especially given the author's involvement and personal stake in the project and the *Memoir*'s useful notoriety. But if, going in, audiences might have reasonably expected the show to be about Gypsy Rose Lee, they would have found it to be much more concerned with her mother, who was, after all, the headlining role; many have therefore criticized the title as being to some extent misleading. Yet the show's unusual dramatic structure makes *Gypsy* precisely to the point. The conventional romantic story in *Gypsy*—between Mme Rose and Herbie—is enormously overbalanced in favor of the former, against whom Herbie has no chance, even though he does, in the end, act on a strong sense of morality and personal integrity (by refusing to accede to Rose's pressuring of Louise to perform a striptease). His failure is a noble one: he is utterly sincere in a world in which only show business matters; thus, he is given relatively little to sing and was originally (and is still often) cast with an actor of little or no singing experience. In a musical whose romantic couple is so constituted, the conventional marriage trope cannot satisfy; even if Herbie could convincingly rescue Mme Rose from herself, how could such a rescue ever be expressed in musical terms, without negating either the effect of the rescue or our belief in it? Instead, *Gypsy* is—daringly for a musical—about the "marriage" between mother and daughter, with Herbie functioning as the third leg in the triangle.

At the start of the musical, mother and daughter are poles apart, with Louise desperately needing the approval of Mme Rose, who seems scarcely aware of her older daughter's existence except to criticize her inadequate performance in support of her younger sister, June, the show's star. But at the end, after everyone else leaves them, the two characters merge. According to Laurents, the intent was "that Gypsy *becomes* Rose. The girl becomes the tough mother, and for all of Rose's toughness, she's just a little girl who wants to be recognized."[20] That the two share a name—Louise's birth name is Rose Louise—does not emerge until fairly late in the second act, after which Louise herself is rapidly eclipsed in favor of the stripper personality she will become, a process tracked deftly by the changes made to her name. First, she merges somewhat clumsily with her mother, as "Louise" becomes "Rose Louise" and displaces her mother in the title of the new act, "Rose Louise and Her Hollywood Blondes" (a makeover of the failing "Madame Rose's Toreadorables"). Then, when Rose Louise is preparing to debut as a stripper, she becomes "*Gypsy* Rose Louise," adding the name that describes them both, since "Gypsy" may designate—when it does not refer to a specific ethnic group—either dancers (on Broadway) or all those who, like Rose Louise and her mother, travel the country as independents taking whatever jobs they can get.[21] Finally, "Louise" disappears altogether when the announcer misreads the card, a seemingly random event that carries great significance

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because it marks the moment when the now-familiar name, "Gypsy Rose Lee," takes its final form.[22] Within this scenario, "Gypsy"—a designation intrinsically hard to pin down—is precisely the name that embraces both mother and daughter, yet belongs legitimately to neither.

If the single name "Gypsy" thus expresses an unusual conjunction of two characters—so that, arguably, mother and daughter have equal claims to being regarded as the title character of *Gypsy*—the larger narrative of the show derives from an utterly familiar situation that is rendered grotesque: the tendency of parents to live through their children, and for children to become like their parents even when they rebel. Thus, as Louise transforms into Gypsy Rose Lee, she becomes a caricature of her mother's ambitions for stardom, and, in response, Mme Rose, in her culminating "Rose's Turn," becomes a caricature of Gypsy Rose Lee, as abjectly unsuited to that role as Louise had earlier been to take over June's routines after the latter had run away with Tulsa. In this way, *Gypsy* becomes the story of identity formation within a family context, told with a heavy emphasis on the negative dimension of generational codependency, so as to intensify the child's need to separate and the parent's difficulty in letting go. It is in part the familiarity of the overall pattern that compels us to believe the story and its denouement; "Gypsy Rose Lee" may not be the only possible outcome when a stage mother's ambition, wedded to her daughter's lack of genuine talent, finds itself confronted with a fading market for vaudeville, but the show's delineation of an all-too-familiar family dynamic makes it an eminently logical one. Moreover, we know this outcome in advance, so that the death of vaudeville—as a victim of both synchronized-sound films and the Great Depression—becomes the fate-driven engine for a doomed trajectory that we know can end in only one terminus: the emergence of a famous stripper from the ruins of vaudeville (that is, from burlesque), seen as both the culmination of a family tragedy and a personal triumph.

Mme Rose is thus not the only one "to blame" for this outcome, even if, at each critical juncture, it is her ruthless pushing that propels Louise toward the abyss. Even Rose's gradually narrowing sensibilities respond crucially to the larger situation. After all, she plays (or makes her daughters play) *to an audience*, and that audience is increasingly less refined in the later stages of the show. For such an audience, considered as a broad spectrum shading off into coarser sensibilities, stripping is but a baby step beyond the emphasis on feminine display that has always lain close to the heart of show business in America, especially when—as is often the case when a young girl is a featured performer—a hint of perverse voyeurism is already part of the package.

That Gypsy Rose Lee can so easily turn Baby June's number, "May We Entertain You" (later, "Let Me Entertain You"), into an ironically deployed strip anthem is thus no mere joke, despite the cleverness with which Sondheim creates seemingly innocent language that may later be effortlessly converted, with virtually every line, into a sexual "come on":

♫5.15

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Let me entertain you,
Let me make you smile.
  Let me do a few tricks,
  Some old and then some new tricks—
I'm very versatile!
  And if you're real good,
  I'll make you feel good—
I want your spirits to climb.
So let me entertain you
And we'll have a real good time—yessir!
We'll have a real good time!

The setting for this lyric and its tune undergoes a transition across the show from catering to "child-cute" sensibilities to serving as a stripper's campish "gimmick." In its original form, as a simple waltz song, there is little to indicate its future purpose: ♫5.16

JUNE: May we entertain you?
May we see you smile?
  I will do some kicks—
LOUISE: I will do some tricks.
J: I'll tell you a story.
L: I'll dance when she's done. . . .

In this simpler setting, the word "tricks" is deemphasized, sung only once and almost inaudibly ("Sing out, Louise!"), whereas the key lines, "And if you're real good, / I'll make you feel good— / I want your spirits to climb," simply do not appear. Partly, this early version seems designed to draw attention away from the double entendres of the full lyric when it appears slightly later in a somewhat more provocative rhythm. Thus, the familiar device of the reprise, along with the new energy of the number that derives from the addition of the backup group of Newsboys, distracts us, so that we tend not to notice the full implications of the more elaborate lyric, even though nearly all the later melodic "pointers" are already in place (i.e., the upward leaps on the now-repeated word "tricks"). This cloaking effect is reinforced by the brief reprise of the opening of the song later, in its original waltz rhythm, during "If Mama Was Married," so that by the time it reappears in its "stripper" setting, near the end of the show, we feel we've heard the number often—exemplifying Mme Rose's "thrifty" recycling of material and serving as an emblem of the act's stagnation—whereas in fact we've heard it in its full form only once, and then as a reprise buried within a new number ("Baby June and Her Newsboys"). ♫5.17

To the extent that this strategy of downplaying the implicit sexualized dimension of June's signature number succeeds, it will seem revelatory that the number is so admirably suited for a stripper's routine, once more raucous orchestration and bump-and-grind rhythms (i.e., a heavy use of dotted fig-

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♫5.18 ures, with driving triplets in the accompaniment) are added to the mix. Yet, the "cuteness" of June's earlier performance already has its salacious side. During the opening scene's rehearsal sequence, just before June sings, Uncle Jocko (the host of "Uncle Jocko's Kiddie Show") makes it clear that one particular little girl, covered entirely in balloons, is to be favored above the others, so as to fulfill his promise to her older sister ("Chip off her sister's block. And you ought to see *them* balloons!").[23] Moreover, as the scene ends Mme Rose is pursuing the balloon girl with a hat pin in an oblique reference to the familiar stripper's gimmick, derived from Sally Rand's famous "bubble dance" in the 1930s, which substitutes the popping of strategically worn balloons for the removal of the "seven veils" in re-creations of Salome's famous dance (other familiar devices included feathers and fans). That this salacious side is to some extent built into the genre of the "cute-little-girl" number becomes increasingly apparent as "Baby June" becomes the fully adolescent "Dainty June," pretending to be much younger than she is, yet fooling no one. Whether we see it coming or not, the strip version of the number brings the saucy subtext of the "Baby June" version fully to our attention, if only in retrospect. Moreover, the effect of suddenly revealing the risqué aspect of a lyric we've already heard and accepted as "innocent" makes the full emergence of Gypsy Rose Lee seem all the more inevitable, as something already implicit from the beginning; in a similar fashion, her trademark "conversations" with her audiences—the basis for the real Gypsy Rose Lee's emergence as a "personality"—are also fully grounded in the earlier "child-cute" act (thus: "Hello everybody. My name is Gypsy Rose
♫5.19 Lee. What's yours?").

Louise's formation of her "Gypsy" identity may thus be understood not only in terms of her relationship to her mother but also in terms of societal expectations for the presentation of femininity, similarly carried to grotesque extremes, and thus drawing a *connecting* rather than a *dividing* line between striptease and accepted modes for performing femininity. On this broader scale, the show may also be understood as a perverse version of the "American dream" of success, whose tawdry result in this instance serves as a marker for America's spiritual decline from its cultured European roots, but which is nevertheless based on two basic "American" tenets: self-realization and the idealized family unit. These two ideals converge in three key numbers, each of them appearing in stark contrast to less positive realities unfolding around them: "Some People," "Everything's Coming Up Roses," and "Together, Wherever We Go." The related theme of vaudeville's decline also has some presence, stemming mainly from Jerome Robbins, whose conception of the show diverged somewhat from his collaborators'.[24] And embedded especially in the failed relationship between Rose and Herbie are conflicts between show business and reality that make *Gypsy* resonate with such shows as *Show Boat* and *Annie Get Your Gun*. But feminized oedipal issues trump these other themes, pulling the focus to the personal dimension, with both family dynamics and societal expectations—metaphorically here,

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whatever succeeds for an audience—serving to emphasize the degree to which achieving a strong personal identity is a matter of performance.

As often with the related theme of idealism, the formation of identity is treated in *Gypsy* as a kind of "quest" narrative, and the deployment of music allows us to trace the evolution of that quest. Two particular devices drive the process, both of them involving the reuse and reinterpretation of musical material, but on different levels. One device corresponds to an inner, "idealist" process, and the other to an externalized process of performance, with different levels of comfort in the latter serving as pointers toward a desired sense of achieved personal identity. Within the bifurcation of mother and daughter, the "idealist" process is carried primarily by the mother ("I had a dream"), and the latter by Louise (*cum* Gypsy), although in the end they merge into something like a double image. Along the way, other double images appear, such as the child-cute / stripper's camp of "Let Me Entertain You," a number that, typically for the show, intertwines with an elaborate process of cross-referencing. Thus, as the act evolves, it adds the "Newsboys" framing material, which carries forward even as "I Have a Moo Cow" displaces "Let Me Entertain You" (see figure 5.2). It is only when this development founders, after its star, June, runs away with Tulsa and Louise proves inadequate as her replacement (in "Madame Rose's Toreadorables"), that a new trajectory emerges from out of the chaos, driven by both Louise's extreme discomfort in performing "June" and her remembered humiliation performing as one of the "boys" behind her sister. In a classic reaction formation based on inversion, Louise becomes the star, but without June's talent, a brunette among blondes who are all imitation Junes, somehow managing to achieve a sense of dignity and self-possession at the center of a laughably ridiculous act barely holding its own in a shabby, second-rate burlesque hall.[25] Tellingly, her emergent but still precarious sense of ladylike dignity, based in her rejection of an adopted identity she cannot perform, will develop into the core of her stripper personality.

But it is Mme Rose's "idealist" trajectory that drives the show, powered by the dynamic "I had a dream" motive, based in triplets, that opens the overture.[26] The deployment of triplets within a duple meter will form its own core of motivic development across the show, evolving first as a setting for idealist inspiration tinged with a certain cheapness (a virtual archetype for Broadway itself) that will eventually degenerate into the bump-and-grind triplets of the burlesque hall. After the overture, the motive first appears in the bridge of "Some People," set in each of its early presentations to the lofty vision Rose projects in an effort to wheedle money out of her father, but gradually giving way to her more immediate—and much less noble—agenda (the triplet motive is given in bold; faster sections describing the dream's content are omitted):

♫5.20

♫5.21

I had a dream,
A **wonderful dream,** Poppa! . . .

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Figure 5.2. *Gypsy*'s Madame Rose (Ethel Merman) presents "Dainty June and Her Farmboys," ready for Broadway—all, perhaps, except June's older sister, Louise (the future Gypsy Rose Lee), who has been relegated to the role of Caroline the dancing cow, singing "Moo, moo, moo, moo" in response to June's series of atrocious "moo" puns. (Photograph courtesy of Miles Kreuger and the Institute of the American Musical, Inc.)

> **I had a dream,**
> Just as real as can be, Poppa! . . .
> **Oh, what a dream,**
> A **wonderful dream,** Poppa.
> And **all that I need** is **eighty-eight bucks,** Poppa.
> **That's what he said,** Poppa,
> Only **eighty-eight bucks.** . . .

Long before the triplets motive appears, the song seems genetically restless, moving between a broadly scaled syncopated tune (a generic "Broadway" style that will reappear in both the "Broadway" segment of the "Dainty June and Her Farmboys" and in Tulsa's "All I Need Is the Girl") and a more urgent, highly repetitive motive that will resurface during the "content" part of the bridge's "dream" (the ellipses in the quotation given above). While

♫5.22

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the resulting sense of restlessness fits Rose perfectly, it also serves as a distraction for what is the main point of the song, revealed when the idealistic triplets motive is forced to carry the mundane "eighty-eight bucks"; at the end of the song, Rose simply steals a solid-gold plaque on the wall—her father's most honored possession—to cover her expenses. Within the song, verbal cleverness and deft musical shifts both give content to Rose's assertion of specialness and provide a kind of razzle-dazzle ("Some humdrum people") to distract her father from her real aim.[27] And this is precisely the mix, of idealist drive conjoined with crass amorality, that will define everything Mme Rose touches, culminating in Gypsy's blend of ladylike refinement and blatant pandering. Throughout the show, Rose's many "dreams" are regarded with both dread and enthusiasm by her troupe, as suspect mixtures of genuine inspiration and manipulation that overpower through the sheer force of Rose's will, and whose results will never prove quite as exciting as she dreamed them.

