Barbra Streisand (1942–)

I Can Get It for You Wholesale: 1962
Funny Girl: 1964; film 1968
Hello, Dolly!: film 1969
Yentl: film 1983

Other Musical Plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein Cited

Carousel: 1945
The King and I: 1951
Flower Drum Song: 1958

Other Musicals Noted

Show Boat: 1927
Babes in Arms: 1937
Cabin in the Sky: 1940
Carmen Jones: 1943
Guys and Dolls: 1950
A Tree Grows in Brooklyn: 1951
Kismet: 1953
By the Beautiful Sea: 1954
Damn Yankees: 1955
Candide: 1956
The Music Man: 1957
Once Upon a Mattress: 1959
She Loves Me: 1963
Fade Out—Fade In: 1964
On a Clear Day You Can See Forever: 1965
The Apple Tree: 1966
Hallelujah, Baby!: 1967

INTRODUCTION

In an early scene in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music,* a group of nuns bemoans the irrepressible nature of one of their postulants, Maria. They sing to a sprightly melody that "she climbs a tree and scrapes her knee" and that "her dress has got a tear." Maria breaks all the rules; she sings in the abbey and "waltzes on her way to Mass"—actions that enrage some of the nuns and charm others. And in the spirit of the musical's delightful, if required, suspension of disbelief, this first verse of the nuns' song is in 3/4 time—a waltz. Thus they rail against what they themselves do: sing and waltz. Maria affects the nuns in potent ways, as they sing in an almost a cappella, cut-time recitative that sounds like a musical tailspin: "When I'm with her I'm confused / Out of focus and bemused / And I never know exactly where I am."[1]

Maria, unruly and uncontrollable, is a problem. Like many of Rodgers and Hammerstein's early songs that describe a main character's flaw or difficulty—Ado Annie's "I Can't Say No" in *Oklahoma!,* Nellie's "Cockeyed Optimist" in *South Pacific,* Cinderella's "In My Own Little Corner" in *Cinderella*—the nuns' song expresses what the character Maria *is.* The song serves the purpose of introducing Maria's character quirks.

As the conventions of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical theater go, the rest of the play must deal with this character's eccentricities. The character is usually a woman, usually needs to be taught a lesson, and usually is taught that lesson by a man. In *South Pacific,* Nellie learns from Emile to be racially tolerant, and he learns to value

love as much as politics. In *The King and I,* Anna learns a lesson of multicultural tolerance from the King of Siam, and she teaches him to be gentle and to trust a woman. In *Cinderella,* the leading woman learns that differences in class and status don't really matter and that one can find true love. Sometimes the Rodgers and Hammerstein heroine changes, and sometimes she changes the man. But she always learns her lesson, and she becomes the wiser for it. Like many of the musicals by Rodgers and Hammerstein and other composers and lyricists of the period, *The Sound of Music* features two principal characters, a woman and a man, Maria and Captain von Trapp, who are temperamental opposites. In this and other musicals of the postwar era, they reconcile their differences, sing together, and marry by the end.

Unlike many musicals, however, *The Sound of Music* does not introduce the two principals one right after the other. In *South Pacific,* for example, Nellie sings "Cockeyed Optimist," and then Emile sings "Some Enchanted Evening." In Irving Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun,* Frank Butler sings "I'm a Bad Bad Man," and then Annie sings "Doin' What Comes Naturally." In Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady,* Eliza sings "Loverly," and then Higgins sings "Why Can't the English." In contrast, in *The Sound of Music,* many songs pass before the male principal appears, and when he does, he barely sings at all.[2] Instead, the nuns enter early in the musical and sing; they are set up as Maria's opposition.

Yet the nuns' song, in a range of female voices, does not take up a position, attitude, or temperament opposite to that of the female principal, as the early songs sung by men do, but attempts, rather, to situate her. From many different points of view Maria is the focus and the center. Maria, the one who can "outpester any pest / Drive a hornet from his nest," the one who can "throw a whirling dervish out of whirl," is the problem.[3]

Maria's singing of the title song opens the musical, followed immediately by the nuns' scene. In "The Sound of Music," Maria reveals much about herself, not by describing what she *is* but by expressing what she *wants.* "My heart wants to beat / Like the wings / Of the birds that rise / From the lake to the trees," she sings. The day is over, and she must return to the abbey, even though "deep in the dark green shadows are voices that urge [her] to stay." When her "heart is lonely," she finds solace in the mountains.[4] In this way, her first song resembles Rose's first song, "Some People," in *Gypsy,* Eliza's

"Loverly" in *My Fair Lady,* and many other opening numbers in musicals by different composers and lyricists. "The Sound of Music" functions more as an "I want" song than as an "I am" proclamation. In *The Sound of Music,* other characters introduce what Maria *is.* She cannot explain what she is by herself, only what she wants. She is figured as a character full of desire.

Even as Maria fits into a recognizable Rodgers and Hammerstein female type, there is something different about her. What kind of "problem" is Maria? No language or word can describe her as the nuns first try out and then reject the possibilities—a "flibbertijibbet," a "will-o'-the-wisp," a "darling!" a "demon!" a "lamb!" She is associated with nature—with moonbeams, with ocean waves, with clouds. She is "unpredictable as weather," "flighty as a feather," untamed, outside the social order.[5]

In *The Sound of Music,* the "problem" is that Maria has chosen the wrong path for her life. She is not destined to be a nun, but a wife and a mother. The problem, then, is that she ought to be a practicing heterosexual. Her desire to be out of doors and to sing and climb trees can be seen as an expression, a rechanneling, or a sublimation of her sexual desires, since in the strict, self-disciplining world of the abbey, there is no sex (and no singing, they sing). Maria's gradual, halting, but steady march toward her heterosexual life and large nuclear family, which begins with the nuns' song, is clearly one reason why she remains one of the most loved characters in the American musical theater.

But there are other ways to see Maria. For many spectators, Maria seems to be a lesbian, and the "problem" seems to be that she is one. Now, of course, she isn't really a lesbian, and Rodgers and Hammerstein (probably) didn't intend for her to be one. And most likely, neither Mary Martin on Broadway nor Julie Andrews on film considered her to be a lesbian in their characterizations of her. But still, to audiences who are inclined to look and listen in this way, she fits. For some audiences, Maria, as embodied by Martin on stage and then Andrews in the film, can be seen and heard as a "lesbian." This book, then, is not concerned with producers' intentions or even with the meanings that mainstream culture has found in musicals, which have been widely written about, but instead rereads musicals from a lesbian and feminist perspective by design.[6]

In *A Problem Like Maria,* I argue that musicals generate queer

meanings and offer queer pleasures for audiences. In the chapters that follow, I detail a range of four women's performances to chart four different "lesbian" types that these women embody and envoice.

I introduce "lesbian" in quotation marks purposefully, to emphasize that I am arguing neither that any of the four actors constituting the focus of this book were lesbians nor that any of the characters they play are lesbians.[7] In contrast, terming them "lesbian" is a shorthand way of asserting that they *can be read as* lesbian.[8] This rhetorical gesture is just that, a device employed in order to create a persuasive reading of these women as "lesbian."

This kind of reading is, to some extent, invited by the song, since to be literal, it is not Maria herself who is the problem; rather, she is compared to a problem that the nuns must solve: "How do you solve a problem *like* Maria?" The relationship between Maria and the "problem" is one of metaphor and approximation, not unlike this author's search for lesbians in musicals. And the fact that there is *a* problem *like* Maria—rather than, say, *the* problem that *is* Maria—suggests that there could be similar "problems" elsewhere. This problem has the possibility of multiplying, much like the contagious pleasure of finding lesbians in musicals once one begins to look at and hear musicals differently. The challenge is to determine how lesbians appear where none officially exist.

Making Meanings

For musicals, as for any novel, film, musical composition, dance, or performance—any cultural work, that is—meanings emerge through a negotiation or a "struggle over meaning" among text, context, and spectator.[9] Any reading, analysis, or interpretation of a performance, then, already incorporates all three terms. In other words, when we say that a play *means* something, we have *already* interpreted that play; already considered some aspects of the context and not considered others; already used particular interpretive skills, of which we may or may not be conscious, to make meaning. "Text," "spectator," and "context" are mutually interdependent terms that might be seen to constitute three sides of a triangle.

The first side of the "meaning triangle" concerns context. In terms of context, this book is both historical and undeniably a- or even anti-

historicist, in the sense that it practices what Judith Halberstam terms "perverse presentism."[10] In other words, I examine the historical contexts in which these lead women originally performed but analyze those performances using theories of gender and sexuality developed many years later. It's quite likely that these women would not have been interpreted as conveying "lesbian" when they appeared in these musicals. The performances of Merman, Martin, Andrews, and Streisand originated in the cultural context of the late 1940s through the early 1960s, and historical assumptions about gender and sexuality are crucial to some of their meanings. At the same time, these women are an enduring part of American culture, partially accessible by way of photographs, recordings, films, or videotapes. They live in the collective cultural memory, as their names are well known to many, their faces iconic, and their voices immediately recognizable. They are historically significant for their own eras and also for the present. Context, then, includes the present moment and the sustained proliferation of references to the musicals of these four women.

The second side of the meaning triangle is that of the spectator. The spectator imagined here is feminist and lesbian, a position that can be inhabited by any spectator willing to look and hear from a lesbian point of view. The terms "woman," "feminist," and "lesbian" are used somewhat interchangeably to underline this book's primary concern with *spectators' uses of the musical,* however they might identify themselves. I do not argue that lesbians possess an idiosyncratic or uniform viewpoint. Indeed, some lesbians might not see musicals from a feminist perspective at all. In short, this book aims not to theorize the intricacies of identity nor even to posit a demonstrable connection between identity and interpretive practices but to *model* feminist and lesbian readings of musicals that are readily available to spectators willing or inclined to look and hear in certain ways.[11] The form of the musical itself encourages spectators to engage with it from identity positions not their own.

The third side of the triangle, that of the text, refers here to the American musicals of Martin, Merman, Andrews, and Streisand. The "text" also includes scripts, interviews, letters, biographies, autobiographies, photographs, videotapes, recorded sound, and the off-stage lives of the four leading women as documented by the media.

