

nine."⁷⁸ Over time, over her career, Streisand's clothes change, but the body and voice remain—in *Funny Girl*, bloomers to satin gowns; in later concerts, extravagant dresses with extravagant jewelry caught in the glare of a concert light; in later films, *Yentl*'s knickers or *The Prince of Tides*'s miniskirts. Finally, both Streisand and Bernhardt were perceived to dominate the roles they played. George Bernard Shaw writes of Bernhardt, "She does not enter into the leading character: she substitutes herself for it."⁷⁹ Alan Spiegel writes that Streisand's "heroines" are "not really characters at all, but vehicles for the demonstration of their author's self-rapture."⁸⁰ In short, both women embody and enact the unresolvable but culturally useful contradictions of a queer, Jewish femininity.

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

She didn't act like a nun, or the way we poor ignorant souls thought nuns acted. She was bouncy, enthusiastic, with an ambling walk like a good baseball player. She also had beautiful clear skin and sparkling, snapping brown eyes. We all fell in love with her.

—Mary Martin on Sister Gregory

When I was ten, I played Marta in a local dinner theater's production of *The Sound of Music*. I had a huge crush on the woman who played Maria and practically fainted with happiness when, several months later, I got to wear her dress—not a copy but the very same one she wore—when I played Maria in an end-of-the-year recital for the acting classes I took at the same theater. But in the show's normal performance run, I played the next-to-youngest daughter six nights a week for three months to an audience well fed on carved roast beef and tapioca pudding. Most of the kids were around my age, except for the little one who played Gretl and who was really only five. When we sang "So Long, Farewell" and got to her verse, she always sang it like the girl on the movie soundtrack, taking a breath in the middle of the line: "The sun has gone to bed (breath) and so must I." It drove the director crazy. If it weren't such a terrible place to breathe in the line, she wouldn't have minded the little one imitating the soundtrack. Imitation would have been fine; the director often used it as a tactic to get us to perform in the specific ways she wanted. But for some odd reason, she wasn't familiar enough with the movie and didn't understand what that breath was about. But the rest of us kids understood. We all had a hard time feeling these roles were ours. Even as we learned the harmonies and could hear that we did not

sound at all like the movie—in part because there were different musical arrangements for the play version; in part because the children's voices on the film soundtrack were supplemented by numerous additional voices, and there were only seven of us; in part because we just weren't very good—even then, we always imagined ourselves in the movie. We always imagined ourselves playing the actors who played the von Trapp children.

I tell this story because it brings together two of the themes I've been tracing out: the connection among musicals, performance, and lesbianism and the interplay between the Broadway musical stage and mass forms of contemporary American culture. This story also points to the magnitude of the influence of the film of *The Sound of Music*. Despite reviews that ranged from mediocre to worse, it broke all records for movie sales, played in some theaters for years, and won the Academy Award for best film in 1965. For some of us, it was among the first films we ever saw. For some of us, "Do-Re-Mi" was learned with "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and the "Star-Spangled Banner." As a friend recently said, "Our generation cathected with *The Sound of Music*."

The Sound of Music invokes lesbian desire, compels lesbian identifications, induces lesbian readings, and works as a contemporary cultural signifier of lesbian identity. Many of the lesbian meanings of *The Sound of Music* originate with Maria von Trapp herself. In a 1978 interview, with "her newly broken arm in a sling," the real Maria said, "I was a wild creature. . . . Julie Andrews and Mary Martin were too gentle—like girls out of Bryn Mawr."¹ Martin's persistence in producing and starring in the Broadway musical, the play's text itself, and Martin's portrayal of Maria, a role written for her, created a character whose spunk outweighed her heterosexual transformation in its lesbian possibilities. Andrews's performance, in one of the most popular films of all time, rendered permanent the body, face, gesture, and voice of the troublesome nun. Martin and Andrews gave different performances in different forms six years apart, yet both produced indelible images of one of the twentieth century's most memorable characters. *The Sound of Music* continues to be immensely popular, both in mainstream culture and among feminists and lesbians. Its enduring, multivalent appeal demonstrates the musical's ability to attract a range of spectators with a range of uses, meanings, and investments. This chapter is made up of four parts. First, the play and the film

of *The Sound of Music* are situated in the context of Martin's and Andrews's lives and careers. Second, some contemporary cultural uses of the image of Andrews-as-Maria are explored. The third part examines real lesbian spectators' responses to and memories of the movie, revealing the importance of Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* to these women's understandings of their lesbian identities. Finally, the remainder of the chapter is a lesbian reading of *The Sound of Music*, which pays particular attention to variations between the two versions and to specific moments of Andrews's performance on film to accrue more evidence for *The Sound of Music*'s delicious queerness. The different versions with their distinct forms (play vs. film), contexts (Broadway vs. Hollywood), years of production (1959 vs. 1965), and Marias (Martin vs. Andrews) lead to overlapping but sometimes incongruous ideological work, especially around politics.