"Ev'rything's Coming Up Roses" is an inspirational anthem that offers an outwardly conventional musical and dramatic profile, as an expression of determination after a devastating setback, whose climax will bring down the first-act curtain. But it also offers one of the most chilling of the show's many chilling moments, because of what it portends for Louise, who at this point is unable to resist her mother's overpowering will. Earlier, with June around, Louise could retreat to the background, becoming one of the "boys," or find some other place of refuge. The latter option, for example, is vividly dramatized for us on her birthday, when the brashly ridiculous "Mr. Goldstone" number preempts her celebration but then evaporates to reveal Louise alone, singing to the live lamb that was her birthday present. "Little Lamb" builds on traditional symbolic tropes in which the lamb represents both childhood innocence and the sacrifice of innocence,[28] vividly evoked in the final haunting lines, "Little lamb, little lamb, / I wonder how old I am." But now, with June gone, there is no one but an equally powerless Herbie to protect Louise from Rose, whose wild ambitions are increasingly tinged with a rising hysteria in response to what she experiences as mutinous betrayal. This time, the song's trajectory is framed by the triplets motive, beginning with "I had a dream" and ending with the title phrase, given in triplets, a phrase that Sondheim devised to sound as if "it had been in the language for years but [which] was, in fact, invented for the show."[29] As the song progresses, it is as if the triplets—the emblem of her "dreams"—are fighting to emerge, to impose themselves on the reality of the duple, generic "Broadway" style of the rest of the song (triplets are in bold; dramatic returns to duple meter are in italics):

♫5.23

♫5.24

You'll be swell, you'll be great,
Gonna have the whole world on a plate!
Starting here, starting now,
Honey, **ev'rything's coming up** *roses!* . . .

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Set it spinning,
That'll be just the be*ginning!* . . .

You can do it,
All you need is a hand.
We can do it,
Momma is gonna see *to it!* . . .

Honey, **ev'rything's coming up roses and** *daffodils*,
Ev'rything's coming up sunshine and *Santa Claus*,
Ev'rything's gonna be bright lights and *lollipops*.
Ev'rything's coming up roses for me and for you.

As in "Some People," the rhythmic shifts indicate an edgy restlessness, but here it is less a matter of manipulating others than of self-management. And although Rose seems to succeed in that—in pulling her "self" together—the price is isolation. In terms of the musical quest set up within the song, she successfully imposes her visionary triplets, yet she fails to control what is a more important musical dynamic, that of *connecting* by getting the others to join in. Herbie and Louise are not truly part of her dream/hallucination and can only watch in numb silence as she works herself up to a frenzied climax; they seem equally frightened by both the possibility of her complete disintegration and the prospect of having to help her realize her latest "dream": making a star out of Louise. Yet, while Rose fails to get Herbie and Louise to join in, their recruitment is foregone, since they have no defense against her crazed "dream" mode.[30]

In the early stages of the second act, temporary salvation comes through two key events. After the predictable failure of the new act ("Mme. Rose's Toreadorables," tailored for a mixed audience of Texans and Mexicans), Louise finally stands up to her mother, throwing away the blond wig she has been wearing ("Momma, I am not June!"). Then, in "Together, Wherever We Go," Rose, Herbie, and Louise establish the semblance of a cooperative family unit, achieving what "Ev'rything's Coming Up Roses" could not. Every bit as manipulative as Rose's "Some People," the song nevertheless establishes a rapport based on the fact that the three of them sing *together*, although it is, as always, Rose who sets the terms:

♫5.25

Wherever I go, I know he goes.
Wherever I go, I know she goes.
No fits, no fights, no feuds and no egos—
Amigos, together!

The payoff line here is the multilingual "amigos," whose wit was apparently much appreciated by a despondent Cole Porter, for whom Styne and Sondheim performed the song along with many others from the show, in a valiant attempt to cheer him in his failing health.[31] The combination has an almost arithmetic perfection, tracing in its rhymes the formation of their group—

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he, she, I (the literal meaning of the Latin "ego"), and friends (amigos)—simultaneously as the music recovers from the tonic minor and a descending sequence to land confidently in the tonic major. Moreover, the Porteresque "amigos" has more than cleverness to offer, since Rose thereby points directly to their failed attempt to merge English and Spanish in their soon-to-be-abandoned act ("Toreadorables"), and subtly invites the others to join her in laughing at themselves. And so they do; by the time the same music comes back around, they are adding rhymed repartee, based again in a kind of arithmetic logic, with Rose again directing her lyrics at their shared perspectives: on travel, farming (implicitly referring to Dainty June's Farmboys), and accumulating debts. Still, Louise has to struggle for an equal footing, first shifting the rhyme slightly to make room for herself within the group (from "duo" to "trio"), and then acting, playfully, as peacemaker:

5.26

Rose:	Whatever the boat I row, you row—
Herbie:	A duo!
R:	Whatever the row I hoe, you hoe—
Louise:	A trio!
R:	And any IOU I owe, you owe—[32]
H:	Who, me? Oh,
	No, you owe!
L:	No, we owe—
All:	Together!

In the song's final joke, Louise is again a kind of third wheel, requiring correction from her mother:

5.27

All:	The things we do, we do by threes,
	A perfect team—
	(Louise heads off in the wrong direction)
Rose:	—No, this way, Louise!

The song manages to restabilize the group by emphasizing the group's shared perspective, by forgoing the idiosyncrasies of Rose's more typical musical locution for something more easily sung together, and by shifting the arrival point from the narcissistic "Ev'rything's Coming Up Roses" to a multilayered emphasis on the collective. Yet, Louise, as a personality, is at this point still not fully formed, even if her position within the family has improved, so that the sense of stability achieved in this song can be no more than temporary—especially since Louise's renunciation of June, which precipitates the number, is what truly launches her own process of personal growth.

Louise's transformation into Gypsy Rose Lee consists primarily in her integrating the bits and pieces that she has absorbed into the rather unformed person she has otherwise become, and then gradually attaining some level of comfort in performing them. Her shy reserve transmutes into an aloof,

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ladylike manner. Her sense of secrecy gives credibility to her assumed name, Gypsy. Her sewing skill provides her with elegant clothing, which increases her self-confidence; thus, in dressing for her debut—the first time she wears a dress in the show—she makes a startling discovery: "Momma—I'm pretty—I'm a pretty girl, Momma!" Becoming a stripper gratifies, in rather blatant terms, her desperate desire to be noticed, especially as she suddenly realizes she is well worth noticing. Her "line reading" for burlesque acts, which she has been doing on a fill-in basis, has given her more comfort interacting on the stage (and off). Even so, she falters and falls back almost in panic on the worn-out routines of their old act, only to discover, miraculously, that those routines suit the situation perfectly ("Hello everybody"). Although the transition from "painfully shy" to "commanding presence" is a difficult one to carry off in the time frame of one musical number (incorporating, however, a montage involving several changes of venue and costume), the arrival points are clear cut. The final part of the sequence (Minsky's in New York) serves as an end point by delivering some of the most familiar "Gypsy Rose Lee" material; here, she pretentiously speaks French in elaborate self-mockery and concludes with her famous "ecdysiast" patter:

> An ecdysiast is one who—or that which—sheds its skin. In vulgar parlance, a stripper. But I'm not a stripper. At these prices, I'm an ecdysiast![33]

Dramatically more significant, however, is her speech during the second part of the sequence (Detroit), which refers to her mother in a way that will register as merely playful to her burlesque audience but will seem deeply significant to *Gypsy*'s audience. The key line of her speech (in bold) is at once profoundly true and absolutely false:

♫5.28

> My mother—who got me into this business—
> *(She is pulling up her dress)*
> Always told me
> Make them beg for more—
> *(Drops the dress)*
> And then, don't give it to them!
> **But I'm not my mothah!**
> Beg!

True enough, she is for the first time indeed independent of her mother and developing a will and persona that are distinctively her own. Yet her persona—and even her strong will—owes everything to her mother, however outwardly she may seem to be in full-scale rebellion.

The show's final number, however, is given not to Gypsy but rather to her mother, conceived as a musical representation of a breakdown.[34] To this end, in "Rose's Turn," the restless shifting of tempo and mood, which had marked Rose's numbers before, reappears, careening out of control as she shifts from song to song. Mainly, she sings somewhat surreal versions of "Some People" and "Ev'rything's Coming Up Roses," colored with an ad-

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mixture of bump-and-grind music (some of it borrowed from the strippers' trio, "You Gotta Have a Gimmick") as she parodies Gypsy's act, and referring briefly to other numbers as well, including one that was eventually cut from the show, "Momma's Talkin' Soft," a counterpoint to "Small World," sung by the girls. Her actual breakdown involves her combination of the "Gimmick" number and "Momma's Talkin'," which breaks down in part because the musical profile already suggests breakdown: a three-beat pattern against the steady duple meter that sounds like a needle stuck in a single groove of a broken record:

Momma's talkin' loud,
Momma's doin' fine,
Momma's gettin' hot,
Momma's goin' strong,
Momma's movin' on,
Momma's all alone,
Momma doesn't care,
Momma's lettin' loose,
Momma's got the stuff;
Momma's lettin' go—

At this point, she breaks down on the word "Momma," tries to continue, breaks down again, and finally achieves a rhythmic arrival with the dramatically significant declaration "Momma's gotta let go!"

5.29

Appropriately, her subsequent recovery comes through reprising her own material, the restless music from "Some People" ("Why did I do it?") yielding to the visionary "I had a dream" motive. With the latter, a kind of primitive wit rekindles as she regains control, bypassing correct grammar to pivot, midway through, from self-denial to self-assertion (as before, triplets are given in bold):

5.30

I had a dream—
I **dreamed it for you**, June,
It **wasn't for me**, Herbie.
And if it **wasn't for me**
Then **where would you be,**
Miss **Gypsy Rose Lee!**

Here, the triplets are all about ownership of the dream, if not the achieved success of that dream. And as she recovers, even more stridently than at the end of the first act, she concludes with the final phrases of "Ev'rything's Coming Up Roses," delivered in a dotted bump-and-grind rhythm rather than triplets (which are now in the band, as part of the stripper's music), and ending with desperate repetitions of the final words, "for me!"

The number is thus shaped as a breakdown leading to a partial recovery tinged with desperation, leaving the writers in a quandary as to how to bring it all to an end. Generically, as the star's final number, the song demands a

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big finish. Dramatically, however, Rose remains broken, with her recovery too desperate to be taken for the real thing. The writers tried to avoid a dramatically dishonest, applause-garnering finish, wishing instead to move directly into the final scene, in which Rose admits to her daughter that she did it all for herself, and the two reconcile within a functionally inverted dynamic. Although they persuaded Merman to go along with this, forgoing her applause, Hammerstein convinced them, after seeing the show during previews, to give Merman her applause for the sake of the audience, who needed that release in order to move on emotionally. Later, for the London production, Angela Lansbury devised with Laurents a way to provide the audience with its needed release without breaking character, by continuing to bow after the applause had ended. Eerily remaining in her own world, she brought them back to the realization that they were in the presence not of a star acknowledging applause but of an unstable woman lost in the emptiness of her "dreams."[35]

♫5.31

Even in this final number, it is through performance—as it has been throughout the show—that identity is to be sought and, perhaps, achieved. Earlier, Louise had tried and failed to be June, yet found a way—midway through performing in front of a live audience—to turn her failed "June" into a successful Gypsy Rose Lee. Similarly, her mother, in "Rose's Turn," tries to perform Gypsy Rose Lee, breaking down in the midst of unfamiliar material, but recovering (to the extent that she does recover) by fusing her most characteristic music to Gypsy Rose Lee's burlesque-house music. Even in musical terms, then, the two characters stabilize their identities by fusing to some extent with the other's distinctive material. And thus, even apart from whatever moral and psychological lessons we might take away from the show regarding the potentially devastating effects of mismanaged family dynamics, we are also vividly shown how identity involves a learning process as well as a quest—through which one observes, imitates, and ultimately owns what one imitates by performing it, thereby making it one's own even though originally it may have been only borrowed.

Sweet Charity (1966) represented a significant milestone for many of those involved in the show. Conceived, choreographed, and directed by Bob Fosse, *Sweet Charity* served as the linchpin for his shift (following the lead of Jerome Robbins) from choreography to directorial control of his projects; he would, in fact, make his debut as a film director with *Sweet Charity* (1969), although with scarcely the acclaim he would achieve with his 1972 *Cabaret*. The show marked Gwen Verdon's triumphant return to Broadway at age forty-one (see the frontispiece), after a six-year hiatus (she had married Bob Fosse in 1960 and given birth to their daughter, Nicole, in 1963). In broad outlines, *Sweet Charity* was clearly intended as a parallel to its inspiration, the 1957 film *Nights of Cabiria* (*Le notti di Cabiria*), written and directed by Federico Fellini as a showcase for his wife, Giulietta Masina.