This book emphasizes the cultural memory of musicals and focuses on performers rather than on the composers, lyricists, direc-

tors, choreographers, and designers who collaborated to produce each show. While there is no doubt that Rodgers and Hammerstein *created* the Broadway musical as we know it, the traditional approach to musical theater history that emphasizes the evolution of the musical's form often does so at the expense of performance analysis. Traditional scholarship of musicals has studied the text (the libretto and the score) above all, only occasionally detailing elements of design, directing, and acting, singing, and dancing. This shortcoming appears to arise from a central methodological dilemma: performance analysis requires the physical proximity of scholar to scene, yet theater is fleeting. However extensive the gossip network and however sharp a given spectator's memory, Broadway musicals of the 1950s and early 1960s are no more. One can read reviews, look closely at publicity photos, listen to cast albums, or witness short scenes restaged on television tributes to composers. One can make assumptions about the work of choreographers based on reproducible dances or film versions of musicals. But the specific details of Ethel Merman's Momma Rose or Julie Andrews's Eliza are lost.

In writing theater histories and performance analyses of musicals, we need to acknowledge that, as with the writing of all theater histories, desire to have experienced the original event and the absence of that event significantly structure our research.[12] Some studies of Broadway musicals compensate for this absence by creating a rhetorical sense of "I-was-there"-ness that is both seductive and dangerous. When an astute, prolific writer like Ethan Mordden provides a first-hand account of the opening night of *Call Me Madam* in his book on 1950s musicals, *Coming up Roses,* I can only wonder how accurately he remembers details about performances witnessed more than fifty years ago.[13] While his evocative description ably provides a sense of the performance, it also belies the fleeting nature of theater and the imaginative labor of the theater scholar.

Some spectators do remember seeing Mary Martin in person, flying across the Broadway stage in 1954. Others saw her on television in 1960. Others now own the videotape of *Peter Pan*. Still others have heard the cast album or have seen photographs of her. Even as I take into account the different forms of photographs, interviews, scripts, and recorded songs, I do not attempt the futile task of reconstructing a live performance. Instead, I am interested in how representations, visual and aural, can evoke a sense of a live performance, perhaps one

witnessed by the reader and now lodged in memory or perhaps one only imagined. All writing about performance is incomplete, but usefully so. As Peggy Phelan argues, "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."[14] In other words, once performance is represented in some way—through recording or description or written or spoken recollection—it no longer counts as performance but becomes a different kind of representation altogether. Attempting to document the "undocumentable event," Phelan asserts, requires the "rules of the written document" and so changes the "tracelessness" that makes performance so significant. Phelan suggests that "the document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present."[15] Because the original texts—the actual live performances of Broadway musicals in which Martin, Merman, Andrews, and Streisand starred—are long gone and because fans experience and understand musicals differently, I use a range of representations in this book to examine the women's lives, careers, and performances. The reconstruction requires imagination as well as research.

Because so few people actually saw musicals during their original Broadway runs, what counts as "memory" and as "performance" varies greatly. For example, the importance of the cast album, one of the key sources of "evidence" for this book, changes over time. When *My Fair Lady* was playing on Broadway in the mid-1950s, the cast album was a desirable commodity that, for some people, was almost as valuable as actually having seen the musical itself. After the musical closed, the cast album took on a life of its own, separate from the play. The songs were memorable even out of context. The songs of mid-twentieth-century musicals also have a life outside of the show, and many listeners know only the music and not the script or the story. For many baby boomers, the songs of 1950s musicals occupy a place of almost unconscious knowledge. Many people know the words to musicals that relatively few people actually saw on Broadway. But the cast album, the musical's ever-available remains, camouflages loss. Owning a cast album means that many listeners never experience loss; they never experience missing the play. Other fans of musicals are familiar with the shows themselves from high school, community, or other local theater productions.

This book is concerned with interpreting musicals differently: in seeing and hearing in nonconventional ways; in consciously accounting for the importance of spectators' identifications and desires; in not taking for granted heterosexual narratives; in seeing the lesbian in the straight character; in recontextualizing, replacing, re-viewing. These are precisely the interpretive practices prompted by seeing movies, watching television, listening to cast albums, and participating in a culture that seldom explicitly represents lesbians or lesbian desires. The pervasive nature of a media devoid of lesbian representation can lead spectators to see, hear, and experience musical theater differently, queerly.

Histories and Contexts

In the mid-twentieth century, Broadway musicals like *Carousel, Guys and Dolls,* and *Damn Yankees* served as mainstream culture, both reflecting and shaping the concerns and fascinations of the United States. With the enormously influential, almost simultaneous developments of the long-playing album and of television in the 1950s, musical theater became available to a mass audience.[16] The frequent appearances of musical theater stars on television variety shows, which relied on many techniques of the stage in television's early years, and the sales of original cast albums brought musical theater to millions of American homes. To this day, Mary Martin and Ethel Merman's thirteen-minute medley of Broadway show tunes on Ford's fiftieth anniversary show in 1953 is cited as a great moment in television history. The album of *My Fair Lady,* with Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison, was released three days after the show's March 1956 opening. It sold over five million copies and was the number one album on the *Billboard* magazine charts for weeks. When Andrews and Richard Burton appeared together on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1960 and sang "What Do the Simple Folk Do?" from *Camelot,* ticket sales for the recently opened show skyrocketed. And Martin's 1960 filmed-for-television performance as Peter Pan is still the standard musical version of J. M. Barrie's classic story. The adaptation of many musicals for film, particularly *The Sound of Music* in 1965, which won numerous Academy Awards and garnered an almost cult-like following, continued the influence of musicals in the

American cultural landscape. Finally, the musical sustains its prominent place in American culture through Broadway revivals, television versions, and countless productions in universities, high schools, and community theaters.

The musical grew and was popular during the post–World War II era—a period when many women who worked outside the home during the war returned to homemaking after men reclaimed their jobs; when homosexuals were both pathologized and criminalized; and when the image of the white, middle-class, nuclear family in the suburbs represented America at its best. The musical appears to reflect the dominant values of the culture: conservative, sexist, and homophobic. Musicals are frequently structured around a heterosexual couple; although the man and the woman often begin as suspicious of one another or even as enemies, they invariably marry by the end, as do Harold Hill and Marian the librarian in *The Music Man* or Annie Oakley and Frank Butler in *Annie Get Your Gun*. Women seem to fall hopelessly in love in musicals. The eventual heterosexual union required by the musical also unifies the community, as woman submits to man, nature to culture, passion to reason, body to mind.

Musicals tend to end in one of three ways. Sometimes the entire cast reassembles for a rousing reprise of the show's sure-to-be-a-hit number, such as "There's No Business Like Show Business" or "Seventy-Six Trombones." Or, when the conclusion is not a literal marriage, musicals often end with a symbolic one that celebrates the strength of the heterosexual couple and the nuclear family. Billy Bigelow in *Carousel* returns to heaven, his soul redeemed, as his daughter graduates from high school; the von Trapp family in *The Sound of Music* prevails over the Nazis and escapes Austria on foot. Finally, if the woman refuses to capitulate to the man, she is punished by isolation, which almost all musicals mark as a tragic ending. In *Camelot,* Guenevere is sent to a convent; in *Funny Girl,* Fanny Brice sings alone, her face stained with tears. In most cases, the message of musicals is that heterosexuality is both natural and mandatory and that women should know their place.

Racial and ethnic politics fare no better. Except for the few specifically African American musicals like *Cabin in the Sky* and *Carmen Jones,* the romantic couple is almost always white. Many 1950s musicals' representations of Native Americans, such as those in *Annie Get Your Gun* and *Peter Pan,* are exaggerated stereotypes and deeply

offensive from a contemporary perspective. A notable exception is the positively portrayed interracial relationship of Lieutenant Cable and Liat in *South Pacific,* which caused anxiety among white theater producers and Broadway audiences and solidified the identification of Rodgers and Hammerstein with liberal politics. Still, *South Pacific* and the other musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein that represent Asian cultures in order to take on serious social issues and argue for tolerance—*Flower Drum Song* and *The King and I*—ultimately objectify the nonwhite characters under the guise of liberal universality. Although these musicals feature Asian characters, they erase the specificity of Asian cultures to prove that underneath everyone is alike and should behave according to American cultural values.[17]

But just as the image of the homogeneous postwar era belies the complexities of that time, the idea of the musical as simplistically conservative underestimates its ability to produce a range of meanings. The postwar decades witnessed an unprecedented baby boom; the building of a national highway system that enabled, for some, an exodus to the suburbs; and a proliferation of household goods that capitalized on housewives as consumers. But American culture in those years also saw the beginnings of the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement. Gay and lesbian communities flourished in bars, homes, and private spaces and built a quiet momentum that would explode during Stonewall. (On 27 June 1969, riots broke out in front of the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village gay bar, when customers resisted arrest after a police raid. This event marked the unofficial beginning of the gay rights movement.[18] It was also the night of Judy Garland's funeral, and some historians attribute the heightened emotions to that event.) Similarly, upon closer examination, musical theater in the 1950s and early 1960s can be seen to reveal considerable ambivalence about gender roles and the possibility of its happy endings. There are cracks in the image of the musical as America's finest form of escapist entertainment. It is these fissures that *A Problem Like Maria* explores.

A Problem Like Maria focuses on the period from the late 1940s through the early 1960s, the period of Martin's, Merman's, Andrews's, and Streisand's unequaled stardom in musicals, especially in Broadway musical theater. Merman and Martin were the indisputable queens of Broadway in the 1950s. Julie Andrews debuted on Broadway in *The Boyfriend* in 1954 (the same year as Martin's *Peter Pan*),

and she is best known for her work later in the 1950s: *My Fair Lady; Camelot;* and on television, *Cinderella.* Streisand made her Broadway debut in 1962 with the small but show-stealing role of Miss Marmelstein in *I Can Get It for You Wholesale.* By the time she achieved theater stardom in *Funny Girl,* she was already known as a singer, having performed in New York City clubs and cut two hit albums. When *Funny Girl* opened on Broadway, Streisand was working on her first solo television show, "My Name is Barbra." Two films that are central to this study are *The Sound of Music,* starring Julie Andrews, and *Funny Girl,* with Barbra Streisand. The fact that enormous social and cultural changes were well underway in the United States by the time these films were released in the mid-1960s and the fact that they both met with immense popular success point to the lasting, almost transhistorical appeal of American musicals.

The musicals of Martin, Merman, Andrews, and Streisand played during what is considered the "Golden Age" of Broadway musicals, from 1943 until the mid-1960s, the years of television's growth, Hollywood's struggle, and Broadway's gradual transformation from a popular venue to an elitist one. The American musical proved the success of capitalist collaborative ventures during an era of economic growth. It proposed mainstream social values in an accessible, crowd-pleasing package. And although Broadway stayed in its geographical place in midtown Manhattan and although much of its audience consisted of middle-class New Yorkers (many of whom were Jewish), long-playing albums made the voices of Broadway's singers widely recognizable, and television enabled Broadway stars to become household names.

Entertainment technologies made the musical more available and easily translatable into more accessible cultural forms. The long-playing album, first produced in 1948, created a desire for and sense of ownership of the musical outside of the experience of actually attending the show. Cast albums were extremely popular, and single songs became hits on the pop charts.[19] In 1956, for example, the same year that *My Fair Lady*'s original cast album was number one on the *Billboard* magazine chart for weeks, Elvis Presley cut his first records that went gold, an astonishing seven for the year. Because much of early television relied on the conventions of theater, particularly the vaudeville variety show, scenes from musicals easily translated to the small screen. Viewers could feel as if they had seen *Camelot,* even if

they had not. Television readily mimicked the live show itself and "meant to democratize what had traditionally been an aristocratic, box-seat view of theatrical spectacle."[20] The breathtaking growth of television meant that for the first time, Americans had a common culture and common points of reference.[21] The musical was a part of that culture.

American popular entertainment in 1956, the middle of this period, included Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady,* starring Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison, which took the theater world by storm and ran for 2,717 performances. *The Diary of Anne Frank* won the Pulitzer Prize for drama. In film, Elizabeth Taylor starred in *Giant;* Tennessee Williams's *Baby Doll* was banned at some movie theaters for being "revolting" and "obscene" and became a smash hit at others. *My Fair Lady* won the Tony Award for best musical, and Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison won best actress and best actor in a musical. *Around the World in Eighty Days* won the Academy Award for best motion picture, Yul Brynner won best actor for *The King and I,* and Ingrid Bergman won best actress for *Anastasia.* Finally, in 1956, the steamy novel *Peyton Place* was published and soon became a bestseller. On television, the tear-jerking daytime show *Queen for a Day* premiered, and *Gone with the Wind* was broadcast for the first time, with 52 percent of television-owning households tuning in.[22] Along with *The Mickey Mouse Club,* jazz, and commercials for Timex watches and General Electric ovens, musical theater was a part of midtwentieth-century American culture.

But musicals cannot be seen only in relation to mass culture—that is, to capitalist, profit-seeking, mass-produced and -distributed forms like movies and television. Although the Broadway musical spawned smash-hit albums and although its stars appeared regularly on television, it remained, in its original setting, available to relatively few people and seemingly within the realm of high art. Although popular in the commonsense notion of the term—well liked by many people—the musical was not mass culture. Its immediate influence was necessarily more limited than the large-scale impact of film or television.[23] At the same time, Broadway musicals never truly qualified as high art and, to many, never earned the label "art" at all. A far cry from the Broadway plays of Arthur Miller or Tennessee Williams, musicals were seen as distinctively middlebrow, middle-of-the-road entertainment, and their predominantly middle-class audiences likely over-

lapped with those of film and television.[24] Soon after they premiered, they were reproduced in university and community theaters and thus moved into the sphere of popular culture, or the culture of the people. Neither high art nor mass culture nor popular culture, the midcentury American musical displays characteristics of all three. The musical, proliferating on vinyl and through the airwaves and later embodied in countless amateur productions, sustained national appeal throughout the twentieth century and continues to have influence today.

The Broadway musical's reputation as optimistic and escapist corresponds to the predominant characterization of this era in American history, as these are the years known for *I Love Lucy* and *Father Knows Best.* The 1950s witnessed the baby boom; the growth of the suburbs; an enormous increase in the production of household appliances; and the propagation of "togetherness," a term coined by the women's magazine *McCall's* in 1954, as the domestic ideal. The 1950s also saw the addition of the television set to many American homes.[25] In the years from 1949 to 1952, the average number of television sets purchased per month was 250,000, and while 9 percent of all American homes owned a television set in 1950, by 1960, 90 percent did.[26] Unprecedented economic expansion, especially for whites, facilitated a sense of self-confidence in the nation and in an individual's ability to make choices about where to live, how to live, where to work, and perhaps most importantly, what to buy. This sense of confidence describes the spirit of many midcentury Broadway musicals.

For white, middle-class, mainstream Americans, social values were clear. The family came to epitomize dominant America's idea of itself, and gendered roles in the family were not only seen as positive but were portrayed as absolutely necessary for psychological health and social stability. The prevailing social script is well known. Men were breadwinners, husbands who helped out at home, and rule-makers. Women married young, married up, had children, and became homemakers, aided by the numerous household appliances appearing on the market. Women were invested in managing a well-run, spotlessly clean home and enabling the success of their children.

While many women, especially middle-class and white women, worked outside the home during World War II, they lost their jobs once the men returned home. Trends were reversed to maintain social stability, and a dominant theme of popular postwar writing was that women should return to their proper place in the home. The woman

who wanted to continue working, according to one 1947 journalist, appeared "thoughtless and greedy . . . extravagant, a poor mate for her husband and a bad housekeeper."[27] In the decades following World War II, women worked in low-paying fields, their wages dropped, and federal support for child-care facilities ended. The Equal Rights Amendment lacked votes, and its supporters were characterized by a memorandum of the Woman's Bureau (a government agency established by Congress after World War I to track the status of women and labor) as "a small but militant group of leisure class women [venting] their resentment of not having been born men."[28] In his study of women in U.S. history, William H. Chafe summarizes, "Although some change had occurred, it was within a structure of assumptions and values that perpetuated massive inequality between the sexes."[29]

In spite of the characterization of the 1950s as the placid decade of happy white families in the suburbs watching televisions and mowing their lawns, it was also a time of uneasiness and anxiety, even for those who were white, middle class, Christian, and heterosexual. The postwar generation was haunted by memories of Bergen-Belsen and Nagasaki, by the threat of annihilation by incineration or the bomb. Anxieties, fears, and contradictions—particularly about power, individualism, gender, and domestic safety—offset the confidence of the postwar era. As Elaine Tyler May writes in *Homeward Bound,* her influential study of the culture of the Cold War, practices of containment abounded, both in actuality (in social policy) and metaphorically, through cultural representations.[30] For example, women were expected to be mothers, but there was great anxiety about the kind of mothers that they should be. They were instructed to be involved but not too overprotective, lest they make their boys into homosexuals. May writes, "Mothers who neglected their children bred criminals; mothers who overindulged their sons turned them into passive, weak, and effeminate 'perverts.'"[31]

Fear of homosexuality was pervasive. Jonathan Ned Katz explains that the 1950s "were a period in which the psychiatric community waged an extensive assault on gay people." For example, in 1953, the State Department fired or forced the resignation of more than nine hundred gay men and lesbians "because of what the government called their 'perversion.'"[32] In the 1940s and 1950s, according to Lillian Faderman, "Every aspect of same-sex love . . . came to be defined as sick."[33] Unlike other periods in U.S. history when women, particularly white, middle-class, or upper-class women, could form alternative domestic arrangements, the 1950s "mandated that women learn to lead a double existence if they wanted to live as lesbians and yet maintain the advantages of middle-class American life."[34]

Furthermore, the "homosexual menace" was intimately connected to the fear of communists, as Stephanie Coontz explains: "A 'normal' family and vigilant mother became the 'front line' of defense against treason; anticommunists linked deviant family or sexual behavior to sedition."[35] The stability of the family, then, not only guarded against foreigners from other countries with other values but also protected society from the threat from within. Chafe explains: "Machismo, patriotism, belief in God, opposition to social agitation, hatred of the Reds—these were the definitions of true Americanism."[36] The "witch hunt" of senator and anticommunist crusader Joseph McCarthy—the House Un-American Activities Committee—was intended to root out any hint of political liberalism, whether expressed through politics, art, or sexuality.[37]

Meanwhile, social and cultural struggles that would lead to Beat culture and to the civil rights and women's liberation movements were forming.[38] While the nuclear family was fundamental for certain sectors of the population and while conservative policy makers emphasized the need for America to maintain its stability, its autonomy, and its borders, many women and African Americans were articulating a different vision of American society. The Kinsey report on women was published in 1953; *Brown v. Board of Education* took place in 1954; the Montgomery bus boycott happened in 1955; the birth control pill was invented in 1960; Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963; the free speech movement occurred in 1964. The stage was being set for the explosive social changes of the later 1960s and early 1970s.

In the postwar decades, popular culture and theater, of which musicals were a part, perpetuated the status quo, reflected everyday realities, and offered new if often contradictory possibilities for gender and sexual identities and relations.[39] Women were frequently portrayed as glamorous temptresses (Marilyn Monroe), as martyrs (June Allison), or as girls-next-door (Doris Day). Idealized images of women as mothers proliferated, from June Cleaver to Molly Goldberg. Playwrights Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams dominated the nonmusical theater of the midcentury.[40] Their women—from Miller's

long-suffering Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman* to the ruthless Abigail in *The Crucible* and from Williams's voracious Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to the pathetic Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*—reinforced the gendered tendencies of other representations in theatrical form. Dramatic realism and Method acting invited a mimetic, identificatory spectatorship, in which the audience could recognize the character's psychology; could locate her in relation to other, real women; and could feel anger or pity or disgust for her. Even within these limited stereotypes, though, contradictions were more than evident. While the television show *Queen for a Day* reminded viewers that women were primarily housewives and that miserable women were to be rewarded for their pain, Elvis Presley's gyrating hips and crooning melodies invited fans, especially women, to express sexual desires. The range of these images both supported social values and reflected divergent expectations.