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In basing an American musical on a continental European film, Fosse also established an important precedent for Sondheim's 1973 *A Little Night Music* (see chapter 1) and Maury Yeston's 1982 *Nine*, each of which sought, in its way, to bring a more worldly sensibility to the Broadway musical.[36] Neil Simon's adapted book for *Sweet Charity* helped give him the distinction, still unequaled, of having four plays running on Broadway simultaneously (the others being nonmusicals: *Barefoot in the Park* [1963], *The Odd Couple* [1965], and *The Star Spangled Girl* [1966]). The score is the most distinctive of a handful of Broadway scores by jazz pianist Cy Coleman, including two breakaway hits (by the mid-1960s an increasingly rare achievement for a traditional Broadway show): "If My Friends Could See Me Now" and "Big Spender." And sixty-one-year-old Dorothy Fields came out of semiretirement (following the death in 1958 of her brother and long-time collaborator Herbert Fields, with whom she had written the book for *Annie Get Your Gun*) to write lyrics that deftly extend, into the treacherous linguistic waters of the 1960s, her remarkable gift for endowing vernacular-based lyrics with enough perspective that they rarely seem "dated" to later ears, even though they are quintessentially of their time.[37]

The adaptation of *Sweet Charity* from *Nights of Cabiria* was fairly direct, allowing for a change in setting to New York City and a few corollary adjustments to the main characters and situations. But these changes and adjustments, which seem generically necessary and mainly inconsequential, turn out to matter quite a lot—more, perhaps (or at least in different ways), than the show's creators may have realized. The main character in both the film and the musical derives from the familiar fictional trope, the "prostitute with a heart of gold," with an admixture of Mary Magdalene, the prostitute redeemed by Jesus. Thus, each protagonist (that is, Cabiria and Charity Hope Valentine) attempts to reform herself through an expected marriage to someone who sees past her profession to her essentially innocent soul; yet each in the end seems condemned to playing out her given earthly role. That Charity is not quite a prostitute—she is a dance-hall hostess who does not, like many of her coworkers, turn tricks on the side—may be no more than a concession to American sensibilities, but the change from the film plays out deeper than that, since Charity herself shares those American sensibilities, and thus could not cross the line into prostitution without self-destructing. A less obvious change also involves the American setting, but with an interesting reversal in effect, as Charity's flirtation with a celebrity who is having a fight with his girlfriend plays differently from Cabiria's, despite the outwardly close parallels between these shared episodes. Because the celebrity is an Italian film star in both cases, he is even more exotic for Charity than for Cabiria; moreover, Charity's familiarity with his films (however faulty her account of them) tells us something of her own range of tastes, which more clearly involve a greater thirst for otherness than Cabiria's. The religious episodes, too, play quite differently, since Cabiria's

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attempt to seek the Madonna's intercession, during ceremonies at a local shrine, represents an attempt to join in mainstream Catholicism, whereas the "Rhythm of Life" number in *Sweet Charity* is, seemingly, a fairly sardonic look at the alternative religions of the mid-1960s. (Additionally, much detail is inevitably lost in the move from film as a result of the broader plotting typical of the musical stage.)

But the most important—and subtlest—change from film to musical resides in the trajectory of the main character. Cabiria undergoes a transformation of sorts, from a hardened prostitute at the beginning to someone who has seemingly reactivated her internal purity (through a hypnotism sequence that has no real parallel in *Sweet Charity*), and is left at the end with that purer self at tragic odds with who she is in the world—although some semblance of hope is suggested by her resiliently warm response to the young partiers who appear after her abandonment by Oscar. *Sweet Charity* is both kinder and more brutal to its heroine than *Nights of Cabiria*. It is kinder because the parallels between the beginning and ending events, in which she is abandoned by the man whom she hopes to marry, are not complete, since Oscar does not rob her and admits that his inability to go through with the marriage is his own failing. Cabiria—who in the beginning of the film has a substantial bank account and owns her own home—is, however, left completely penniless.[38] But *Sweet Charity* is also in one sense more brutal, because Charity herself is not allowed to evolve significantly. While both stories dramatize the distinction between inner and outer selves (a fairly conventional version of the mind-body split), the basic thrust of *Sweet Charity*, and its particular take on identity formation, is that Charity cannot escape who she is, neither inwardly (through evolution or by recapturing something lost) nor outwardly (by leaving her past behind).

In telling the story of someone's futile attempt to escape who and what she is, *Sweet Charity* takes full advantage of its medium to create a sense of a cynical world that holds no legitimate place for Charity and to show her desperate quest to escape. All the collaborators played an important part in this. Neil Simon's wisecracking dialogue—a feature often criticized in his other work as distracting from and sometimes interfering with character development—helps establish the requisite fatalistic cynicism that circumscribes Charity. Thus, in the first scene, after Charlie robs her and pushes her into the lake, she almost drowns while a curious crowd looks on and a sidewalk vendor offers refreshments, until, finally, she is rescued—by a foreigner. Fosse's tightly controlled choreographic style (preserved in the film) underscores that particular brand of cynicism—based, unfortunately, on documented instances of similar behavior in 1960s New York—by embodying a laconic, world-wise, and world-weary "attitude" while expressing a sense of stifling constriction at odds with Charity's generous impulses. (Such numbers starkly contrast with the later "breakout" numbers, "There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This" and "I Love to Cry at Weddings.")

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Charity herself, as created by Gwen Verdon onstage and interpreted by Shirley MacLaine in the film, adds a dimension of individual quirkiness that establishes her as both attractively unique and not really "belonging" to any of the alternative settings that she tries on in her quest to escape her life as a dance-hall hostess. But it is in its musical numbers that *Sweet Charity* makes its dramatic points most effectively.

In Charity's opening number, "You Should See Yourself"—which she sings to a silent Charlie, who at the end of the song will rob her and push her into the lake—her inherent, enthusiastic quirkiness deflects a basic conventionality at every turn. Cast as a "jazz waltz," the number is, in broad terms, romantic without being overly sentimental. Formally, it follows a conventional AABA pattern, but with unusual and somewhat unpredictable phrase lengths, incorporating unexpected harmonic and melodic departures. The lyric reveals her sensibilities to be based enthusiastically on commercial culture, so limited in their perspective that she reads Charlie's appearance and sexual focus as tokens of high sensibility: "You're a blockbuster, buster, you got class / And when you make a pass, man it's a pass!" But her lack of perspective on herself is precisely what makes her appealing and gives the song enough perspective that her reliance on clichés becomes an endearing affectation. Particularly effective in rescuing the song from its mundane subject and language are Charity's delivery as written into the song, filled with sexual innuendo in its leaning chromatic touches and adding syllables as an expression of overabundant enthusiasm and in response to the jazzy syncopation: ♫5.32

> You're a hundred watt elec-a-tric light. . . .
> And I laugh 'till I'm ga-ga-ga-ga gone!
> When you switch to a seduc-a-tive mood! . . .
> You're a blue ribbon Pul-it-itzer Prize!

"Big Spender" sets the world Charity inhabits yet does not by sensibility really belong to: the jaded atmosphere of the Fan-Dango Ballroom. The number's impact stems in large part from the contrast between its broad musical gestures, all deriving from bump-and-grind stripper's music (thus, with heavy dotting and driving triplets), and the highly stylized and restrained movements of the dancers, who will often move only one body part at a time. Against this restraint, occasional explosive eruptions—"Hey, big spender!" from the dancers or a "growl" from the orchestra—set off, with a heightened, demanding sexuality, the promised intimacy of dancing with a "hostess" in the darkened hall, where such subtle movement carries more sexual charge than the more typically broad movements suggested by the music in generic terms. Thus, at the song's end, loud repetitions of "Hey, big spender!" fall chromatically back to quiet intimacy, with the flattened fifth (one of the "blue notes" of jazz; in italics) suggestively tugging downward toward the tonic with each insinuating repetition of "*Spend* . . . a little

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ti-ime with me." In this song, we also hear evidence of Coleman's classical training, as he sets up and delivers, in the major-mode bridge, a layered, hocketlike contrapuntal effect that becomes, in combination, a transposed replication of the chromatic opening motive (given in bold):[39]

♫5.33

The **minute you walked** in the joint . . .

Wouldn't you like to have	fun,	fun,	fun?
How's about a few	laughs,	laughs?	
I can show you a		good time. . . .	

[becoming, in combination:] fun, laughs, fun, laughs, fun . . .
[and then:] **fun, laughs, good time**.

The device is sophisticated, yet formulaic enough to be easily accessible—an ideal combination for the bizarre mixture of the exotically titillating and the utterly routine that the number offers more generally.

Two songs in the show detail Charity's determination to escape while at the same time telling us, fairly plainly, that escape is not possible for her. In "Charity's Soliloquy," she recounts the story of her affair with Charlie, a narrative that alternates between her resolve not to be victimized and a series of episodes in which she is, once again, victimized. The number ends with a flourish that seems to harness religious fervor and (in the musical accompaniment) the panache of a tango-dancing toreador (the latter effect apparently inspired by the reference to Florida heard just before; note also the musical "turn" on the word given in bold,[40] another token of Coleman's offhand musical sophistication):

♫5.34

[intoned] 'Cause it **turns** out [spoken] the bum wants to go to Florida.
C'mon down!
[sung]
Now hear this! And get this!
Oh Susannah! Amen!
This big fat heart
Ain't gonna be torn apart
Ever, ever, ever again! Olé!

Despite these rhetorical flourishes, verbal and musical, we hear throughout the song—and see in the scene immediately thereafter—that it is part of Charity's generous nature to fall for any and every line she hears, however transparently bogus.

After her episode with the Italian film star, she joins with two coworkers in "There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This," in which her friends detail their fantasies of a better life (see figure 5.3). But Charity cannot truly envision an alternative, even along the lines of her friends' comically plebeian fantasies:

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Figure 5.3. A striking juxtaposition of determined optimism and habitual cynicism from the 1969 film version of *Sweet Charity*: Charity Hope Valentine (Shirley MacLaine), flanked by confidantes Helene and Nickie (Paula Kelly and Chita Rivera), has a brief prayerful moment during "There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This," framed behind the lineup of dance-hall hostesses waiting at the rail of the Fan-Dango Ballroom.

> [spoken]
> CHARITY: Me too!
> HELENE AND NICKIE: What?
> CHARITY: I'm getting out too!
> NICKIE: But baby—what can you do?
> CHARITY: I dunno. Just get me out of here and I'll figure it out later.

Although Charity delivers her "Soliloquy" while dancing with a client at the Fan-Dango, in "Something Better" the confining set disappears for the duration of the number (in the film they move outside, to the roof), and the dance style gradually becomes more and more exuberantly expansive. As with the ending strains of "Charity's Soliloquy," the music for this number also promises a kind of escape to a southern vacation spot, specifically through its "Tijuana Brass"—style accompaniment and "traveling" tempo (approximating the sound of a contemporary Western film score)[41] and its simultaneous combination of 3/4 and 6/8 meters, deftly evoking "America" in *West Side Story* (the latter referred to also by the performers' Latin dance styles and vocalizing). Coleman and Fields, in the song's distinctive hook, also find another correlative for the "stuttering-exuberance" effect heard earlier in the added syllables of "You Should See Yourself," which provides its own sense of release by retracing and then condensing the song's opening melodic contour:

♫5.35

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I'm gonna get up,
I'm gonna get out,
I'm gonna get up, get out and live it!

Time and again, the songs of *Sweet Charity* highlight the disjuncture between Charity and the variety of escapes she "tries on" in an attempt to find a legitimizing place for herself, so that much of the show plays as an extended "list aria" of what Charity is not. Three numbers in the sequence involving the Italian film star Vittorio Vidal, for example, provide different dimensions of Charity's disconnection with her setting. "Rich Man's Frug" (subdivided into "The Aloof," "The Heavyweight," and "The Big Finish") is an instrumental number based partly on "Big Spender," establishing the setting in an exclusive nightclub and creating an aura of stylized snobbery that Charity could never take part in. At this point, however, she triumphs over the snobs with a giddy "It's me!" in answer to their offensively pointed questions ("Who's that with Vittorio?"), a line that she repeats at the end of "If My Friends Could See Me Now" ("It's me, Charity"). The latter song, sung in Vittorio's rooms, both celebrates her apparent escape and illustrates vividly that it is no real escape, both through its overall thrust—the entire number is about how out of place she is—and in its language, which describes her expensively furnished surroundings with a decidedly inexpensively furnished vocabulary. Finally, banished to the closet when Vittorio's lover Ursula unexpectedly returns, Charity watches through the keyhole—as if watching one of Vidal's films from a darkened theater—as he sings the Broadway equivalent of an Italian aria, "Too Many Tomorrows," and reconnects sexually with Ursula.

♫5.36

♫5.37

In another episode, "The Rhythm of Life" (the current installment of the Religion of the Month Club, to which Oscar belongs), Coleman creates a mixture of jazz, exotic "Eastern" music (in token of the San Francisco origins of the "Rhythm of Life" Church), Protestant organ chorale, and an elaborate, many-leveled counterpoint, the latter deriving from long-standing European traditions of the "sublime" religious style. The number is broadly satirical of religious alternativity—a year before *Hair* would open, with its determination to take such things very seriously—and can seem uncomfortably dated (as it does in the film version, with Sammy Davis Jr. as "Daddy"). But the number succeeds, as satire, even in its datedness, especially through its evocation partway through of the "Swingle Singers," whose sometimes jazzy vocalized versions of instrumental works from the classical repertory enjoyed several years of popularity during the mid-1960s. In thematic terms, the number details and elaborates an organic "growth process" that cynically blends idealistic inspiration and commercialism:

♫5.38

Daddy started out in San Francisco,
    Tootin' on his trumpet loud and mean.
Suddenly a voice said, "Go forth, Daddy,
    Spread the picture on a wider screen."

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And the voice said, "Daddy, there's a million pigeons
Waitin' to be hooked on new religions. . . ."