Representations of women in the musical differ in kind from those in mass culture and nonmusical theater. While many musicals do feature the ingenue/girl-next-door in the soprano romantic lead, such as Laurey in *Oklahoma!* and Julie in *Carousel,* and a few musicals offer temptresses, such as Lola in *Damn Yankees,* just as many contain strong, dominating women like Anna in *The King and I,* Auntie Mame in *Mame,* and Dolly Levi in *Hello, Dolly!* Even women coupled with men emerge as powerful and singular. Most of the shows focus on women, and they tend to be the stars—think of Merman then Martin in *Annie Get Your Gun,* Merman in *Gypsy,* Martin in *The Sound of Music,* Andrews in *My Fair Lady,* and Streisand in *Funny Girl,* to name only a few.[41]

In contrast to the many representations of "perfect" mothers on television and film, in musicals, motherhood as a biological, familial role is seldom represented, although the metaphorical image of the mother as caretaker (rather than as biological mother) is prevalent, especially in such musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein as *South Pacific, The King and I,* and *The Sound of Music.* In each instance, though, the woman takes on an identity that exceeds motherhood. Idealized mothers, so prevalent on television, tend to appear in musicals as secondary, nonsinging roles. Broadway's most famous mother continues to be Merman's Momma Rose in *Gypsy,* described by reviewer Walter Kerr as "the mastodon of all stage mothers," not a typical mother.[42] The Broadway musical is the one performance form that features women as neither passive objects of desire nor subjects of vilification.

The argument that mid-twentieth-century American musicals contain potential feminist and lesbian pleasures goes against the grain of accepted assumptions about musicals. Even in its heyday, the musical was considered to be the quintessential, sentimental, nostalgic American art form. In *Broadway Babies Say Goodnight,* Mark Steyn notes that Oscar Hammerstein II invented many of the clichés of the contemporary American English vernacular—"I'm as corny as Kansas in August"; "climb every mountain, ford every stream"; "getting to know you." He adds, "And it's not his fault he did it so well that clichés is what they've become."[43] Not only is the language of Broadway the language of America, but the happy escapism of the musical also conforms to America's postwar optimism. Ethan Mordden writes: "Listen. European art is honest: Italian art is about faith, English art is about class, and German art is about power. American art is dishonest—which explains why our only major narrative invention is the musical, a fantasy form."[44]

The "dishonest" fantasies that musicals perpetuate operate on two levels, the individual and the societal. On the level of individuals—the principals or the musical's main characters—boy gets girl. On the level of the representation of society—the chorus—everyone is united at the end. Mid-twentieth-century musicals promote tolerance and offer a vision of an American world in which heterosexual couples unite and different people—farmers and cowmen, Siamese and British, Indians and whitefolk—get along, primarily through music and dance.

But the Golden Age musical's origin story requires a more complicated telling, because these American fantasies were produced primarily by Jewish artists who were influenced by the music of African Americans. As in the early days of the movie industry, Jewish men, many of whom were first-generation Americans, dominated the mid-century production of the musical. Jewish composers and lyricists included Irving Berlin, Lorenz Hart, Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Alan Jay Lerner, Fritz Loewe, Jule Styne, Stephen Sondheim, Jerry Herman, Sheldon Harnick, and Jerry Bock.[45] Richard Rodgers's now-legendary story recounts how the non-Jewish Cole Porter told him that he had found "'the secret of writing hits.'" In his autobiography, Rodgers relates:

> As I breathlessly awaited the magic formula, he leaned over and confided, "I'll write Jewish tunes." I laughed at what I took to be a joke, but not only was Cole dead serious, he eventually did just that. Just hum the melody that goes with "Only you beneath the moon and under the sun" from "Night and Day." . . . These minor-key melodies are unmistakably eastern Mediterranean. It is surely one of the ironies of the musical theater that despite the abundance of Jewish composers, the one who has written the most enduring "Jewish" music should be an Episcopalian millionaire who was born on a farm in Peru, Indiana.[46]

How did Jewish men in particular—historical outsiders—create one of the most quintessentially American forms of culture? Although anti-Semitism was less overt after World War II, Jews, many of whom had liberal politics, were suspect. As Victor S. Navasky writes in *Naming Names:* "Congressman John Rankin (HUAC) linked liberal Jewish interests and Hollywood's 'pro-Soviet' agenda. On November 14, 1947, he read a list of actors and their given names—June Havoc/Hovick, Danny Kaye/David Daniel Kaminsky, Eddie Cantor/Edward Isskowitz."[47] Rankin added: "There are others too numerous to mention. They are attacking the Committee for doing its duty in trying to protect this country and save the American people from the horrible fate the Communists have meted out to the unfortunate Christian people of Europe."[48] Not surprisingly, given the rhetorical and political slippage between communists and Jews, most mid-twentieth-century musicals do not directly reflect the identities of their makers. Andrea Most explains: "Centrist Jews, in order to protect their hard-won status as loyal American, therefore needed to dissociate Jewishness from communism and establish their own anticommunist credentials, while critiquing the methods and rhetoric of anticommunist demagogues."[49] One way of doing this was to recast the "fight for racial equality as a way to fight communism," protecting the United States from "revolution from below" by an African American underclass.[50] This strategy translated artistically into positive characters of color, as in *South Pacific.* Jewish men could assimilate into white society by writing "American" characters in an American idiom, demonstrating their patriotism and not pushing the liberal envelope too much.

Well before Jewish men in musical theater consciously attempted to produce racially liberal musicals, their "Jewish music" of Broadway drew on the rhythms and sounds of African American music—jazz and the blues. Bernard Holland notes, "The Broadway show [the American musical], a cultural collision of East European Jewry and the descendents of African slaves, is fresh food packed with energy, just waiting for upscale tastes."[51] The popular, Jewish music of the mid-twentieth-century musical was bookended by African American music. In the 1930s and 1940s, the blues influenced Tin Pan Alley composers like Berlin and Gershwin, who then became Broadway composers. By the end of the 1950s, African American singers like Sam Cooke, Ike Turner, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard were on the white hit charts, and Elvis Presley became known as the first "black" white performer. According to David Halberstam, Elvis Presley was part of a larger cultural revolution in which white artists were using many of the techniques of black music and white audiences were listening to black musicians. The 1960s replaced the popular music of Broadway with rock 'n' roll, again the music of African American culture.[52]

Writers of the mid-twentieth-century Broadway musical were also likely influenced by African American women blues singers from earlier in the twentieth century. The strength, singularity, and passionate expressiveness of the Broadway musical's female star are reminiscent of women blues singers; these qualities are not found elsewhere in mid-twentieth-century American culture. Angela Davis analyzes the lyrics of women blues singers of the 1920s and 1930s, noting that the women almost never characterize themselves as wives or mothers in their songs and that there are few references at all to marriage or domesticity. As Davis explains, the reality of the lives of African American women in the first decades of the twentieth century differed from that of middle-class white women, whose "'place' was in the domestic sphere."[53] As in the musical, women blues singers take up visual and aural space. They reclaim their experiences and their bodies through song. Like the women stars who dominated the midcentury musical, the first successful professional blues performers were women, including Bessie Smith, called the "Empress of the Blues" when 750,000 copies of her first record were sold.[54]

Some women blues singers were or were rumored to be lesbian or

bisexual.[55] Ma Rainey, although married, often wore men's clothes and was open about her women lovers. In "Prove It to Me Blues," she sings:

> They say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
> Sure got to prove it on me
> Went out last night with a crowd of my friends
> They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.
>
> It's true I wear a collar and a tie
> Make the wind blow all the while
> They say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
> They sure got to prove it on me [56]

Other women singers during the Harlem Renaissance were known to be bisexual but were less public about it, like Bessie Smith, Jackie "Moms" Mabley, Josephine Baker, and Ethel Waters.[57] Davis explains that with "their provocative and pervasive sexual (and not always heterosexual) imagery . . . blues lyrics deviated from that era's established popular music culture."[58] Like the Broadway performers in this book, women blues singers maintained well-known on- and off-stage identities, and they performed music that could be heard, depending on the listeners and the context, as either maintaining the status quo or profoundly challenging it.

Spectators

Aside from the mainstream popularity of the musical, historically and culturally, gay men have been its most visible devotees, and their fascination is well documented in autobiography, history, and criticism. In popular culture, the character of the musical theater aficionado is a staple in representations of gay men. These include, on stage, the priest in the off-Broadway play *Party* (1995), who furiously berates the youngest man in the group when he mistakenly refers to a (movie) soundtrack when he means to describe an "original cast album," and Buzz in Terrance McNally's *Love! Valor! Compassion!* (play 1994; film 1997) Both of these roles are flamboyant, their relationship to musicals both constitutive of character and a site for the performance

of camp. In the films *Clueless* (1995), *Beautiful Thing* (play 1993; film 1996), *In and Out* (1997), and *The Next Best Thing* (2000) and the television sitcom *The Nanny,* a character's knowledge of musicals actually signifies his gayness.[59] These characters occupy that ideologically complex position of the stereotype by simultaneously drawing on "reality"—perpetuating the image of the show queen in both its positive and negative manifestations—and reproducing that image, making it available to be usefully emulated and taken up. Michael Warner notes that gay culture is often practiced at material sites through consumption of, for example, theater, film, museums, food, household items, and clothing.[60] Musical theater and film qualify as such material sites for many gay men. Their affection for and support and knowledge of musical theater lore, facts, and trivia serve as cultural capital, as community-building practices, and as markers of identity. Gay male culture is produced in part through engagement with musicals.

Many gay men, the non-Jewish Cole Porter foremost among them, have been important in the production history of musicals. Others include Lorenz Hart, Moss Hart, Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins, and Stephen Sondheim, to name only a few.[61] Gerald Mast attests that Oscar Hammerstein II frequented gay bars, and he suggests that illicit love affairs in Hammerstein's musicals can be read with a gay subtext.[62] He notes, for example, that "We Kiss in a Shadow" from *The King and I,* a song of forbidden heterosexual love, resonates meaningfully when sung by a gay male chorus, many of whose members likely experienced similar pains of forbidden love.[63] In *Place for Us,* D. A. Miller poetically evokes the personal history of a gay man as it intersects with his desirous fascination for the "somehow gay genre," the Broadway musical.[64] Miller asserts that virtually all 1950s musicals have a gay subtext. Musicals have long offered personal, emotional, and cultural validation for gay men.