As in *Nights of Cabiria*, the solution religion offers is a false one, but the point of view here is somewhat confused. *Sweet Charity*, as with its substitution of dance-hall hostess for *Cabiria*'s prostitute, seems unduly timid, unwilling to risk outraging its audience by suggesting that established religion might prove to be a false alternative for Charity. Indeed, in finding alternative religion a fitting object of parody, the show seems to line up on the side of established religion, leading one to wonder why religion in some other form might not have been taken seriously as a solution (as it was for a time in *Nights of Cabiria*). More likely, though, we are expected to notice how similar the constructs of this alternative church are to those of established religion, which were increasingly prone to pandering to changes in taste during the 1960s, especially in the wake of "Vatican II" (1962–1965), which guardedly authorized the use of vernacular idioms in the Catholic service and thereby became the target for rebuke and satire—the latter including Tom Lehrer's "Vatican Rag" (1965). Similarly here, religion's drift in the 1960s toward a Swingle-Singers-like watering down of traditions might be construed as the true object of the song's parody, and so provide a fuller explanation for why religion is not a viable alternative for Charity.[42]

But respectability—here, as so often, represented by marriage—is also no viable alternative. In "Baby Dream Your Dream"—a song that may well have been modeled on the narrative strategy of Cole Porter's "It's De-lovely"—Helene and Nickie narrate the full trajectory of a romance, including the disillusionment that follows the wedding.[43] Here, the device of holding a single note over shifting harmonies both inspires a dreamlike harmonic succession and depicts a certain tenacity of image in the many returns to the head of the tune, beginning with and returning to the warm third of the tonic triad (melodic repetitions of E are given in bold; each line carries a different harmony, as noted):[44] ♫5.39

Baby, **dream** your dream.	(C major)
Close your **eyes** and **try** it.	(C-augmented)
Dream of **fur**niture;	(A minor)
Dream that **I** can **buy** it.	(V_7/F)

But even in its hopeful moments, the song admits to being only a dream, a setup for the inevitable disillusionment to follow. Later in the act, in the seemingly climactic "I Love to Cry at Weddings," we are confronted with a discordant double image when Oscar shows up for the surprise shower thrown by Charity's coworkers at the Fan-Dango. With a visibly discomfited Oscar present, the irony is almost viscerally painful: the more celebratory the number becomes, the clearer it is that the wedding they are anticipating will never happen. ♫5.40

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Yet the irony of this musical climax remains invisible to those who know the show only from recordings. This is particularly true for the original cast album, in which Charity's "I'm a Brass Band" follows "I Love to Cry at Weddings" (out of order), so as to give the impression of a conventional happy ending. Even "I'm a Brass Band"—a seemingly celebratory number Charity sings directly after accepting Oscar's proposal—finds Charity unable to settle on an appropriate musical mode for performing her happiness, oscillating wildly among alternatives: brass band, harpsichord, clarinet, Philadelphia orchestra, Modern Jazz Quartet, Count Basie, cathedral bells, and tissue paper on a comb. By ending with "I Love to Cry at Weddings," the musical trajectory of the show "lies," which may have been why, in the film, Charity's "Where Am I Going?" is delayed until near the end, after her abandonment by Oscar. In the stage show, the latter number marks Charity's despairing realization that her profession has doomed her as far as marrying Oscar is concerned, leading her to quit the Fan-Dango with no hope of holding on to Oscar (who, as it happens, has already learned what she does for a living and will soon propose to her anyway). And yet, her despair is more existential than circumstantial; even if she can somehow escape from the Fan-Dango, she cannot escape from herself:

♫5.41

♫5.42

Run to the Bronx, or Washington Square,
No matter where I run, I meet myself there,
Looking inside me.
What do I see?
Anger and hope and doubt.
What am I all about?
And where am I going?
You tell me!

Charity's fatalistic failure to escape may be interpreted in many ways. It may betoken the ways in which one's self remains apart from one's situation; thus, Charity cannot truly adapt to fit into a different life, just as she cannot efface the tattooed "Charlie" on her arm, which serves as a permanent declaration of her failure. Or her failure may, considering her show of resiliency in the final scene, be taken as a strange kind of victory, so that the show celebrates her undefiled difference, as a person whom an inadequate world (i.e., Oscar) cannot accept. In this sense, her failure to adapt is actually a sign of self-loyalty; although she may be incapable of the kind of "performance" that allows Annie to win Frank in *Annie Get Your Gun*, this is more to her credit than not. Or her failure—taken as ambivalently open-ended—may simply be a reflection of 1960s America, so full of what Charity sees inside herself: "anger and hope and doubt." More broadly, however, her failure stems from the conditions of the Broadway stage, which were not all that different in the mid-1960s from those of Bizet's *Carmen*, nearly a century earlier.[45] However acceptable it might have been to build a story around a fully and frankly sexualized woman, it was far less acceptable to show her

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succeeding in the world. By the 1960s, this may have been widely seen as more a failure of the world than of the woman in question, but the salient fact remains that *Sweet Charity*'s ending upholds the image of sexual otherness as an abject position, regardless of how, in other ways, that image might simultaneously be admired.

If we take the designation "bad girls" to refer only to heroines whom an audience might be expected to disapprove of in at least one important sense, then, in the musicals discussed earlier, only Gypsy Rose Lee and her mother really qualify. Annie Oakley is particularly innocent, although she transgresses gendered boundaries. Charity is pure of heart, and even her sexual indiscretions arise from her innate generosity and naïveté. Moreover, both of these shows provide us with significant models for how we should respond to them; "good" characters (Sitting Bull and Oscar) respond positively to Annie and Charity, who bring out the best in more dubious sorts, such as Frank Butler and Charity's friends Nickie and Helene. Indeed, a central strategy in musicals for making at least some kinds of "badness" acceptable and even laudable is to provide a model for our expected response in this way, or in intricate variations of it. For example, late in *Gypsy*, even though we expect it and even understand it, we are invited through Herbie's censure to regard Madame Rose's pushing of Louise to strip as the moment she crosses the line. Yet, until that moment, because Herbie goes along with everything else, we are given permission to enjoy at least the audacity of Rose's amorality when she steals, sabotages other acts, lies, and browbeats her way through life. But Louise escapes Herbie's censure altogether, even though the decision to strip is ultimately hers. Perhaps our attitude is expected to change as Louise becomes Gypsy Rose Lee, since that is the moment she loses her status of being only a victim and chooses freely to enter a tainted profession. Yet, if we are expected to feel critical of her for that choice, the crucial moment comes, ambiguously, with the later reconciliation of mother and daughter. This reconciliation may be understood in at least two ways: as Rose's partial redemption, because she is accepted by a "good" person (to the extent that Gypsy Rose Lee is still Louise); or as Gypsy Rose Lee's implicit admission that there is little to choose between them, in moral terms. In any case, however subtly their relative "badness" may be cast, all of these "bad girls"—even the innocently bad ones—are punished to varying degrees, although none of them dies.

Cabaret, another "moral fable" that opened the same year as *Sweet Charity*, follows this general pattern to some extent: the bad girl (Sally Bowles) remains before us as an admired free spirit until Clifford (Brian in the 1972 film) leaves her behind at the end; we know, implicitly, that she will not survive in Nazi Germany. If Sally Bowles ends up worse off than Annie, Gypsy, or Charity, however, we don't see her bad end; rather, we see only

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someone who is a genuine diva throughout the show, misbehaving in a grand style, both onstage and off. Thus, what Gypsy Rose Lee does only at the end of *Gypsy*, Sally Bowles does throughout: she *performs* "badness." Moreover, by the end of *Cabaret*, that performance has developed sufficient roots so that she can no longer seem innocent (that is, according to "our" reaction as performed by Clifford/Brian). Less than a decade later, after Fosse had already intensified this corruptive dimension of Sally Bowles's divahood in the 1972 film version of *Cabaret*, his 1975 *Chicago* offered up a world that contained no conventionally "good" perspective with which audiences could identify, so that what counts as good is generally something between naïveté and stupidity (thus, Roxie at times and her husband throughout), which can hardly be expected to provide a reliable moral compass. Indeed, conventional notions of morality seem simply beside the point in *Chicago*. In one important sense, this marks a kind of historical division point, after which, within a certain line of theatrical development, the idealist notion of self is eclipsed by performance as such.

Many things contributed to that development, but the threshold event was, arguably, the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, whose aftermath saw homosexuality increasingly acknowledged in several arenas, especially in personal terms ("outing") and in theatrical venues. The increased emphasis on Brian's homosexuality in the film version of *Cabaret* clearly reflects this changed environment. Post-Stonewall, it becomes more evident (even to mainstream audiences) that his admiration of Sally Bowles stems in large part from her divahood, and that his being in Berlin at all has less to do with his work than with his recreation, since Berlin—like Morocco for an earlier generation—was widely known as a place one could indulge in homosexuality without fear of official censure, particularly in the years immediately preceding June 1934, at which point the Nazis cracked down on homosexuality, beginning with their own (in the "Night of Long Knives"). Within the closeted gay theatrical context of pre-Stonewall Broadway, the badness of "bad girls," especially in the sexual realm, frequently served as a stand-in for homosexuality, and no more so than when the bad girl in question was an unabashed diva. While Broadway's penchant for indulging sexual license held appeal across orientations—Fosse, after all, was himself a notorious womanizer, although operating, as a dancer and choreographer on Broadway, within a world populated by a high percentage of gay men—the importance of many sexualized female stars to gay subculture became increasingly evident in more mainstream culture. Stonewall, in this sense, "outed" the diva as a trope of homosexuality.

To a significant extent, the specific features and the reception histories of many earlier film musicals, such as *The Wizard of Oz* and the 1953 *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, revolve around their playing in part to a closeted gay community while seeming to target mainstream audiences. I discuss how this works for *The Wizard of Oz* in chapter 2; in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (and here I refer only to the film version), the constellation of elements that play,

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often blatantly, to a gay audience is staggering, particularly considering that its director, Howard Hawks (who, however, had little if anything to do with the musical numbers), is widely considered among the most heterosexually "masculine" of that generation of Hollywood directors.[46] Those elements include Marilyn Monroe's fragile divahood and campish portrayal of femininity as Lorelei Lee; Jane Russell's broad-shouldered mannishness as Dorothy Shaw, which enables her parody of Monroe in a blond wig to play almost precisely like male drag; their glitzy production numbers, "Two Little Girls from Little Rock" and "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" (among the few songs retained from the 1949 Broadway score by Jule Styne and Leo Robin); their strangely emasculated admirers, Tommy Noonan's Gus Esmond, Elliott Reid's Ernie Malone, George "Foghorn" Winslow's Henry Spofford III, and Charles Coburn's "Piggy," none of whom sings and only the latter of whom had any real currency at the box office; and, of course, the all-male Olympic track team, famously featured as a nearly nude beefcake chorus line in Russell's "Ain't There Anyone Here for Love" (by Hoagy Carmichael and Harold Adamson; added for the film).

Post-Stonewall, the gay dimension of these and other films became more and more accessible to mainstream audiences, and open treatment of homosexuality grew increasingly common on stage and in film. For example, in the hugely successful *A Chorus Line* from 1975 (conceived, directed, and choreographed by Michael Bennett, with book by James Kirkwood and Nicholas Dante, music by Marvin Hamlisch, and lyrics by Edward Kleban), one of the finalists (Paul) is given an extensive monologue detailing his experiences as a gay dancer.[47] Whereas many saw this frankness as a breakthrough, others faulted the show for the timid conventionality of its overall treatment of this issue, especially given its daring treatment of other frankly sexual themes (e.g., in "Dance Ten, Looks Three," better known by its hook, "Tits and Ass"). Thus, after Zack (the director) pressures Paul into telling his story against his own wishes, Paul falls and injures himself; while this allows him to assume greater dramatic importance, it also eliminates him from contention and thereby excuses the musical from having to clarify how much, if at all, his being a "tortured gay" might have mattered in the selection process. (The other openly gay character, Greg, does not make the final cut.) Moreover, his elimination through what may well be a career-ending injury lies uncomfortably close to the familiar "punishment" scenario long associated with portrayals of gay men on stage and screen.[48]

In some ways, this episode plays as a miniature version of the basic strategy of the show, which is to make each person matter tremendously as such, with particular focus on his or her deepest fears and vulnerabilities, and then to efface his or her individuality completely as each dancer either fades away through elimination or becomes absorbed into the uniformity of the chorus line. For example, Cassie, a former star (a diva?), must hold herself in check so as not to stand out among the group, whereas the ambiguously titled "One"—the number they are learning to perform—seems at first to be a

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celebration of the uniqueness of each individual but ends up celebrating the oneness of the ensemble, which moves with such uniform mechanical perfection that it becomes difficult to tell one dancer from another.

In a deep sense, then, *A Chorus Line* runs counter to, or at least hedges around, the very reason that performance—especially in its heightened form, the performance of a *star*—is central to theatrically centered gay culture, which is that such performance is above all about making difference *matter*. This is not to deny the very important work that *A Chorus Line* performed for many gay men in giving Paul one of the most moving monologues of the show. But it may well be argued—and his monologue supports this, if obliquely—that Paul's appearance at an audition for a "normal" show marks his desperate need to deny his own difference so as to blend in. This is why it is particularly painful for him to have to recount his story at this moment, to "come out" just when he is in the process of trying to go back into whatever closet might be left for him. Moreover, with this speech the show also seems to suggest that Paul's prior theatrical venues were indeed something for him to be ashamed of; thus, he elicits ready sympathy by describing the Jewel Box Revue—a much-acclaimed, racially integrated drag show that ran for well over three decades—as "the asshole of show business." Needless to say, this opinion would hardly have been shared by the large number of the Revue's fervent devotees. But such judiciously mainstream positioning was, as we will shortly see, scarcely the only means by which musicals could, by the mid-1970s, engage with the phenomenon of gay divadom.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (film, 1975) was based on the experimental rock musical *The Rocky Horror Show*, by actor-composer Richard O'Brien, which he developed in early 1973 with director Jim Sharman for a three-week run at the experimental Theatre Upstairs in the Royal Court Theatre of London's King's Road.[49] Its success there allowed them to move it to a larger theater in King's Road, the Classic Cinema, for a slightly longer and even more successful run beginning in August. By November, it had settled into the King's Road Theatre, where it would play until March 1979.[50] In early 1974, Los Angeles–based record producer Lou Adler arranged to bring the show to his Roxy Theater on Sunset Boulevard, where the pace of many musical numbers became faster, and the basic style—apart from the frequent use of pastiche—shifted from glam (a development that had been less successful in America than in London) to an early version of punk;[51] it was during this run that audience members began dressing up as if they were in the show. The successful run closed in January 1975 to prepare for the move to Broadway, by which time the film version, based on Jim Sharman's adaptation, had already been shot within a tight schedule and under conditions so dreary that many participants were left discouraged or sick (or both; Susan Sarandon would suffer a nervous breakdown while battling pneumonia over the next nine months).