If its relationship to gay masculinity is not enough to "prove" the queerness of musicals, then the gendered formal conventions of the genre corroborate its queer status. For example, the spectacle of musicals has long attracted gay male spectators who see their own behaviors as heightened artifice, whether through camp or through other modes that are culturally marked as unnatural.[65] Many gay men articulate the specifically feminine pleasures of musicals. Alexander Doty, for example, writing about the Hollywood musical, is interested in its "'feminine' or 'effeminized' aesthetic, camp, and emotive genre char-

acteristics (spectacularized decor and costuming, intricate choreography, and singing about romantic yearning and fulfillment)."[66] Like Doty, Miller sees the musical as feminine and feminizing. He argues that part of the musical's magnetism is due to its seductive ability to make gay men want to be—that is, perform as—women. Describing it as "the utopia of female preeminence on the musical stage," Miller argues that it is "a form whose unpublicizable work is to indulge men in the thrills of femininity *become their own*."[67]

John M. Clum, in *Something for the Boys,* also argues that musical theater is a part of gay male culture, especially the performance of the diva, with whom gay men identify. Clum finds a camp sensibility, a sense of artifice fundamental to the power of the feminine in musicals. He asserts that the "diva" is preeminent in the musical and that gay men identify with her over-the-top rendition of femininity. He also sees many performances by the great women performers of musicals as camp.[68] I agree with Doty, Clum, and Miller that musicals are striking in their dependence on women as performers and their frequent placement of a woman as the strong, active center of the show. But while gay men identify with the leading lady across gender, women spectators can find a strong figure in an actor and character of their own gender.

The Golden Age of musical theater was the golden age of female stars and characters. In the 1950s and early 1960s, a female star could guarantee a show's profitability. In addition to Martin, Merman, Andrews, and Streisand, many other women performers achieved stardom in the midcentury Broadway musical. These include Barbara Cook (*Candide, The Music Man, She Loves Me*); Carol Channing (*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes; Hello, Dolly!*); Shirley Booth (*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, By the Beautiful Sea*); Carol Burnett (*Once Upon a Mattress, Fade Out—Fade In*); Barbara Harris (*On a Clear Day You Can See Forever, The Apple Tree*); and Leslie Uggams (*Hallelujah, Baby!*).

The very action of singing and dancing—the foundation of performance in musicals—requires an athleticism that demonstrates women's physical and vocal strength. The female principal in most musicals is visually and aurally dominant. She stands center stage, the story is built around her, and the songs are written for her as solo presentations.[69] Before the advent of body microphones, a woman's voice had to carry in a large Broadway house, and her acting choices needed to be large and clear in order to reach audiences in the bal-

cony. (It becomes clear why so many women performers in Broadway musicals, like Martin and Merman, found it difficult to shrink their styles to fit the intimacy of film.) What Carolyn Abbate writes of women singing in opera applies here: "Aurally, she is resonant; her musical speech drowns out everything in range, and we sit as passive objects, battered by the voice."[70] Many songs celebrate the character herself and exhibit what may be called an autoerotic quality. The character often takes pleasure in her own mellifluousness, in her own singing, in her own voice, and she expresses delight autonomously. Midcentury musicals, however self-consciously audience oriented, still obey the convention of the fourth wall, where the audience imagines they are looking through a keyhole or an invisible fourth wall of the room in which the characters meet and where the actors talk to each other as though the audience is not there. Thus a character sings less to the audience than to herself. And even when the character sings a song of being in love (with a man) or when the implied listener is a man, the female performer "owns" the song; the performance itself is all about her. The midcentury American musical is a feminine yet active cultural form that does not locate a woman as a passive, to-be-looked-at object but allows her to take up the position of self-spectacle. Women in musicals look back.

Lesbian Spectators

In this book, the presumed spectator is "lesbian." Less an identity than a viewing and listening position, the feminist/lesbian spectator's point of view can be practiced by virtually any willing, willful spectator; conversely, an actual lesbian spectator may be unwilling to read musicals in this way. My perspective here links an aggressively poaching "queer" viewing and listening practice with a lesbian-feminist politics. By entering the singing and dancing stage dominated by mainstream American and gay male cultures, this metaphorical lesbian spectator intervenes and reperforms musical theater. I term this practice "lesbian" but acknowledge that it is markedly inflected by queer theory and queer spectatorial practices. "Queer" privileges any nonstraight reading or interpretation. "Queer," as Alexander Doty writes, marks "a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural production and reception."[71] "Queer"

also captures colloquially the sense that these readings are not always straight on. "Queer" connotes that bodies, genders, and sexualities don't always line up.[72]

Lesbian desire reads bodies and behaviors playfully, aggressively, and queerly, refusing to give up the pleasures of musicals. Indeed, all audiences' receptions and interpretations are always a negotiation of text and context; of the past and the present; of memory, nostalgia, and future use. As Cherry Smyth writes of film:

> As an act of vengeance, I want to take what could be mine from Hollywood, put myself in the picture as it were, reinvent the story of the gaze. Wish-fulfillment, you may say, as I wrest the homo-subtext from its cosy heterocomplacent form and make it the major discourse. Maybe so, but then reading against the grain began as a wish for inclusion by marginalised, underrepresented people and ended up a strategy for our survival.[73]

That these deviant readings are generated through queer desire makes them no less valid. More conventional or "straight" readings simply rely on different, if naturalized, assumptions about representational practices and, by extension, social relations.

Identification, a primary exercise of interpretation and reception, is a multiply inflected spectatorial practice. It can refer to "ego-libido"—seeing oneself as or wanting to be the object ("I like her; therefore I want to be like her")—or to "object-libido"—desiring or wanting to have the object sexually ("I like her; therefore I desire her"). Teresa de Lauretis argues that the latter form of identification "characterizes adult, post-oedipal, lesbian homosexuality," while ego-libido is narcissistic identification that is really "homosocial, that is, woman-identified female bonding."[74] I would suggest, though, that both forms of identification play a part in lesbian engagements with musicals.

While there are distinctions among different modes of identificatory desires, there are also different practices that emerge from identification. In her study of women's fandom of film stars, Jackie Stacey distinguishes "identificatory fantasies," which remain on the level of articulated imaginings, from "identificatory practices," which involve a conscious effort to enact or become the star.[75] In the case of musicals, many fans have identificatory fantasies and many enact identificatory practices in their own performances, either on stage or in their bedrooms. Stacey's book *Star Gazing* documents and analyzes interviews with self-professed heterosexual female fans of midcentury female film stars who, in letters and interviews, declare their unabashed, passionate adoration of these film stars. Stacey's project at once disavows lesbian identities and opens up possibilities for self-identified heterosexual women spectators to identify lesbianly.[76]

A spectator's identifications are flexible and can shift across identity positions, even within the social situation of a single performance.[77] Spectators can also identify with more than one character at a time. Additionally, disidentification or distancing oneself from a character or a representation can provide a pleasurable encounter with a performance.[78] The range of identifications confirms that, as Diana Fuss puts it, "there is no 'natural' way to read a text; ways of reading are historically specific and culturally variable, and reading positions are always constructed."[79]

Identification is but one mode of engagement with representations. In addition to wanting to be or wanting to have a character, a spectator might simply admire a character; sympathize with her; find her objectionable, funny, or strange. Tanya Krzywinska finds a range of possibilities in meaning-making. She explains that "engagement with any text is a dance with desire—the desire to appropriate, ironise, or equally, to reject meaning. Our desire and fantasy is, undeniably, always cast through the ideological meanings that are inherent in the systems of signification available to us at any given time."[80] The spectator might not identify at all but still feel emotionally involved in the story, touched by the characters, involved in the plot, amazed by the dances, or in love with the sound of certain melodies. In reception of the musical's form, these other processes and other pleasures are central.

The spectator's interpretive habits and cultural competencies fundamentally delimit, determine, and enable her interpretation of a performance. Cultural competencies are developed in everyday life and can include identity positions of gender, race, class, and sexuality, as well as other kinds of knowledge. In her foundational essay on feminist and lesbian spectators' reception of the women's sports film *Personal Best,* Elizabeth Ellsworth argues that identity-oriented interpretation is a culturally constructed practice. Identity is social; femi-

nist and lesbian spectators are an "interpretive community." Ellsworth shows that lesbian spectators often saw a lesbian relationship in the film not because the spectators were lesbians but because their daily spectating practices taught them to see films differently, to look for differently encoded relationships between women, to read the signs differently.[81] As Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman write, "Lesbian viewers may bring certain subcultural experience and knowledge to the reading of specific texts."[82] Given our daily experiences of gender, race, and class, as well as sexuality, we acquire skills of reading culture. Looking "as a lesbian" is at once a learned habit and an active practice. Any representation can be "lesbianized" by the spectator.[83]

Rather than understanding reception practices as based solely on identity, then, it is useful to attach interpretation to cultural competencies. A spectator's cultural competencies, which may or may not coincide with identity, effectively structure her interpretative practices. While reception studies have emphasized cultural competencies that come from identity-oriented experiences (of gender, race, class, able-bodiedness, sexuality, and so on), they've tended to ignore the significance of other areas of cultural competence and experience. Another position of cultural competence that is significant to this project, for example, is having knowledge of conventions of midcentury American musicals. And, like any representational genre, musicals carry the history of having been interpreted in certain ways. Understanding some of the formal conventions and favorite subjects of mid-twentieth-century musicals can clarify both the meanings of musicals that are taken for granted and the ease with which musicals can be read against the grain.

American Musicals

The "Golden Age" of musicals refers as much to a set of formal and aesthetic conventions as it does to a time period. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* opened the era with the first "integrated" musical, and virtually all of the musicals of the later 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s followed their structural innovations. Composer Jerome Kern first articulated the notion of the integrated musical when he collaborated with Hammerstein on *Show Boat* in 1927. In the early part

of the twentieth century, there was little difference between the musical and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular entertainment forms from which it developed—minstrelsy, vaudeville, and burlesque. Although the musical distinguished itself by the presence of a plot, continuous characters, and a unified score written by one composer and lyricist, Kern imagined a total artwork. Kern based his ideas on Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or the notion that all arts—music, visual art, poetry, dance—should be synthesized in a unified theatrical performance, with no one element taking precedence over the others. Kern believed that the story was the most important element of a musical, and he wanted the story to structure the entire show, supported by and developed with songs and dances. While *Show Boat* succeeded by all accounts not only as a musical formally integrated but also as one that dealt with serious social issues, it was not until *Oklahoma!* that the "new" form truly caught on. Before World War II, some composers and lyricists worked to link closely the songs and dances with the book (that is, the script, the spoken text) and some musicals presented increasingly elaborate plots, but still, the dramatic action stopped frequently to allow the star her well-known number, the dancing girls their piece, or the comedian his bits.

Oklahoma!—which was immediately noted for the interdependent relationship among all the elements of dialogue, music, lyrics, dance, and design—was the first of Rodgers and Hammerstein's ten musicals, one for television and the rest for Broadway. Like Kern, Rodgers and Hammerstein began with the story, often one originating in another source: James Michener's Pulitzer Prize–winning collection *Tales of the South Pacific* for *South Pacific,* Margaret Landon's novel *Anna and the King of Siam* for *The King and I,* the nonmusical play *Liliom* by Ferenc Molnar for *Carousel,* the memoir of Maria von Trapp for *The Sound of Music.*[84] The techniques practiced by Rodgers and Hammerstein were developed, expanded, and conventionalized in the late 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s by Alan Jay Lerner and Fritz Loewe, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Jerry Herman, Jule Styne, Leonard Bernstein, and others. In addition to making the various elements of the musical work together, Rodgers and Hammerstein are credited with formulating a more serious and sophisticated form, which many scholars describe as a musical play rather than what preceded it—musical comedy.

Because they wanted each of the musical's production elements

to support all the others, Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote the songs and worked with librettists, directors, choreographers, and designers who shared their goal. During this period, for example, the title "Broadway choreographer" emerged, replacing the job of "dance director."[85] Before World War II, dance was not necessarily related to the play itself. Broadway dance was dominated by precision dances, mostly tap, which were all the rage in the Hollywood musicals of Busby Berkeley in the 1920s and 1930s. For *Oklahoma!* though, Agnes de Mille created dances from a ballet and folk-dance vocabulary that expressed the musical's setting, presenting rough-and-tumble kicks that New York audiences might identify as Oklahoman. The musical was and still is primarily a form produced in New York. And as Jacqui Malone argues persuasively, the decline of tap in Broadway musicals, beginning in the early 1940s, was one of the factors that contributed to the "whitening" of the Broadway stage and tap's eventual "demise."[86] In musicals of the Golden Age, movement evokes place, time, and mood, and choreographers brought their own movement training and styles to the Broadway stage. Jerome Robbins created low-to-the-ground, syncopated jazz numbers for *West Side Story*'s New York streets and tacky tap dances and burlesque numbers for *Gypsy*'s vaudeville stages; Jack Cole fashioned dances influenced by Native American, Caribbean, and South American cultures for *Kismet*.[87]

Like dance, the songs of Golden Age musicals represented time, place, and character. Previously, a successful musical had consisted of numerous terrific songs that could stand on their own outside of the show. Not everyone realizes that the classic Rodgers and Hart romantic ballad "My Funny Valentine," from *Babes in Arms,* was, in the musical, actually sung to a character named Valentine. Many of the songs written by Irving Berlin, the Gershwins, Cole Porter, and Rodgers and Hart became hits outside of their original shows, and many were social dance songs in nightclubs and at parties. But Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote songs that musically expressed setting and character, theme and mood. Some of the songs from *South Pacific,* for example, are marked by rhythms and chord progressions that create a sense of that place, an island in the South Pacific. And like dance, the songs come directly out of the on-stage situation and advance the story; a musical is in a different moment after each song than before it. Rodgers and Hammerstein also insisted that the dialogue, music, and dance move seamlessly into one another. They

often used musical segues, crossovers (musical passages during set changes when some action takes place), and lyrics that are spoken before they are sung to move the dialogue into music.

Although they built musicals from the story, Rodgers and Hammerstein privileged characters above all. They created characters with psychological depth and wrote character-driven songs—that is, songs from each character's point of view—so that characters could be delineated musically. For example, in *South Pacific,* the songs of Nellie Forbush, the out-of-place American "hick," sound different than those of Emile, the elegant, wealthy, French planter, who sings the majestic "Some Enchanted Evening," and different still than Bloody Mary's haunting "Bali Ha'i." Nellie's songs, in contrast, contain bright, clear melody lines and a heavy downbeat that underlines her earthiness. Moreover, Nellie sings the silly phrases and nonsensical metaphors that one would expect a slightly ditzy but ingenuous character to sing: "I'm as corny as Kansas in August."

Rodgers and Hammerstein's practice has become so accepted and so expected of midcentury musical theater that we seldom consider how, as Stephen Banfield writes, music and lyrics "do not merely explain themselves simultaneously, they explain each other." He offers that we should "hear the song as a single aesthetic entity in which the strategies of similarity and difference, of repetition and contrast, in syllable and note are mutually illuminating." Often, lyrics express what the music is doing—for example, when songs begin with words that are about beginnings: "Starting here, starting now" from *Gypsy;* or "Let's start at the very beginning" from *The Sound of Music*.[88] The songs of midcentury musicals tend to be easy on the ear, often with hummable, memorable melodies; straightforward harmonies; and an AABA structure, with rhymes ending the first, second, and fourth lines of the stanza. Analysis, then, considers both the relationship of lyrics to music and the creation of character through song, or what Peter Kivy calls "textual realism."[89]

Other structural or formal conventions of the musical include the dominance of the first act in terms of plot development and the number of songs—first acts sometimes have twice as many songs and run twice as long as second acts. In addition, a strong number ends act one to get the audience excited for act two. Solo and ensemble numbers alternate to relieve the audience and the performers. Reprises of songs mark a character's consistency and create a musical vocabulary com-

fortable and recognizable to the audience. Finally, the "eleven o'clock number"—the last song of the show, which was sung around 11:00 P.M. when Broadway shows began at 8:30 rather than at 8:00 P.M.—brings the house down. The mid-twentieth-century musical holds great appeal in large part because of this combination of the predictable and the new. So, while Nellie Forbush, Maria von Trapp, Momma Rose, and Fanny Brice were new on the Broadway stage, many formal elements of the musicals that told their stories were familiar and welcoming.

The main characters of musicals, the principals, tend to be introduced in the very beginning, and the principals' first songs define their characters in lyrics and music. In nonmusical plays, as Lehman Engel observes, a principal may or may not be introduced at once, and often the entire play is about that character's development and change. He writes, "One of the chief differences between most plays and most musicals (in this respect) is that characters in plays are often not what they seem; in musicals, they invariably must be."[90] Because the musical values song as the most sincere and honest form of expression, it privileges characters who sing, and nonsinging ones are usually evil, dull, or dispensable.

Most musicals are structured in binaries: two characters of the opposite sex who differ temperamentally and musically meet early in the musical. As soon as the principals are introduced, "simultaneously a schism arises between them, while the audience is made to want to see it removed or resolved."[91] Before the end, they are united and coupled together, singing a duet, often in 3/4 time—the meter of the waltz, the dance of romance—which signifies their attachment.[92] In other words, celebration of heterosexuality is the raison d'être of the musical. Engel notes the "ubiquity" of romance in the musical. He observes that many different events can take place around romance—the boy may or may not get the girl, songs may contain the word "love" or not, there may be a subplot or not—but love is needed, he says, to evoke "feeling." Feeling, as expressed through song, Engel writes, is a key element of the musical, as "romance is at the center. This does not mean that its treatment is a single-track affair. Nevertheless, love is at the core. This is a fact, and its need or reason also seems quite clear."[93] Both musicals and critics are unself-consciously heterosexual in their orientation and heterosexualizing in their narrative. In their song-by-song accounts of people falling in love, musicals overwrite heterosexual presumption with lyricism. We hum heterosexuality on our way out the theater's doors.

Engel is right about the prevalence of "romance." Because musicals are by definition entertainment for mainstream America, musicals of the midcentury tended not to challenge the status quo, at least not on the surface. Although Rodgers and Hammerstein were known for their liberal political messages, sexual politics before, during, and after Rodgers and Hammerstein were resolutely heterosexual. Furthermore, the romantic couple of a musical represents more than simply two people falling in love. The entire cast reassembles at the end of the musical to celebrate the uniting of the couple, which serves as the synecdoche for the unification of the community, of the world at large. The celebration that attends the finale of musicals symbolically resolves U.S. social conflicts of class and labor.[94] Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals insistently connect romance to social concerns, as their musicals, by way of the heterosexual couple, always argue for social tolerance.

The dominance of heterosexuality in the musical is neither natural nor inevitable. On the contrary, it's a choice that conforms to most representations, a choice that producers likely don't even see as a choice—hence the power of dominant ideology. But this most innocent of cultural forms is distinctly and powerfully political. As spectators and readers of culture, we can denaturalize the politics of the musical by seeing the conventions *as* conventions. We can see contradictions in the history of the musical and its habits.

It is precisely the musical's musicality, the element that marks the form's popular appeal, that also opens it up to queer appropriations. Assumption of straight values in musicals leaves them open to what David Van Leer calls "cultural carelessness."[95] Van Leer shows how the musical, in spite of its mainstream popularity and the attendant conservative gender, sexual, and racial politics of its content, offers possibilities for queer spectatorial interventions. Simultaneously, the musical often exchanges one problematic representation for another—progressive gender politics frequently accompany racist images. As a form of popular culture, the musical by definition appeals, apparently innocently, to mainstream culture. At the same time, as Alexander Doty and Corey Creekmur argue, queerness is "at

the core of mainstream culture even though that culture tirelessly insists that its images, ideologies, and readings [are] always only about heterosexuality."[96]

From a lesbian perspective, the apparent contradiction of the Broadway musical—the presence of a great, strong, charismatic woman performer in a heterosexualizing narrative that severely limits her—is resolved by the musical's own structure. Because musicals so privilege the first act, the heterosexual romance that concludes many musicals is not as significant as the woman's individual sustained presence throughout the musical. Second acts are shorter; have fewer songs; have few narrative turns besides resolving the romance and the subplot; and are, as is always noted by scholars and critics, much weaker than first acts. The longer first act means that more stage time is spent in a character's development and musical expression of herself than in the working out of the romance. This structure necessarily de-emphasizes the heterosexual resolution. It is only because of mainstream culture's heterosexual presumption that romance carries such an interpretive weight in these shows.[97]

Furthermore, in spite of the received history of musical theater, the form is hardly "integrated" at all. Although composers, lyricists, and librettists are said to have successfully "integrated" the book and the numbers, musicals are figured around what might be called Brechtian pauses, gaps, absences, interruptions, and "Alienation-effects."[98] Audiences never forget that they are watching a musical, as performers move in and out of song, in and out of dance. However much dialogue blends elegantly and "naturally" into song and however much composers and lyricists strive to have characters sing like they speak, musicals operate in two aural modes, speech and song. Andrea Most argues that these two very different manners of expression, the "psychological realism" of the dialogue and the "celebratory energy" of the musical numbers, create a tension that allows the musical to grapple with social problems and issues and apparently reconcile them into a community celebration of music and dance.[99] The fragmented form of the musical invites extravagant identifications, aggressive reappropriations, and elaborate forays into fantasy.