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By the time the film was ready for screening, however, the stage show had opened and closed at the Belasco Theater on Broadway after only forty-five performances and predominantly negative reviews, seemingly bringing the positive trajectory of the show in America to an abrupt end. Without the expected wave of anticipation from a successful Broadway run, and despite the film's great success in Los Angeles, Fox decided not to give the film wider distribution. Indeed, many *Rocky Horror* fans who saw the film at this stage found it disappointing, whether because it left behind the seedy cinematic setting of the stage show, because it toned down some of the show's sexual references, because it left out a fair amount of the show's dialogue, or because it seemed to be much slower paced than the stage version (as is often the case with film adaptations of stage musicals). After some minor editing,[52] Fox attempted, without much success, to market the film in college venues and then decided to try it out with midnight cult-film audiences in New York. So, on the midnight following April Fool's Day in 1976, the film opened at the Waverly in Greenwich Village—which marks the true beginning of the *Rocky Horror* story in America, notwithstanding its success as a stage show earlier in Los Angeles.

The revolutionary dimension of the *Rocky Horror* "phenomenon"—as it came to be called—was not just that it continued to draw audiences over a very long time or that many people came back again and again to see the film (all of which was unusual but not unprecedented),[53] but rather that members of the audience began *participating* in the film, a practice that evolved into a regular feature of midnight screenings across the country. Several factors contributed to this development, based variously in the subgenre of rock musicals, then-current trends in rock concert behavior, and long-developing habits of television viewing. The groundwork for activating these factors was well laid. Many of the principals in *Rocky Horror* had participated in the *Hair* "phenomenon" a few years earlier—*Hair* being, of course, the first "rock musical," which had tried in various ways to break down the boundaries between stage and audience. It was in the 1970 London touring company of *Hair* that O'Brien met Tim Curry, who would originate *Rocky Horror*'s Frank-N-Furter (variously punctuated) in London and America before playing the role in the film; and Jim Sharman worked with Brian Thomson on the Sydney *Hair* (also 1970), where Thomson had the idea to distribute participatory "kits" to the audience at each show. Shifts in the ways in which audiences and performers interacted at rock concerts (especially within the emergent "punk" community) had contributed to the audience-dress-up trend already noted with regard to the Los Angeles stage production. But aside from props and accessories, such as costumes, makeup, rice, and toast, the most startling development in audience behavior was its engaging the film in a semblance of conversation.

Louis Farese Jr. is most often given credit for the first call out, on Labor Day weekend in 1976, at the Waverly,[54] but it didn't take long for others to join in, as audiences found that the relatively slow pace of the film, with its

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often stylized, portentous line delivery, replete with internal "method"-style gaps, made it a particularly congenial property in this regard. Audience members could easily "respond" to the film's characters and their behavior, or interject questions or commands that ensuing dialogue or action would seem to respond to. Or, as part of an ongoing "floor show," audience members already dressed to resemble the film's cast could perform musical numbers either before the screening or along with the film. Many newspaper and magazine articles and, eventually, several books were written to document the various experiences of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*'s devotees. The Waverly received the most media attention, which indirectly led to the show's closure there in January 1978, after such publicity led not only to huge crowds but also to street-gang harassment of those crowds, threatening and sometimes delivering violence. But by then, in early 1978, *The Rocky Horror* phenomenon had long since become an ongoing national event that has yet to run its full course.

The practice of talking back to the screen, or performing along with it, probably devolves most directly from television, and in particular the screening and rescreening of certain films or film genres to somewhat specialized audiences in late-night slots, often (in those days) broadcast from local UHF stations. Familiarity with particular films or their predictable devices, or even with the recycling of a handful of (typically) really bad advertisements, undoubtedly led to a variety of homegrown verbal practices whose motivation might have ranged from "defense mechanism" to genuine (if sometimes patronizing) affection. Those verbal practices were like primitive versions of the elaborate "scripts" that would evolve for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, less imaginative and ritualistic but similar enough to confirm the significant overlaps between late-night-television viewers and the audiences for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The informal late-night party atmosphere that developed around the film's screenings thus led to a process of mutual discovery. Audience members who might have found echoes of their own private viewing habits in others who were talking back to the film felt uninhibited enough to join in, and through a cult-based folklike process evolved an oral tradition that both hardened into ritual and, paradoxically, liberated its participants into a quasi-improvisatory space. At the same time that the practice of talking back to *Rocky Horror* provided a way of asserting control over the unresponsive medium of film more generally, the film itself became, in part, a vehicle for something else: *performance*.

Any performer of someone else's material—especially in a musical—undergoes something very like this negotiation between the prescribed dimension of performance and a liberating feeling of agency. This feeling stems both from the physical aspects of performance and the process of adapting the material to one's own person and situation (thus making it one's own in some sense), which may or may not involve overt improvisation or riffing on what is already given. Moreover, as I have noted several times (see especially the beginning of the previous chapter), audience members often per-

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form material from a musical privately (with or without the assistance of "original cast" record albums), which both helps to internalize a musical's characters, emotions, attitudes, and so on, and makes possible a kind of "acting out," ambiguously either expressing one's "true self" or stepping outside oneself to assume an entirely different persona. Part of the liberating experience that this kind of performance provides lies in that ambiguity, in the difficulty (often even for the performer) in distinguishing between what is real and what is put on. "Trying on" roles in this way could allow private performers either to "find themselves" or "lose themselves"—or, in another seeming paradox, both at once.

Participating in screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, then, allowed audiences to merge this fairly private sphere of performance with the public arena of theatrical performance. What requires further explanation, however, is why this film, and only this film, has served this purpose so well, notwithstanding the proliferation of highly successful derivative events in recent years, including "sing-along" screenings of such films as *Mary Poppins*, *Evita*, and *The Sound of Music*.

Part of the reason is that the show was conceived and written by someone who shared many obsessions with this future audience base, including late-night genre films on television (especially science fiction), the theatrical dimension of rock concerts and rock musicals, *The Wizard of Oz* (after it began airing on television), and comic books. And here, the specifics matter tremendously. The predominant trope of the science-fiction/horror films to which O'Brien refers—those of the 1950s, when television first evolved into a mass media, and of the 1930s, especially those of the Frankenstein / King Kong / haunted-house varieties—was cultural paranoia, allegorically expressed. In the 1930s, much of that paranoia centered around political issues, so that, as a reaction to the xenophobic regimes that would form the Axis powers in World War II, America and its future (mainly English-speaking) allies, already suffering under the Great Depression, easily warmed to catastrophic or near-catastrophic scenarios involving uncontrollable monsters of one kind or another. The 1930s saw the best of the Frankenstein series (James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein* and 1935 *Bride of Frankenstein* and Rowland Lee's 1939 *Son of Frankenstein*), *The Old Dark House* (Whale, 1932), and *King Kong* (Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack, 1933); the decade also heard Orson Welles's panic-inspiring *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast on Halloween 1938. Moreover, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), like this parade of horrific strangeness, found renewed life on 1950s and 1960s television, albeit at a more respectable hour. After viewing these films repeatedly against the backdrop of evolving standards of presentation, aficionados began to relish the artificialities of situation and performance that many today would identify as camp, but which also stem in part from their allegorical basis.

In the 1950s, that allegorical basis would have seemed to address one or more of three main targets of cultural paranoia: communism (with focal

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points ranging from simple xenophobia to communism's atheistic basis), science (seen as either unnatural or against nature, or perhaps atheistic in its aspirations to God-like powers, but above all the suspect source of atomic power's various dangers, such as radiation-driven mutation), and an increasingly rebellious youth (manifest in specific elements of pop culture, commonly expressed in the triad of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll"). That the latter would provide the primary (but not only) focus for O'Brien has to do with the confluence of artificiality and performance. Sex, drugs, and rock and roll have always been about performing in some sense, offering opportunities for individual release and more generally constituting a rebellion of one generation against its predecessor. The lines of division were mostly a matter of performance: either you did these things or you didn't. Whatever person you were "inside," you were still a virgin, by definition, if you didn't take part (and it is no accident that the term "virgin" carried over into the *Rocky Horror* film cult to describe first-time viewers). Even O'Brien's response to rock was heavily mediated by issues of performance. Early on, before he moved back to London from rural New Zealand (where he had been raised), he was fascinated by an Elvis imitator;[55] later, the ready-made personae of *Hair* and the androgynous element in glam clearly held enormous appeal for him. In all three cases, despite the mythology of authenticity that has dominated a lot of discourse on rock music, it was the performative dimension that mattered for O'Brien, the ways in which rock created situations and personae for performance. Above all, then, *The Rocky Horror Show* was conceived as an opportunity—brazenly artificial because constructed of bits and pieces of familiar characters and situations—to perform those characters as experienced through the prism of the evolving rock scene in the early 1970s, in which everything revolves around sexual identity and its performance.

What follows is a partial accounting of the assemblage of situations and characters in *Rocky Horror*:

Frank-N-Furter (see the frontispiece) collapses the androgynous glam rock star and the God-like presumption of Dr. Frankenstein (Colin Clive in Whale's Frankenstein films) into one rock diva, channeling also some of the amoral and sexually aggressive qualities of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (as played by Malcolm McDowell in the 1971 Stanley Kubrick film). At the end of the film, Frank also recalls Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), in both his tearful "diva-farewell" scene in front of an imaginary audience (Gloria Swanson's Norma Desmond) and his ending position, as a discarded corpse facedown in the pool (William Holden's Joe Gillis, *Sunset Boulevard*'s narrator). Besides being a mocking derivation from the familiar "Frankenstein," Frank's name is promiscuously suggestive in sexual terms. In a mix of Freudian associations and then-current British slang, "frank" and "fur" refer to the male and female genitalia, respectively, with Frank's middle initial blurring the distinctions between "and" and "in," so that the name suggests both

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heterosexual copulation (frank *in* fur) and hermaphroditic qualities (frank *and* fur). Moreover, the familiar image of the frankfurter, of a "frank" in a "bun," has often been used to suggest male homosexuality.

Riff Raff is also a combination character, deriving most clearly from the dwarflike or hunchbacked servants of the Frankenstein films (variously, Fritz, Albert, or Ygor) and, with his sister, **Magenta**, the odd hosts of *The Old Dark House*. With the latter, the suggestion of incest between Riff Raff and Magenta probably stems from a more covert intimation of sexual deviance invoked by the hosts' family name (Femm) and the quirkily creepy performing style of Ernest Thesiger (Horace Femm; also Dr. Pretorius in *The Bride of Frankenstein*).[56] Additionally, Magenta takes on aspects of Morticia Addams (Carolyn Jones in the 1960s television series), Marlene Dietrich (especially in her monotonic singing style in her verse of "Time Warp"), and, completing the circle back to Frankenstein, Elsa Lanchester's "bride" in *Bride of Frankenstein* (with her hairdo at the end of the film).

The Criminologist (the "Narrator" in the stage version) was modeled most directly on Edgar Lustgarten,[57] who hosted *Scotland Yard* (1953–1961), *Mysteries of Edgar Wallace* (1960–1965), and *Scales of Justice* (1962–1967), British crime-program "featurettes" from Merton Studios, which were also syndicated for airing on British and American television; more generally, he serves (especially for those unfamiliar with Lustgarten) to parody stuffy authority figures of all kinds.

Brad Majors and **Janet Weiss**, like the first couple in *The Old Dark House*, are young (sexual) innocents stranded on a stormy night who seek help at the "haunted castle"; they also evoke the generic "good" kids tempted by the wilder ways of their peers in youth-oriented films, and the potential young victims/heroes of science-fiction and horror films. To betoken their relative lack of sophistication, they are played by Americans, whereas the rest of the cast are European (mostly English, following the tradition of the Whale films). They are also versions of Dorothy Gale from *The Wizard of Oz*, who, like them, travels during a catastrophic storm to a strange, unearthly place. Original plans were to imitate the *Oz* film by casting the framing sequences in black and white (or sepia) and by prefiguring future Oz characters among those in Kansas/Denton; following that plan, color would have arrived with Frank.[58] *Oz* is also evoked when, as Brad and Janet approach the haunted castle, they encounter a sign reading "Enter at your own risk," recalling the sign read out by the Cowardly Lion as they approach the castle of the Wicked Witch of the West.

Columbia is a rock groupie (of Frank), modeled specifically on tap-dancing stars of film musicals from the 1930s to the 1950s. She and rock and roller **Eddie**—whose knuckles read "l-o-v-e" and "h-a-t-e," recalling Robert Mitchum's creepy Rev. Harry Powell in Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter* (1955)—are discarded sexual conquests of Frank.

Rocky Horror is the creature created by Frank, referring most obviously to the Frankenstein monsters of 1930s films (all played by Boris Karloff) in being

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brought to life on a stormy night through electricity, being virtually mute (at least in the original 1931 film), showing an affinity for music (here he sings but does not speak), fearing fire, and escaping captivity after being tormented with fire by the servant. Like King Kong, he will attempt, late in the film, to ascend a tower carrying his beloved, in this case the RKO Tower rather than the Empire State Building (recalling, perhaps, that *King Kong* saved RKO from bankruptcy), and carrying Frank rather than Fay Wray (whom Frank has just identified with in song). Rocky differs from Karloff's monsters (and King Kong), however, in conforming physically more to the Charles Atlas bodybuilding ideal touted in ads at the back of 1950s-era comic books, or to Steve Reeves, a former Mr. Universe who made several films in the 1950s (Frank's songs refer to both); he has been created, after all, to serve Frank's sexual needs.[59]

Transsexual, Transylvania (the planet and galaxy of origin for Frank, Riff Raff, and Magenta, as well as many of the guests in the film version) connects the obligatory central European location for horror films with the gender bending that became increasingly mainstream in the 1970s, thanks in part to glam and a more general tendency toward gothic creepiness. In temporal terms, this constellation of "places" brings the relative innocence of the early 1960s (Brad and Janet) face to face with early 1970s presentations of alternative sexual identities, giving an explicitly sexual profile to the more allegorically presented strangeness of earlier science-fiction/horror films.