Experiencing a musical is unlike any other spectating event. Some elements of musicals are the same as those of nonmusical plays: we witness characters and observe narrative. But I would suggest that our attentiveness at a musical, our involvement, even our identifications have less to do with the characters and the narrative and more to do with bodies shaped through song and dance. The pleasure of the musical is not that the boy gets the girl but that they sing about love. The pathos of the musical is not that she longs for him but that she dances that desire. Whatever the dialogue, the musical is fundamentally structured by way of song and dance, by overt displays of vocal aptitude and physical prowess—that is, by its own pleasure in its own performance. The performers' virtuosity is always evident and part of the musical's pleasure.

Spectatorship of musicals goes beyond camp, gender-crossing identifications and beyond aesthetic appreciation to, quite literally, a performative spectatorship. I refer here to tapping toes, to humming tunes, to learning physical bits and choreography—that is, to the visceral experience of watching and listening to a musical play. In this way, spectatorship of musicals is literally active. The musical offers not only the sensory experience of music and dance, voice and body, but also often a physicalized memory of the performance. What we take from musicals is seldom the moral or the theme, but rather the line from the song or the choreographed movement. What we take from the musical is embodied.

The performative spectatorship invoked by the musical and its fragmented, nonintegrated aspects complicate identification and offer other means of engagement; these different, sometimes nonidentificatory modes allow and encourage the varied, against-the-grain readings undertaken by this book.

Stardom

While all theater is collaborative, musicals may be the most so. Because *A Problem Like Maria* is concerned with the social uses of musicals and with the musical's lingering effects in memory and the media, I emphasize each musical as it was actualized in theatrical (or filmic) performance. The performer is the most remembered; the woman in the role is central to reception.[100] While this book is concerned with the midcentury American musical as a genre, it will primarily focus on the work of these four women as stars.[101] The women in this study were and are stars both for mainstream culture and for lesbian and feminist fans.

A star, in commonsense terms, is a very famous person, a celebrity, and often a performer, whose everyday life has become as important as, if not more important than, her acting.[102] Gossip about her is as fascinating as her performance. A star is readily identifiable, having "transcended" her performances and "created an aura."[103] For example, the name "Ethel Merman" calls to mind the buxom, bouffant-haired belter; Ernest Borgnine's forty-eight-day wife; the character Reno Sweeney crooning "I Get a Kick out of You" in *Anything Goes;* and Cole Porter's favorite singer, who said, "I never took a voice lesson in my life. I just open it up and let it go." All of these descriptors—from the physical to the personal to the professional to the gossip-borne—compose the figure "Ethel Merman."

The star persona is a public figure who is defined, often complexly and often with contradictions, in relation to the cultural politics and social practices of her time.[104] The star must fit in enough to be popular yet be distinguished enough to be exceptional. She must strike a nerve of recognition for many people, and she must project something extraordinary to allow that recognition to move toward desire, appreciation, adulation, and fandom. Rosemary Coombe writes, "The celebrity image is a cultural lode of multiple meanings, mined for its symbolic resonances and, simultaneously, a floating signifier, invested with libidinal energies, social longings and political aspirations."[105]

The very idea of a star acknowledges a triangulated self: the person who works as an actor who portrays a character. The notion of a star elides the distinction among these different selves who reside in one body, as the star is not only the person or the actor or the character but all three. The term "star," then, becomes a shorthand way of referring to the multiple positions of such a woman. This book is concerned with those demarcations of type that constitute the star and with the multiple ways in which "type" is conveyed—through choice of and interpretation of role; through singing and dancing, speech and gesture. The actor is more than the character, and we see and hear the character through the actor.

Considering each woman as a star requires an exploration of her "everyday life," another intricately produced performance. I want to call "performances" those representations that we might assume to be nonperformances or off-stage life—photographs of stars at home and "candid" interviews, for instance. The "reality" of each woman's life, including her marriages and her relationships with friends and children and coworkers, is inseparable from its media representation. Rather than sharply distinguishing the actor's work from her life or her characters from her self, I consider all elements of the woman's star persona. Because these women were (and Andrews and Streisand are) subjects of public fascination, their so-called private lives were well documented by interviews, articles, and photographs. Audiences interpret their on- and off-stage performances together. When Martin played Peter Pan, she also carried her image of the wealthy grandmother who—according to Theodore Bikel, her costar in *The Sound of Music*—took taxis to the theater without knowing exactly where it was.

Just as significant as the representation of a star's private life is the impression that that representation is natural and unmediated, whether it appears in print or as a televised interview with Edward R. Murrow on *Person-to-Person*. Authenticity, or the sense that a star truly is what she seems to be, is created rhetorically, through the use of words like "sincere, immediate, spontaneous, real, direct, genuine" and "by the use of markers that indicate lack of control, lack of premeditation and privacy."[106] Thus, through performance off stage, the star seems authentically herself. Each of the four women considered here creates a sense of authenticity and immediacy but with completely different inflections: Martin is effusive, grateful, gushing; Merman is direct, to-the-point, deserving; Andrews is cheery, doggedly consistent, polite; Streisand is at once temperamental *and* outspoken *and* self-effacing.

Off-stage performances bond with on-stage ones because both encompass the same body, face, and voice. In publicity stills from *The Sound of Music,* for example, we can see Mary Martin's face as she plays Maria. In one photograph she has an expression of affection for the children; in another, she has a look of confusion about her attraction to the Captain. In each of these evanescent moments of performance, captured only in still life, the actor and the character are immediately conflated. We, as observers, cannot see the difference between Maria and Martin at that moment. Even as we know that she is acting, even as we have no idea what Martin was feeling at the time or how she arrived at that particular expression of emotion, the emotion looks real; that is, it mimics our culturally and historically specific idea of what that emotion looks like. Still, we cannot help but see that Martin and Maria are different. With an unknown actor, the

viewer cannot perceive the distinction between actor and character, and the viewer's response is entirely tied into the character portrayed; all the information available to that viewer is contained within the photograph itself. For the star, though, spectators experience a uniquely multidimensional response evoked by the star's various representations and appearances on stage.

A star plays more than one character; thus, certain characters become identified with her, and the repetition of her body across characters then links the characters. Conversely, a star carries the history of her characters as part of her star persona. This repertoire encompasses the emotional as well as the physical, as actors are also associated with characters because they are believed to have personality traits applicable to their characters; that is, "type" is physical, but it is also emotional. For example, Ethel Merman played Reno Sweeney, Annie Oakley, Sally Adams (*Call Me Madam*), and Momma Rose, among others. All of these characters are haunted by Merman's originary performance; they are her creation, and in cultural memory, they all look like Merman and sound like her. Her image, too, retains shadows of each of these characters—Reno's nightclub pizzazz, Annie's guileless self-confidence, Mrs. Adams's uninhibited brashness, Rose's aggressive mothering.

We know how Ethel Merman looks because of visual products like photographs or videotapes or films of performances; we know how she sounds because of cast albums; we know about the characters she played by reading librettos or watching films; we know about her personality because of written documents such as interviews, biographies, theater reviews, scholarly books, and gossip. A star study like this one considers all of these materials. The star "Ethel Merman" emerges by accretion from these various sources. Journalists and reviewers repeat descriptors; photographers capture similar poses or expressions; the actor repeats the same quotation, observation, or story; Merman plays similar kinds of roles and sings similar kinds of songs. The images build on each other to create publicly a sense of an identity.[107] The repetition of the same stories of stars reminds us how narrow and constructed these personas are. At the same time, the repetition of the same stories provokes the sense of knowing. We hear stories that we've heard before, we feel that we know something about her, and the star seems accessible.

The star persona, then, is not a real person but rather an impression of a person that emerges from words and phrases, images and metaphors that coalesce in the sense that she is someone we know. In spite of this "knowledge," the project of star study takes the genre of biography and turns it around. A biographer wants to get as close to her subject as possible to create the world from the star's point of view. I, on the other hand, am primarily concerned with reception and spectatorship. Rather than asking, for example, why Julie Andrews chose to play Guenevere so ironically, I ask about the cultural significance of her playing the mythical queen in this way and the uses of her irony for differently positioned spectators.

The Visible and Audible Lesbian: A Lesbian like Maria

Given that the musical presents strong women characters and that women actors in musicals are active and athletic, how do I make the leap from strong women to lesbians?[108] In this book, the lesbian is never self-evident. What is "perverse" about this project is that there are no lesbians there. And yet, we can find "the lesbian" in the performative signs of body, face, voice, gesture, character, or narrative. But is she only the one who invokes desire, pleasure, identification, or recognition in a "lesbian" spectator? How can certain performances signify "lesbian"?

The spectatorial practices in this book involve both what is available in musicals to be seen and certain ways of seeing them. At times the spectator might respond to a moment out of its context, or she might place emphasis on a relationship that seems minor in the musical as a whole. In other words, the lesbian spectator is urged to interpret creatively and unconventionally, as well as to note what is clearly present in musicals. In this way, the method is imaginative, not strictly literal, as Cherry Smyth asserts: "The exercise of harnessing the text for purposes for which it was not intended also involves a level of whimsy, of ironic layering and deconstructing."[109] As is discussed earlier in this chapter, a character (like Maria) can only be seen and heard "as a lesbian" by those spectators, lesbian or not, who are willing to imagine her in that way and allow "lesbian knowledge" to structure their reception.[110] "Following queer desire," Elspeth Probyn writes, "turns us into readers who make strange, who render queer the

relations between images and bodies."[111] My purpose is, in part, to persuade spectators that it is actually quite easy and pleasurable to imagine these four women and the roles they played as lesbians. In this book, I model this reading strategy to open up sites of pleasure in the musical that have been traditionally overlooked and to show how the musical is feminist and politically progressive.

The study of performance—an event of bodies and voices across space and time, whether in theater, film, or television—must make use of multidimensional signifiers of "lesbian." *A Problem Like Maria* presumes an elusive relationship between reality and representation and the impossibility of knowing precisely how each constructs, determines, reflects, refracts, affects, and is affected by the other. We may say, in theory, that identities are unstable, shifting, contingent, contradictory, and fragmented. But in the moment of representation—whether on stage, on film, on television, in music, or on the page—there's a body there. The struggle over meaning concerns how spectators make sense of that body in the cultural landscape, what that body can mean and to whom. Admittedly, finding a lesbian in representation is at once completely idiosyncratic and utterly context-specific, based on cultural conventions, histories of representations, and images currently in circulation. Finding a lesbian in representation requires a certain circular knowledge, as it presumes that a "lesbian" image precedes the image in question. In other words, we can only recognize what seems to be lesbian if we have some previous idea of how a lesbian might look and sound.[112]

Each representation of a "lesbian" is simultaneously marked by gender (e.g., masculine or feminine), race (e.g., white or black), ethnicity (e.g., Jewish or Chicana), and class (e.g., upper-class or working class). Sexuality is inseparable from these other modalities, and every lesbian has every one of and more identities than these. The conjunction of gender, race, ethnicity, and class in a "lesbian" body is critical to this study because each of our four stars performs them differently (and these performances may or may not correspond to real life and identities): Martin's whiteness and her chic, Manhattan, upper-class fame; Merman's blunt, Queens, New York, seeming-Jewish, seeming-working-class notoriety; Andrews's very white, British-inflected, princess demeanor; Streisand's emphatically Brooklyn and Jewish celebrity. These very different configurations of gender, ethnicity, and class necessarily commingle into different

sexualities. In addition, normative performances of gender, ethnicity, and class often mitigate the effects of the "lesbian." For example, an appealing image of a "lesbian" in a musical is often accompanied by offensive representations of race. This occurs most prominently in *South Pacific,* where not only is the lesbian-tomboy Nellie Forbush (played by Martin) unapologetically racist, but the musical itself abounds with stereotypically racist representations of island "natives," such as the manipulative, conniving Bloody Mary (played by Juanita Hall).

Some of the images discussed in this book—particularly the appearance of butch and femme (masculine lesbian and feminine lesbian, respectively)—are out of fashion in some communities (but not others), and they certainly do not capture the wide range of how lesbians in the United States dress, act, and interact today. In fact, many women who self-identify as lesbian would not be visible under the terms explored in this book; sexuality is by no means an identity that is always and immediately visible. But for representation to work positively, we need to be able to find what might look or sound lesbian. These signs—on television, in film, in theater—tend to be marked as butch or femme.

Identifying characters or actors who are butch or femme is neither a nostalgic call nor a rejection of butch-femme arrangements today. It is rather a way to enter representation, a way to make sense of what is visible on stage, on an actor's body, on her face, in her voice. All interpretation depends on previous representations and their meanings, and to find or to construct the lesbian in a performance means that we call upon other, already existing representations of lesbians, both historical and contemporary.[113] Markers of butch, in particular, and of femme continue to allow the lesbian to be identifiable. When the actor is seen alone, her gestures, intonations, or expressions make it almost impossible to identify her as lesbian without indications of masculinity or signs of the butch, as is discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 3, on Julie Andrews, identifies ways of seeing the femme without the butch as lesbian.

The danger invoked by identifying the butch or the femme, the spinster, the schoolmistress, the vampire, the bulldyke, the tomboy, or the androgyne as lesbian—the possibility that such images serve primarily to reinforce stereotypes—exists here. There are pitfalls in presenting certain images again, valorizing them, and therefore giving

them a kind of truth value. But even in the twenty-first century, we negotiate our identities in terms of (but not at all identically with) such images. Perhaps in time, lesbian representations will proliferate, and stereotypes will no longer be useful. But for now, viewing and hearing Martin, Merman, Andrews, and Streisand as variations of what Chris Straayer calls the "hypothetical lesbian heroine" can give musicals a different, positive meaning.[114]

Let me outline some of the representational practices, including character and narrative, that I believe can and have been read as "lesbian." Each of these identifiers of "lesbian" is developed in later chapters.

Unlike most identity positions, sexuality, which involves desire, is assumed to be relational. Here we look for moments of doubling, when the actor is placed narratively, visually, or thematically in a couple. If nothing else, what all lesbians have in common is desire for other women. The expression of desire between women surely functions as a sign of "lesbian." In the aggressively heteronormative genre of the musical, however, desire between women is never directly sexual but is rather transmuted into another affect—love, support, dominance—that can be seen as lesbian. Even if the two women are not explicitly lovers—and in these musicals, of course, they never are—their relationship can convey "lesbian intimacy."[115] Patricia White identifies "tropes of lesbian seduction" in representations of female bonding inflected with a dynamic of "nurturance" or "dominance."[116] When two women appear together as friends, compatriots, coworkers, roommates, mother and daughter, or sisters, they offer queer visual (or textual) pleasures. Visual or aural differences between the women—of age, of race, of class, of status, of experience, of type—can call up lesbian associations. Sometimes the "lesbian" character is often linked with another woman, who is marked as "heterosexual" through excessive displays of femininity. Consider, for example, Maria and Liesl, Peter Pan and Wendy, and Rose and Louise. Often these relationships carry an undercurrent of eroticism.

The setting, context, or situation, on or off stage, can also suggest "lesbian." A woman-centered world or a living environment dominated by women or a group of women living together all have lesbian connotations.[117] In representation, settings like convents (*The Sound of Music*) or the backstage of a theater (*Gypsy*) provide spaces for groups of women together and impart a homoerotic dynamic.[118]

What looks and sounds like a heterosexual couple in a musical—that is, a man and a woman—can also denote queerness, as gender and gendered behaviors get recoded in musicals. Men are often feminized and defined in relation to women; they are secondary. Women sing more (and more interesting) songs; they take up more stage space. Even apparently heterosexual couples in musicals often don't appear to be straight at all, since many men in musicals are constructed as feminine, if not gay. When a woman forms a couple with such a man, a queer coupling ensues. Peter Pan and Captain Hook, Momma Rose and Herbie, Guenevere and Arthur, and Fanny Brice and Nick are all representationally heterosexual relationships. Still, each of these relationships looks queer, and narratively, they are rendered more so because each dissolves by the end of the musical.

A woman, when she is not in a couple, can signify as "lesbian" with markers of unconventional gender performance. Although gender and sexuality are different aspects of identity, they are mutually determining. So pervasive is heterosexual presumption that a woman is straight unless she is overtly marked otherwise. Still, any evidence of gender unconventionality can call up lesbian connotations, whether excessively feminine, excessively masculine, or distinctively unmarked. Any woman who defies gender norms is also in a contradictory relationship to heterosexual femininity and can appear lesbian.

Culturally dominant, "commonsense" understandings of femininity weave heterosexuality into femininity. Because society impels women to please men and make themselves attractive to men, a woman who eschews such behavior can signify as lesbian. A character who takes on stereotypically masculine qualities or expresses masculine desires (or the desire to be a man)—something as simple as wearing her hair short—can signify as lesbian. A lesbian-seeming character can be boyish or butch, or she can engage in activities understood culturally as masculine. A character who is a "bad girl" or who does not do what a girl should do can invite lesbian recognitions.[119] She might be too active, too assertive, too outspoken, too uncontained. An outsider or someone who is separate and individualized can have lesbian appeal, especially a woman who changes the world around her, exudes a sense of agency, action, and influence.[120]

Ambiguous markers or a lack of certain signs of heterosexuality can also appear to be lesbian, especially in relation to other characters who do have specific markers. For example, a character who is not

specifically coded as male or female (like Peter Pan), who is "socially deviant" (like Momma Rose), who is "abnormal" in some way (like Fanny Brice), or who is "asexual" (like Eliza) suggests lesbianism. Although such markers are often intended misogynistically, they can be interpreted differently and positively by lesbian spectators.

While librettos provide textual evidence and films or television shows afford visual signs, music sung by each woman also offers ways of hearing "lesbian."[121] The singing voice, or what Abbate calls "the voice-object," matters immensely here because so many fans may have never seen the lead women perform.[122] Furthermore, songs in musicals work as concise expressions of character; three minutes of music are considered equivalent to fifteen minutes of dialogue.[123]

Music's ability to affect its listeners emotionally relies on cultural and historical conditions—the kinds of musical sounds present in a culture at any particular historical moment—and the listener's aural competence—how she comprehends the way music works.[124] Because songs in musical theater are sung, they always seem to be created and produced by a specific singer. Simon Frith writes:

> In songs, words are the sign of the voice. A song is always a performance and song words are always spoken out, heard in someone's accent. Songs are more like plays than poems; song words work as speech and speech acts, bearing meaning not just semantically, but also as structures of sounds that are direct signs of emotion and marks of character.

He continues, "The voice is an apparently transparent reflection of feeling; it is the sound of the voice, not the words sung, which suggests what a singer really means."[125] The voice singing a song, then, becomes another element of each woman's star persona. The voices of Martin, Merman, Andrews, and Streisand are as recognizable as their bodies. Each woman's voice emerges from her body yet is separate from it, taking on a life of its own as recorded sound. And when the songs are heard outside of the musical itself, they are always ghosted by the original voices.

Each of the four women in *A Problem Like Maria* exemplifies what musicologist Elizabeth Wood theorizes as a "Sapphonic voice," one that "traverse[s] a range of sonic possibilities and overthrow[s] sonic boundaries." A woman with such a voice, Wood writes, "may

vocalize inadmissible sexuality and thrilling readiness to go beyond so-called natural limits, an erotics of risk and defiance, as desire for desire itself."[126] All four of these women are known for their extraordinary voices. Part of the project of each chapter is to describe and define what kind of "Sapphonic voice" each woman has. For example, the music of Rodgers and Hammerstein and Lerner and Loewe, sung by Martin and Andrews, differs from the music of Styne, sung by Merman and Streisand.

Composers of mid-twentieth-century musicals like Porter, Rodgers, Loewe, and Styne accentuated the exceptional qualities of each of the four women's voices and understood the necessity of their projecting vocally into a large space.[127] Merman's belt was loud, and her belting range was large; Martin had a trick voice—without singing across her break, she had two voices, an alto and a head voice; Streisand, like Merman, belted to very high notes; and Andrews, a legitimate coloratura with an extraordinary range, sang with perfect placement and diction so that her voice sounded higher than it was. Each of these women sounds different from the others and different from all other singers. Their voices are the voices of the characters they created. Martin, Merman, Andrews, and Streisand are not only singers; they are stars.