Significantly, each of the above combines elements from less than reputable cultural artifacts familiar from late-night television, makes their sexualized dimension explicit and dominant over other elements (such as science and politics), and provides the basis for elaborately artificial performance. Performance itself thus becomes, like the learning of dance crazes ("The Time Warp") and sexual experience (Frank's separate seductions of Brad and Janet, and Janet's seduction of Rocky in "Touch-a Touch-a Touch-a Touch Me"), a rite of passage, seen both in individual and in cultural terms. In this way, Frank's rampant sexuality encompasses and infiltrates all the stranger elements of genre film, making them seem, in retrospect, to have been mainly about weird sex in the first place.[60]

In this context, *Rocky Horror*'s music provides a means for regulating and facilitating the performances of these eclectically assembled personae, using exaggerated pastiche to emphasize both their artificiality and their adherence to generic archetypes.[61] Brad and Janet's "Dammit Janet," for example, exaggerates rock and roll's tendency to repeat simple chord progressions by repeating the progression I–iii–vi (not uninteresting in itself, but relatively simple and without a strong direction) to support a lyric that revels in its own uninspired inadequacies.[62] And, indeed, the score has many similar numbers that tread the boundary between pastiche and parody, so that they might be enjoyed as examples of their genres while emphasizing, with affectionate indulgence, their generic limitations. Just as important as these con-

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structed inadequacies, however, are the score's many instances of intriguing and subtle sophistication, so that the show does not simply wallow in the predictabilities of the generic but also engages its possibilities.

For example, Frank's pretensions to a God-like mastery of life itself—creating Rocky and manipulating, seducing, and physically controlling the other characters—resonates readily with both the Frankenstein stories and familiar tropes of divahood, a connection that is encapsulated in Frank's oft-quoted line (when he discovers Rocky with Janet), "I made you . . . and I can break you just as easily." The same trope, of "making" someone in both figurative and literal terms (with a suggestive undercurrent of what it means to "make" someone in sexual terms), provides the hook for "I Can Make You a Man," which Frank sings to Rocky after he emerges from his birth tank.[63] But here there is an additional layer to the "make" pun, as the song pushes hard against the Charles Atlas promise to make weaklings into "real men" through a crash exercise program (familiar from ads at the back of comic books). Even more fundamental to the scene, however, is the God-like pose Frank assumes, recalling Colin Clive's line at a similar moment in the 1931 *Frankenstein*, "Now I know what it feels like to *be* God!" The full line of the song's hook is "In just seven days, I can make you a man," alluding, with subtle blasphemy, to the original seven-day creation story from Genesis and evoking tropes of religious expression in the elaborate plagal conclusion to the line, delivering a full-scale "Amen" cadence (IV–I, with intervening harmonies) over "a man" (a near homophone of "amen"):[64]

In just seven days,
I can make you **a ma-aa-aa-an**.
[Ame-ee-ee-en.]

(Another evocation of the creation story occurs in the later "floor show" sequence, when the "creation-of-man" image from the Sistine Chapel is revealed on the bottom of Frank's pool; Frank floats above the image, situated between God and Adam, buoyed by a life preserver labeled "Titanic"; see figure 5.4)

Although *Rocky Horror* is flagrantly eclectic, O'Brien's score retains some aspects of the "integrated" score fostered in "book" musicals, mostly by drawing important harmonic materials out of the opening number, "Science Fiction—Double Feature," which was, indeed, one of the important generators for the show, both conceptually and literally. In the film, the song is sung by a pair of disembodied lips belonging to Patricia Quinn, the original Magenta, who sang the song in the original play dressed as an usherette. But the voice we hear is Richard O'Brien's, pitched so as to sound at times masculine and at times feminine. (The idea for this presentation was Brian Thomson's—production designer for the film and longtime collaborator with Jim Sharman—who found Sharman's idea for a montage of science-fiction film clips too boring.)[65] The resulting combination of androgynous sexuality and general campy creepiness is ideal, and this function of the

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Figure 5.4. Blasphemous images from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*: the disembodied lips of the opening credits fading into the cross above the Denton Episcopalian Church after "lip-synching" "Science Fiction—Double Feature" (top panel); and the "cross"-dressing Frank-N-Furter (Tim Curry) singing "Don't Dream It, Be It" while floating between the Sistine Chapel's images of Adam and God, as reproduced on the bottom of his pool. Easily missed in the latter, but evident in this juxtaposition, is how closely Frank-N-Furter—with some help from the "SS Titanic" life preserver and his brightly painted lips—reproduces the earlier image's constellation of smile, oval, and cross (thus also anticipating his own imminent "crucifixion").

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song—that is, to set a context for the show/film—carries forward on many fronts. Most obvious are the song's lyrics, which point to the quaintly exotic world of filmic science fiction. But the disembodied presentation itself points in two directions, toward the objectification of body parts encouraged by pornography and other overtly sexualized presentations, and toward the free-floating idealist "dream world" that the song suggests in its free-floating intermingling of situational "images" from roughly a dozen films (including *Rocky Horror*). Even more subtly, the musical profiles for verse and chorus point very specifically to significant musical moments late in the show, and less specifically to important material in between.

The chorus of "Science Fiction—Double Feature" plays out against one of the few really standard chord progressions in the show, especially familiar from doo-wop music from the 1950s, looped as an ostinato (as is typical for both rock and roll generally and this score in particular): I–vi–IV–V. But the progression is kept oddly off-balance by beginning in the middle (rectified by a two-bar extension of IV near the end) and by a device of musical phrasing common to most of the show's songs, of deemphasizing the opening harmony of a phrase in favor of the subsequent harmony (thus, V and vi in this case), by beginning after the former is struck and leaning syntactically into the latter:[66]

5.45

IV	V	I	vi
Science	fiction,	double	feature.
Doctor	X	will build a	creature.
See androids	fighting,	Brad and	Janet
Anne Francis	stars in	"Forbidden	Planet." Oh, oh, oh,
Oh, oh, oh, oh,			
At the late night,			
Double	feature picture	show.	

During the extended "Floor Show," this progression returns, but in a gradually normalized phrasing, to set Frank's "soliloquy" and then his repeated mantra, "Don't dream it, be it" (figure 5.4), which is eventually taken up by everyone as they join him in the pool in a stylized, dreamlike orgy:

5.46

I	vi	IV	V
Whatever happened to	Fay Wray, that	delicate satin draped	frame, as it
		Clung to her	thigh, how I
Started to	cry, 'cause I	wanted to be dressed just the	same.
. . .			
Don't	dream it,	[vocal rest]	be it

Not only is the progression itself regularized into its more satisfying conventional shape (a kind of resolution), but the words of the mantra, as well as the preceding words, are also especially well aligned with the harmonies, drifting toward the minor and softer realm of the subdominant ("Fay Wray, that delicate satin draped . . ."; "Started to cry"; "Don't dream it") and then

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coming around with a strong assertion of will on the dominant (in italics) ("I wanted to be dressed just the *same*"; "*be it*").

The verse for "Science Fiction" follows a different four-chord ostinato harmonic pattern based on the descending tetrachord from tonic to dominant (in this case, E♭–D♭–C♭–♭), and this progression, too, forms an important part of the concluding scene, as one of the traditions associated with this ♫**5.47** shape, the "lament" tradition, takes over in "Super Heroes." Although the lyrics do not lament, precisely, the song itself functions as a lament in musical terms; as the bass traces a fully chromatic descending tetrachord (see note 14 in the previous chapter), the song suggests a profound sense of loss even as its lyrics provide different modes of "processing." Thus, Brad remains fixated on his inadequate performance as a conventional strong male ("down inside I'm bleeding"), Janet on the insatiable sexual desires still fully awake within her ("still the beast is feeding"), and the Criminologist on the "larger picture" in suitably clichéd terms ("lost in space and meaning"). But the music mourns Frank, and it also offers a segue back to a concluding reprise of "Science Fiction," a segue that is both thematic (in its dreaminess) ♫**5.48** and musically specific.

Somewhat less literally, the opening harmonic progression in the chorus of "Science Fiction," a strong move from a major chord to the major chord a whole step above, forms the basis for many of the more aggressive rock numbers, particularly those with a strong sexual component. "Time Warp," for example, the most elaborate "strangeness" that Brad and Janet encounter in the early stages of their "haunted-castle" adventure, evokes a kind of visceral strangeness in its opening progression, each time cycling safely back to the tonic through a series of plagal resolutions (descending harmonically by fourths):

I (A)	II (B)	♭VII (G)	IV (D)
It's astounding, time is	fleeting,	madness	takes its
toll, / Listen closely, not for very much	longer	I've got to	keep con-
trol, / I remember doing the	Time Warp	drinking	those moments,
when / The blackness hit me			
and the void would be	calling		

melody:	F	E	G	F♯	F♯–E
harmonies:	♭VI (F)	♭III (C)	♭VII (G)	IV (D)	I (A)
	Let's	do the	Time	Warp a-	gain,
	Let's	do the	Time	Warp a-	gain.

As shown, the refrain initially jumps even farther afield (to F, the ♭VI of A and a tritone leap from B) before an extended plagal progression completes the cycle back home, while the melody maintains a tight, quasi-hysterical circle of control. The overall progression is a decidedly odd one, despite its familiarity, a combination that perhaps holds the key to the song's irresist- ♫**5.49** ibility. Importantly, while the initial harmonic impetus may be traced to "Sci-

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ence Fiction," the song is more concerned with controlling something that seems initially strange, so that it begins by bringing out the strangeness of its "Science Fiction" source progression, and then proceeds to control that strangeness. In literal terms, this fits the "instructional-dance" mode of the song, borrowed from similar numbers of the 1950s and early 1960s (a trope that Brad recognizes and acknowledges in his suggestion that they do the "Madison"), but it also suggests very strongly, through its surreal party setting, a realm of both drugs and strange sexuality ("But it's the pelvic thrust that really drives you insa-a-ane")—which can, however, be similarly learned and controlled.

"Sweet Transvestite" (Frank's entrance number), along with several later numbers with strong sexual implications or specific connections to Frank, takes its fundamental progression from the more extended progression of "Time Warp"; thus, "Sweet Transvestite" (I–♭III–IV) and the chorus of Eddie's "Hot Patootie—Bless My Soul" (I–II–IV), while partaking of different segments of the extended "Time Warp" progression, also bear a strong familial resemblance to each other.[67] Perhaps most elaborate in this regard is Janet's "Touch-a Touch-a Touch-a Touch Me," which extends a minor-mode version of the referential progression to the dominant, thereby creating a strong charge of urgent desire (dominant arrival is in bold):

I was feeling done in, couldn't win,
I'd only ever kissed before,
I thought there's no use getting into heavy petting,
It only leads to trouble and seat wetting.
Now all I want to know, is how to go,
I've tasted blood and I want more,
I'll put up no resistance, I want to stay the distance,
I've got an itch to scratch, I need assistance.

The harmonies of the verse (i–♭VII–III–iv, etc.) set up this moment of desire twice before the release into the major mode and Eddie's "Hot Patootie" progression:

I	II	IV	I
Touch-a, touch-a, touch-a,	touch me.	I want to be	dirty.

In its eclectic and fragmented recycling of the past, and in its breaking down of the boundaries between a fixedly performed "work" and a newly empowered audience, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* seems quintessentially postmodern. Only its status as doggedly *not* aspiring to high-art status would seem to bar it from becoming the poster child of postmodernism in its most pretentious form. Yet this point of resistance is crucial; for all its irreverence, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is dead serious about valuing its tokens of low art *as such*—that is, as found, recycled objects that belong to us all. In this sense, *Rocky Horror* is not at all postmodern but rather a kind of modernist reconstitution of devalued and discarded artifacts, deftly aligned into

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gratifyingly performable personae. Probably, it makes greater sense to think of the film as post-Stonewall, created during a time in which sexual identities seemed fragmented and nebulous, in which it could seem only natural and right to play freely with the combinatorial possibilities, both in fantasy and in the more fully realized domain of role-playing and performance.

Hedwig and the Angry Inch (1998), despite outward similarities with *Rocky Horror*, is aggressively postmodern, as it resolutely confronts us with the postapocalypse of the European-based modernist trajectory. The apocalypse in question is World War II and the Holocaust, and its "post" phase is the enforced splintering of cultures and societies represented most vividly by the Berlin Wall (1961–1989) and its aftermath. In *Hedwig*, the Wall and the conflicts it symbolizes are embodied within the person of Hedwig Robinson (né Hansel Schmidt), whose sex-change operation has left him/her in both gender and sexual limbo. While *Hedwig* seems to have been intended as a kind of follow-up to *Rocky Horror*, and though its mode of presentation is decidedly unorthodox (a mixture of standup comedy and low-budget rock concert), it is also, in the way it interweaves its political and personal themes, a much more conventional musical than *Rocky Horror*.

The parallels between the two shows are important. Both are situated in America and feature a non-American, cross-dressing male diva of somewhat ambiguous sexuality who pays a steep price for his/her deviance. Both scores are based in a sometimes retro rock idiom that partakes generously of punk—specifically, *Rocky Horror* is based in 1950s pastiche within a glam-derived protopunk, and *Hedwig* in what might be described as neoglam and postpunk, with a substantial admixture of heavy metal. Indeed, in Hedwig's monologue, the musical influences she cites overlap significantly with Richard O'Brien's, including *Jesus Christ Superstar* (not mentioned in the film version) and those whom Hedwig terms "the crypto-homo rockers: Lou Reed . . . Iggy Pop . . . David Bowie" (ellipses in original). *Hedwig* includes many direct and oblique allusions to *Rocky Horror*, referring early on to a doctor's operating table as a "slab" and incorporating verbal images of Frankenstein's creature in "Exquisite Corpse" (thus, "I'm all sewn up"), a song that also evokes the title of a key song in *Rocky Horror* during the bridge ("As *time* collapses and space *warps*"; emphasis added). More externally, there has been some effort to duplicate the *Rocky Horror* phenomenon through midnight screenings of the 2001 film of *Hedwig* in selected venues. But there is above all the sense of a shared *attitude* between the two shows, to some extent coming from their shared musical basis. In its unusual and flagrantly low-budget mode of presentation in particular, *Hedwig* seems to thumb its figurative nose at established ways of staging a narrative musical show, especially considering the hugely expensive productions that dominated Broadway during its development in the mid-1990s. Indeed, in this respect *Hedwig* is probably more daring than *Rocky Horror*; certainly its format allows it to indulge its music according to more normative standards

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of rock authenticity, mostly eschewing the often distancing effect of campy parody that runs through *Rocky Horror*'s songs.

One particular parallel, however, points vividly to how very different the two shows actually are. *Hedwig* went through a longer period of development than *Rocky Horror*, dating from early 1994, when actor John Cameron Mitchell created the central character, backed by Stephen Trask's songs and his band Cheater, at Don Hill's Squeeze Box in Greenwich Village, as part of a series of live-singing drag queens. As a full-fledged theater piece, *Hedwig* began in earnest in February 1997 at the Westbeth Theatre Center (considered off-off-Broadway) before moving a year later to an off-Broadway venue, the Jane Street Theatre, where it ran for a little over two years after a slow start. Once it achieved success as a show, its trajectory grew more parallel to that of *Rocky Horror.* In particular, the creative team for each show was quick to try to expand on the success of its initial American run (neither of them on Broadway, where *Rocky Horror* failed and *Hedwig* never ventured) by producing a film version, and each—like Hansel becoming Hedwig—had to "leave something behind" in order to make that move. In dropping its evocation of a seedy theater in favor of a more "natural" setting, *Rocky Horror* brought itself closer to the science-fiction films that were its inspiration, increasing the degree to which its central figures could be readily understood as composites created solely for the pleasure of performing them. The film version of *Hedwig* seems to move in the same general direction, away from the artificialities of the stand-up stage (sacrificing some of John Cameron Mitchell's often quite funny shtick in the process) toward something like the real world, by projecting believable if slightly surreal versions of pre-1989 East Berlin, a trailer park near Junction City, Kansas, and America as experienced by a band on a road trip. More to the point, perhaps, it tells its story along more conventional narrative lines than the stage version. Importantly, however, this strategy—while producing a film that acquired quick and deserved recognition when it appeared at the Sundance Film Festival in 2001—took the show away from the most unusual features of its initial presentation and brought it closer to what it was at heart: a Broadway musical whose characters resonate in vivid ways with the world of its time.

The world of *Hedwig*'s time was, of course, very much in flux, a situation that remains true as of this writing. Despite the widespread jubilation that greeted both the destruction of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and, slightly later, the collapse of the Iron Curtain, when both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia broke apart into constituent nations and ethnic groups in 1991, the reality of liberation was quite grim. The figurative Iron Curtain—so named by Winston Churchill in a famous speech in March 1946—had been erected between Soviet-controlled (or Soviet-influenced) Europe and the West just after World War II, whereas the more literally termed Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, as part of a failed attempt to isolate and then absorb West Berlin into the Soviet bloc. Partly because both institutions seemed, throughout

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the many decades that they remained in place, destined to endure for the foreseeable future, their sudden removal was felt with particular force. Yet, the extreme and prolonged violence that accompanies political repression tends to cast a long shadow, and it became clear across the 1990s that the removal of these long-enforced political barriers had activated (and in some cases reactivated) a large number of disturbing problems, both ethnic and economic. Throughout the 1990s, the former East Germany drained the resources and patience of the more prosperous West Germans, and ethnic- and nationalist-driven violence flared with barbaric ferocity in the Balkans and elsewhere, recalling for many the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust. The process of East European liberation was, all in all, a messy operation.

In thematic terms, *Hedwig* maps this unhappy political situation onto the body of its title character and relates it as well to ancient myths of origin, both of humanity and of sexual orientation. Thus, most obviously, the "messy operation" is performed on Hansel Schmidt's person, effacing his very identity as part of a process of liberating him politically and sexually. While Hansel acquiesces, by agreeing to the operation and assuming his mother's name as a necessary means for marrying the black American sergeant Luther Robinson, it is equally clear that his choices are closely circumscribed by political realities in East Berlin in the years before the wall came down. Despite frequent interpretive assumptions to the contrary,[68] there is little in the script (or in performances I've seen, which have in some ways deviated from the script) that confirms that *Hedwig*'s Hansel is in fact gay, although he does seem confused regarding his sexual orientation. As Hedwig makes very explicit, Hansel allows himself to be seduced by Sgt. Robinson specifically because of the taste of *power* that it gives him, and his agreeing to the unsuccessful sex-change operation is not driven by his sense of being a woman trapped within a man's body but by political necessity, since it appears to be the only way that he can use Sgt. Robinson as a ticket to the West. Many transsexuals have understandably felt betrayed by *Hedwig* because it problematizes Hedwig's sexual identity in any number of ways without providing any perspective whatever on how or why someone in a position to choose freely might decide to change her or his gender. But the show's fundamental frame of reference, politically, is not sexual politics in the United States but rather postmodern global politics, enacted in sexualized terms; from *Hedwig*'s perspective, it is thus crucial that Hansel's decisions and their consequences reflect basic truths about the chaotic, postmodern, and soon-to-be post-Soviet world he inhabits, in which promised freedoms prove elusive, choices are often few and onerous, and most attempts to improve things seem to make them worse.

But the depressing state of world politics is not the only larger frame of reference for *Hedwig*, for the show is also grounded, as noted, in ancient myths of origin, which offer important perspectives on both current world politics and Hedwig's situation. The most central of these myths comes from Plato's *Symposium* and is laid out in the second song of the show, "The

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Origin of Love," cast as a recollection of one of Hansel's mother's rare bedtime stories. According to this myth (which has its Judeo-Christian counterpart in Eve's creation from a part of Adam), and as recounted in the song, people were formed by the gods splitting us in two as punishment for our presumption; previously, we were double size (four legs, four arms, two heads, etc.), sometimes two men (Children of the Sun), sometimes two women (Children of the Earth), and sometimes mixed (Children of the Moon). In splitting us, the gods created the pain of love, understood as the desire to reunite with our severed other half. In Hedwig's song, the myth assumes universalized status through her naming of a variety of gods drawn from among different mythologies (see figure 5.5): Norse/Germanic (Thor), Greek (Zeus), Egyptian (Osiris), Roman (Jove), and Indian (unspecified). Moreover, the myth naturalizes homosexuality and even speculative bisexuality, since, although none of us can know whether his or her other half is female or male, we are nevertheless impelled through the painful urges of love to seek to reunite with that other half.

The myth has obvious application to both the political situation outlined here and to Hedwig's own personal quest. Despite the widespread urge to put things back together, whether politically or personally, it is a fairly hopeless quest to efface the violence of initial separation and the passage of time. As the first song, "Tear Me Down," states in fairly aggressive terms, the Berlin Wall that is Hedwig—at times suggesting that he represents the broken human legacy of the wall, at other times the wall itself—remains defiant of those who would simply remove it. Yet the song also holds out some hope, substituting in its final strophe the image of a bridge for that of the infamous wall. Being in between—Hedwig's position, both culturally and sexually—is, however, a decidedly mixed blessing, for it not only facilitates connection but also clarifies and reinforces the essential separateness of the two sides, neither of which represents home.

"Tear Me Down," like most of the "angry" songs in *Hedwig*, uses the musical language of metal, dominated by successions of "power chords" (that is, chords that are missing the mode-defining third, often overamplified to produce distortion and add rawness to the tone). Part of what gives power chords their "power" is their evocation of the primitive, which includes a seeming antipathy for the more refined subtleties of the major and minor modes. It is probably appropriate to hear this aggressive disregard for the basic binary categories of tonal harmony, which have dominated music for three centuries, as a parallel to Hedwig's—and the world's—situation in the mid-1990s: as something in between, and thus at the same time either-or and neither-nor. While this congruence between technical features and the show's basic themes may be a matter of instinct or happenstance, it goes a long way toward explaining why metal makes up an essential part of *Hedwig*'s idiom. Moreover, two things indicate that Trask's musical choices in this regard are neither casual nor merely reflex driven. Later in the show, after Hedwig spits beer into the audience, she explains: "That was a rock

♫ 5.54

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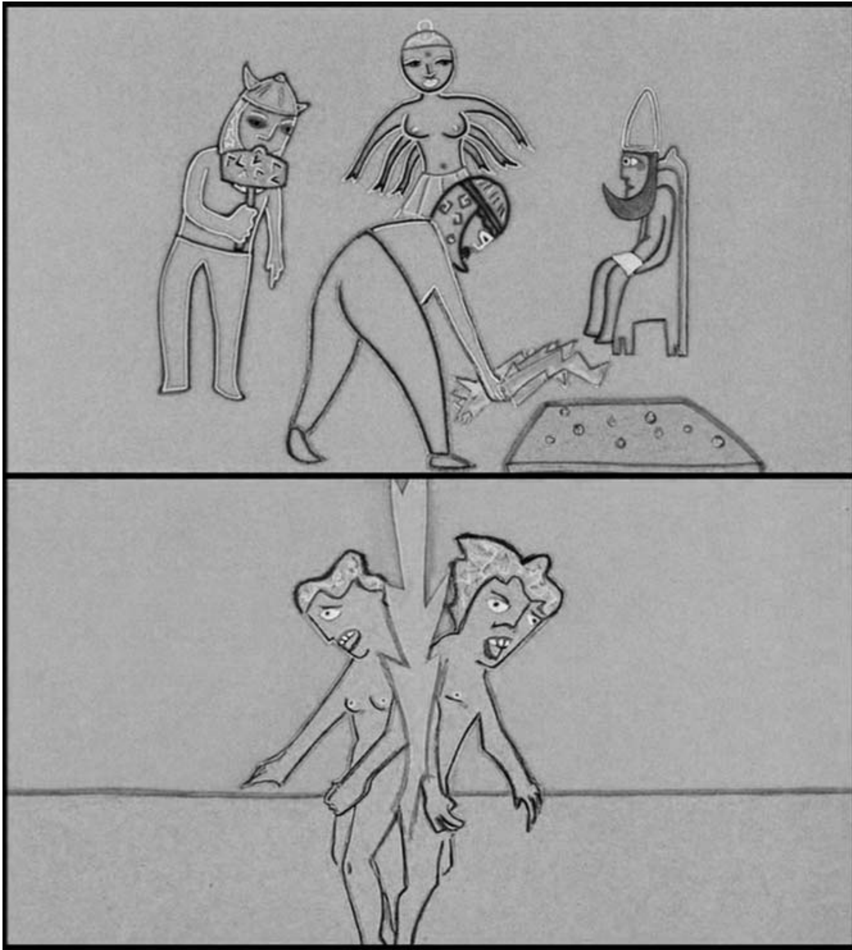

Figure 5.5. Two images from Emily Hubley's animated sequence for "The Origin of Love," in the 2001 film version of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. In the upper panel, gods representing four different mythologies—from left, moving clockwise, Thor, Durga (or Devi; the song does not identify precisely which Indian god), Osiris, and Zeus—plot how to punish humanity; in the lower panel, Zeus splits the compound humans in half with his thunderbolts, forming the two-legged species we know. This fundamental act of irreparable mythical violence serves in the show as the metaphorical basis for both Hedwig's quest for wholeness and postmodern political realities.

and roll gesture. Actually that was a heavy metal gesture. Want to see a punk rock gesture? *(Fills mouth with beer; a threatening pause; then she spits it over herself.)* It's the direction of the aggression that defines it." This theatrical demonstration of gesture and attitude underscores generic conventions without either choosing among them or denying their value as authenticating expression; even here, Hedwig remains in between. Moreover, such distinc-

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tions also have a specifically musical profile in *Hedwig*, worked out as part of the show's basic musical strategy of alternating anger (metal, power chords) and comfort (often retro, with full harmonies).

Thus, "The Origin of Love" begins with a gentler but still "primitive" style, with chords consisting mainly of empty fourths and fifths and an off-the-beat tonic motive that seems a more tranquil echo of the screaming, off-the-beat tonic power chords heard during the instrumental portions of "Tear Me Down." This faint hint of the violent idiom of the previous song soon gives way to a warmly sophisticated treatment of fuller harmonies when the vocals enter, emphasizing the major-mode third in a repeated melodic figure, but then shifting the harmonies beneath. The effect is a kind of harmonic shape-shifting, which sets a child's view of the origin myth, brilliantly captured in Emily Hubley's animation (see figure 5.5), which accompanies this song in the film (in the following, boldface indicates melodic repetitions of F♯, the third of the tonic D):

5.55

When the **earth** was still flat / And	D
clouds made of fire / And	Bm
mountains stretched up to **the** sky,	A (added sixth)
Some**times** higher. . . .	G^4_3 (inverted G_7, or G/D)

Especially poignant is the final line of this introductory "once upon a time," with its aching major-seventh combined with an image that suggests both Olympus and a child's perspective on mountains. But besides setting up these warmly expressive harmonies, the emptier harmonies of the opening also look ahead to the angry explosion of power chords that will erupt as the gods perform their cataclysmic surgery on humanity. If the connection to Hedwig's own cataclysmic surgery is only implicit, the final return places the myth firmly within the context of Hedwig's personal quest, a matter now of personal pronouns, beginning with "Last time I saw you."

5.56

The next song, "Sugar Daddy," inverts that progression toward the personal, moving in its three verses from a craving for sugar to a craving for the surge of experienced power, a transition mounted against a series of dominant-tonic cadences late in the verse, moving from V to I both melodically and harmonically (italics are for the melodic dominant, bold is for the tonic arrival):

5.57

v. 1: *Oh, the thrill* of **control**, like *the rush* of rock **and roll** . . .
v. 2: *Oh, the thrill* of **control**, like *a blitz*krieg on **the roll** . . .
v. 3: It's *our tradi*tion to **control**, like Er*ich Hon*ecker and Hel**mut Kohl**. . . .[69]

But in the angriest song from the first part of the show, the subsequent song, "Angry Inch," with its wall-to-wall power chords and stuttering vocal delivery, the personal-exteriorized profile becomes a kind of sandwich, with all personal hurt on the outside, slaked with some bitter humor, and with only the hint along the way of how Hedwig's personal and at times physical pain reflects a larger situation ("I'm from the land where you still hear the cries").

5.58

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This kind of negotiation, between the personal dimension and its larger context, partakes of an integrative strategy typical of musicals, usually assuming some aspects of the marriage trope, and it is worthwhile to sort out the dimensions of the latter in *Hedwig*. To begin with, there is the question of gender and its potential for "bending." Significantly, for example, the makeup of her band (the "Angry Inch") undergoes a shift in gender while reflecting both Hedwig's real need to scavenge as best she can and her apparent desire to move along the borders; thus, she first uses "Korean sergeants' wives" and later switches to fellow East European political refugees, Jacek, Schlatko, Krzyzhtof, and Skszp (according to the script, pronounced "SKSHP"). In the show's original staging, *Hedwig*'s band provided most of the needed vocal backup, although in some later productions a separate vocal group also assumes some of the roles in Hedwig's stories, perhaps as a compromise with the more naturalistic approach of the film. Originally, Hedwig's only onstage collaborator is her current husband, Yitzhak, another refugee who is a former drag queen from Zagreb, Croatia, where he was (according to Hedwig's monologue) billed as "the Last Jewess in the Balkans," appearing under the name "Krystal Nacht" (referring to the infamous "Night of the Broken Glass" in 1938 Nazi Germany, when Jews were beaten and their property was destroyed all over Germany).[70]

The extremity of Yitzhak's marginalization is underscored by his being played by a woman (Miriam Shor) in both the original production and the film. This casting stemmed partly from musico-dramatic needs: to have higher notes available in some of the ensemble singing, and to allow Yitzhak more easily to upstage Hedwig on occasion, as required by the plotting of the show. Arguably, this casting also moves the show somewhat closer to the mainstream casting of musicals, which have traditionally benefited from the blending of female and male vocal types, especially as integrated within a romantic plot. But the choice also carries deeper thematic significance, both by providing a balancing reversal for Hedwig's profile as a man imperfectly presenting as a woman, and by underscoring the tendency to align marginalized populations with feminine characters. Hedwig's own emasculation reflects this tendency as grounded in the political realities of East Germany after World War II, when it had come to occupy the more feminine position of disenfranchised "Other" in relation first to the Soviet Union and then to West Germany. The legacy of World War II and the Nazi era also inflects Hedwig's view of things; thus, as she notes the visual parallel between Sgt. Robinson and his proffered Gummy Bears, she concludes with a brief but chilling reference to the Nazi gas chambers, disturbingly resonant as well with her descriptions of her childhood experiences, when, as a boy, and on his mother's insistence, he listened to rock and roll with his head in the oven: "His expression is echoed in scores of tiny faces pressing against clear plastic. Painted faces of every imaginable color, creed and non-Aryan origin, fogging up the bag like the windows of a Polish bathhouse. It's only a shower. Abso-

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lute power!" But notwithstanding the complementary gender-bending aspects of Hedwig's pairing with Yitzhak, that relationship is clearly destined to be no more permanent than her marriage to Sgt. Robinson, for it is constantly being eclipsed by her past relationship with Tommy Gnosis, né Tommy Speck, the son of a general who, after gratefully receiving Hedwig's love and tutelage, has built a successful career as a rock star on the songs she taught him and with the name she bequeathed to him ("Gnosis," the Greek word for knowledge).

The film and some later stage versions of *Hedwig* efface the delicious possibility that Tommy (or perhaps only his relationship to Hedwig) is a phantom, a mere projection on Hedwig's part. Since in the original all of the characters are channeled through the same actor's monologue, the strong suggestion persists throughout that they are but dimensions of one complex personality, embracing not only Hedwig herself but also Hedwig as a boy (Hansel), his mother, Luther Robinson, and Tommy, all of whose voices emanate from Hedwig. Moreover, this interpretation, or something like it, is eminently consonant with the show's governing myth of separation and possible recombination through love—from which, however, Yitzhak stands somewhat apart, both because he is literally present and because he resists assimilation into Hedwig's encompassing psyche. The original show is thus much more ambiguous about the boundaries of the self, and it seems plausible to see Hedwig's inadequacies—the neither-nor dimension of her in-betweenness—as powerful facilitators, allowing her to transcend neither-nor and even either-or to become, simply, *all*. As such, drawing on Christian imagery, her story lies close to that of Christ, whose abjectness transmuted into the universal and all-encompassing; there are, indeed, rather broad hints that this is an intended deep reading of the show. Hence, early on, Hansel's mother draws a shocking, cryptic analogy between Jesus and Hitler (both of whom "died for our sins");[71] Hedwig later alludes to the Shroud of Turin, whose ghostly image many believe to be the imprint of Christ's face (in this case, the "Shroud of Hedwig" consists of the imprint of her overdone makeup on a hand towel); and the show encourages a close identification, especially in "Exquisite Corpse," between Hedwig and the martyred creature of Dr. Frankenstein,[72] who is often seen as Christ-like, born without original sin and martyred to humanity's imperfections.

Hedwig's assumption of different personae in telling her story is brought to a musical focus in "Wig in a Box," the "comfort" song that follows "Angry Inch," and which details Hedwig's ritual of assuming identities as a mode of escape, admittedly temporary (since each verse but the last ends with Hedwig alone: "I put myself to bed" and "I turn back to myself"). The ritual dimension is carried by a calming descending sequence, dropping fairly conventionally from tonic to subdominant by way of the submediant, in an expansion of the familiar doo-wop progression (first verse given; later lyrics vary slightly):

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I put on some makeup (I–V)
Turn on the tape deck (vi–iii)
And put the wig back on my head (IV–I–V)

At this point, the ritual accomplishes its magic, and Hedwig (now fully ♫5.59 "head-wig") becomes someone else over transporting harmonies:

Suddenly I'm Miss Midwest Midnight Checkout queen . . .
. . . Miss Beehive nineteen sixty-three . . .
. . . Miss Farrah Fawcett from TV . . .
. . . this punk rock star of stage and screen. . . .

All of these identities are retro, transfixing images from Hedwig's youth as Hansel, and so are both all the more tantalizing and all the more unattainable. The final identity—"this punk rock star"—is not relinquished, however; perhaps because of the "angry" bridge, an empowered Hedwig insists at the end of the final verse, "And I ain't never, I'm never turning back." In its ritualized, transformative performance of clichéd characters, this number comes the closest in *Hedwig* to the world of *Rocky Horror*, and it is no coincidence that this number has lent itself most readily to audience participation.

Yet, despite this number and the untraditional device of enacted narration, with its enticing interpretive avenues, the show may also be read less obliquely, as a more traditional deployment of key songs underpinning a story of romantic reconciliation. "Wicked Little Town," which doesn't appear until midway through the show, provides the linchpin, positioned by Hedwig as "the first song I've ever written" and left hanging, incomplete, at the end. The song is, in effect, the show's "Science Fiction—Double Feature" (that is, its musical and thematic wellspring) while at the same time functioning as its "Send in the Clowns," appearing fairly late, but still early enough so that its reciprocated reprise can complete the drama. Hedwig sings it to Tommy shortly after they meet, and it is through his singing it back to her with a new lyric of conciliation that the show achieves some sense of closure. Like *Rocky Horror*'s "Science Fiction—Double Feature," "Wicked Little Town" begins with a prominent instrumental descending line that will later be elaborated as a lament bass (in "Hedwig's Lament"). Like "Send in the Clowns," the song proffers an invitation that alternates between hopeful and hopeless, in this case evoking a context that mandates escape as a first priority, implicitly conflating both Junction City and Berlin with Sodom, the ♫5.60 original "Wicked Little Town." But between the invitation and its eventual acceptance (however ambivalent and partial) comes Hedwig's complete breakdown, as her exquisitely rendered "Lament," with shifting minor-mode harmonies over a chromatically descending bass, segues into what is another aria type borrowed, like the lament, from opera: the "mad" scene. "Exquisite Corpse" ferociously inverts the chromatic descents of the "Lament," screams out its stream of power chords, and breaks mood incoher-

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ently ("A random pattern with a needle and thread"), while the lyric speaks directly to the ways that the world's madness has literally been mapped onto Hedwig ("I'm all sewn up, a hardened razor-cut scar map across my body"). As this number concludes, Hedwig removes her wig and smashes the tomato breasts from her bra against her bare male chest. Now fully abject and defeminized, she is able to become Tommy, and does so, singing the reprise of "Wicked Little Town."

5.61

Hedwig offers an intriguing constellation of the "authentic" dimension of rock—its capacity to enact raw, ugly violence and emotional depth in seemingly direct terms—and the acknowledged artificialities of performance. At the same time, it develops its themes in such a way that personal identity is conceived as only and always partial, so that a deep sense of self is necessarily also partial, driven to seek its completion in others. The divided world, divided Europe, divided Berlin, and Hedwig's divided self are all aspects of the possibly redemptive tragedy of human existence, the impossible quest for a stable, embracing unity that must inevitably be denied to any sexual being. But redemption is nonetheless possible, through abjection and perspective, both of them familiar tropes of religion. Hedwig and Tommy achieve individual redemption through Hedwig's failure, Tommy's recognition of her, and Hedwig's subsequent gesture of release to Yitzhak, the latter delivered during the benedictory "Midnight Radio"—another reference to *Rocky Horror* in its acknowledgment of a community that achieves spiritual union through the air waves at the "in-between" time of midnight.

"Midnight Radio" adopts a "traveling" tempo in a 6/8 meter but begins starkly, in barely related chords and isolated melodic pitches, so that the more secure flow of the evolving song will emerge as part of a process that will later include an honor roll of female divas (Patti, Tina, Yoko, Aretha, Nona, and Nico),[73] and culminates in the familiar harmonic token of redemption and religious acquiescence, the plagal "Amen" cadence (on the final syllables of "radio" and "rock and roll"):[74]

5.62

> And you're shining like the brightest star,
> A transmission on the midnight radio.
> And you're spinning like a forty-five,
> Ballerina dancing to your rock and roll. . . .
> And you're spinning your new forty-fives,
> All the misfits and the losers.
> Well, you, you know you're rock and rollers
> Spinning to your rock and roll.

In paying homage to other female divas, Hedwig effectively abandons her divahood by joining perspectives with the "misfits and the losers" she is singing to. As when she left East Berlin, she progresses here by thus leaving part of him- or herself behind. The process of stripping away the trappings of her divahood made a particularly strong effect in the prefilm stage productions, when the process also implicitly depleted her of her supporting cast,

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most of whom were channeled through John Cameron Mitchell as he enacted Hedwig's story with the mix of real life and exaggeration familiar to us from stand-up comedy. But even in the more conventionally narrative film version, and in many postfilm stagings of the show, which tend toward greater narrative realism, Hedwig is able to redeem something of herself in the end only by renouncing her own divahood and becoming part of the audience, part of the world at large, for whom rock and roll is something heard over the airwaves, at midnight. To be sure, the world she thereby embraces is broken, perhaps beyond repair. But by joining it—and here she again recalls Christ, in his renunciation of divinity to become human—she enables a sense of transcendence that is confirmed by one of music's most powerful and traditional symbols of transcendence: the flat sixth, which is why the number (and the show) ends with a cycle of alternations between tonic and flat sixth ("Lift up your hands"). ♫5.63

For Further Consideration

The Wizard of Oz (1939), *Carousel* (1945), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949; film, 1953), *Bells Are Ringing* (1956), *Funny Girl* (1964), *Mame* (1966), *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (film, 1967), *Applause* (1970), *A Clockwork Orange* (film, 1971), *Seesaw* (1973), *A Chorus Line* (1975), *The Wiz* (1975), *La Cage aux Folles* (1983), *Beauty and the Beast* (1994), *Howard Crabtree's "When Pigs Fly"* (1996), *Rent* (1996), *A New Brain* (1998), *The Full Monty* (2000), *Bat Boy* (2001), *Hairspray* (2002), *Avenue Q* (2003), and *Wicked* (2003)

See Also

Regarding *Annie Get Your Gun*, see chapter 5 of Andrea Most's *Making Americans*; pp. 218–28 in Philip Furia's *Irving Berlin: A Life in Song*; pp. 235–46 in Edward Jablonski's *Irving Berlin: American Troubadour*; pp. 233–40 in Michael Freedland's *A Salute to Irving Berlin*; and pp. 111–18 of Ethan Mordden's *Beautiful Mornin'*.

Regarding *Gypsy*, see Keith Garebian's *The Making of Gypsy*; chapter 6 of Scott Miller's *From Assassins to West Side Story*; chapter 4 of Craig Zadan's *Sondheim & Co.*; pp. 375–400 in Arthur Laurents's *Original Story By*; pp. 105–28 in Stacy Wolf's *A Problem Like Maria*; pp. 69–121 in D. A. Miller's *Place for Us*; pp. 244–51 in Ethan Mordden's *Coming Up Roses* and pp. 276–78 in his *Better Foot Forward*; pp. 132–43 in Meryle Secrest's *Stephen Sondheim: A Life*; and chapters 14, 16, and 17 of Theodore Taylor's *Jule: The Story of Composer Jule Styne*.

Regarding *Sweet Charity*, see pp. 219–22 of Ethan Mordden's *Open a New Window* and, concerning the film version, Richard Dyer's "Sweet Charity."

Regarding *Rocky Horror*, see (among a large quantity of writings about the show and film) especially Jim Whittaker's *Cosmic Light: The Birth of a*

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Cult Classic; Scott Michaels and David Evans's *Rocky Horror: From Concept to Cult*; Sal Piro's *"Creatures of the Night": The Rocky Horror Picture Show Experience* (including an introduction by Richard O'Brien and some of the audience "scripts"); Bill Henkin's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show Book*; and Richard J. Anobile's *The Official Rocky Horror Picture Show Movie Novel*.

Regarding *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, see Scott Miller's "Inside *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*" and pp. 233–51 of Judith Peraino's *Listening to the Sirens*.

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