Martin and Andrews as Maria

By the late-1950s Mary Martin was a famous, powerful Broadway star. After stealing the show singing and doing a "striptease" to "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" in *Leave It to Me*, she solidified her stardom as the goddess-come-to-life in *One Touch of Venus*, charmed audiences all over the country in the national tour of *Annie Get Your Gun*, and brought the house down with a record-setting 1,925 performances in *South Pacific*. She had a brief but memorable run in *Peter Pan* and later filmed the performance for television, permanently laminating her star identity onto the role of the boy who wouldn't grow up. Martin also turned down some notable parts, including the leads in *Okla-homa!*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Funny Girl*.² But Martin actively pursued, financially backed, and created another role, that of Maria, which to this day is associated with her. Martin's performance as Maria happened late in her career. She went on to play in *Jennie* and was a big hit with Robert Preston in *IO/IO!* She later hosted a well-received television show for seniors, but in some ways, *The Sound of Music* was her swan song.

The trajectory of Martin's career in the late 1950s, from Peter Pan to Maria, from (tom)boy to (tomboyish) heterosexual woman, echoes Maria's transformation in the play. And while Maria may be a "problem," the role itself solved some "problems" for Martin's public

image. At age forty-six, she was able simultaneously to recuperate her performance of femininity and also to resist the traditional rigid gender roles of the 1950s. In preview articles, of which there were many, Martin emphasizes both the boxing workouts she endured to prepare for the show (she walked, ran, and danced three miles during each performance) and her happiness in “playing a woman”:

I’ve played very young parts for so long. . . . Here, as Maria von Trapp, I start off young but have to grow up and mature, become a woman with a husband and seven children. Vinnie Donehue [the director] said, “Every time you sound young, like a little girl, I’m going to come back and tell you.” And he does—and I like it. I’m delighted because I do want to play a woman.³

Unlike her performance as Peter Pan, in which she felt like she “was” Peter effortlessly, Martin understands playing a woman as acting. She writes, “I had to remember the character always, keep a tight rein on my emotions and my performance.”⁴ She at once acknowledges that she has not played women before and that women are not natural, are to be played with restraint: “You could never do a kidding thing, never play it broadly.”⁵

In the press, Martin’s hair also signified her transition to femininity. An interviewer writes, “Close up, Mary Martin turned out to be more diminutive than one expected, and now that she was letting her blond hair grow for the part, she was quite different.”⁶ For this writer, she had become Peter Pan, and he seems to think he’s witnessing her maturation. Perhaps because of Martin’s fame, perhaps because of her well-documented boyishness, the writer expects her to be larger. Longer hair makes a difference to Martin, too, as the writer notes: “The first thing she did was pat her hair appreciatively and exclaim: ‘Thank heavens I’m not playing boy’s parts anymore or hillbillies. I’m being a mature woman again and I like it.’”⁷ Not only do the writer and Martin rely on European traditional notions of long hair as a marker of true femininity and of women’s (hetero)sexuality, but Martin also tellingly parallels gender and class. Maria allows her to play “feminine” and “upper class.”

When Julie Andrews was signed for the role of Maria for the film version of *The Sound of Music*, there were few if any reverberations



As Maria in *The Sound of Music*, Mary Martin plays the nun-turned-mother who retains her feistiness and changes the world around her through song.

Photo by Friedman-Abales. Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

from Mary Martin fans. Martin was fifty years old by then, and while she maintained her pixie poise, she was clearly too old to play the unruly postulant. Furthermore, except for Martin’s astonishing success in the television version of *Peter Pan*, she was known primarily as a stage performer. What was more notable at the time was that Andrews was signed before her first film was even released. She had received rave reviews on Broadway in *The Boyfriend*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Camelot* and been acclaimed as Cinderella on television, but she had not yet appeared on film. *Sound of Music* director Robert Wise viewed the dailies from *Mary Poppins*, found Andrews looking fabulous on film, and signed her on as Maria well before *Mary Poppins* opened in theaters. She had also filmed the yet-to-be-released nonmusical *The Americanization of Emily*. Andrews, then, was still relatively unknown to film audiences when she landed the role.

Andrews was also a sentimental favorite, having lost the role of Eliza in the film version of *My Fair Lady* to Audrey Hepburn, who was then already a well-known movie star. That Andrews won the Oscar for best actress for *Mary Poppins* in 1964 may have been in part because Hepburn, like many musical film actors at the time, did not sing the part of Eliza.⁸ To many fans, Andrews seemed unfairly overlooked in the casting of *My Fair Lady*, and she was rewarded with an Oscar for *Mary Poppins*. At the Academy Awards ceremony, Andrews thanked Jack Warner, the producer of *My Fair Lady*, for not having given her the part of Eliza and so enabling her to do Poppins. Many felt she deserved the role of Maria.

In preview articles for the film, Andrews is characteristically positive. Except for telling stories of the terrible weather they suffered in Austria, which delayed filming to the tune of \$1 million, she relates how much she adored her costars, how delightful the children were, and how talented and lovely Christopher Plummer was to work with.⁹ After the film's release and its immediate dismissal by critics and adoration by fans worldwide, Andrews's stories shift to describe her hesitation about the film. Unlike Martin, she was hardly taken with the story and was most anxious about its cloying sweetness. She relates how she tried to play Maria genuinely but with an edge, recalling:

I didn't think of myself as that sweet young thing in *The Sound of Music*. We had to fight being saccharine throughout the picture, and many critics thought we gave in to it. . . . But the character of Maria was so sweet I played against it as much as possible—acting the role as straight as I could.¹⁰

Wise notes that Andrews worked up countless bits of schtick to give Maria an almost slapstick physicality, including the guitar case getting stuck sideways as she tries to get off the bus in the early "I Have Confidence" scene and tripping over her own feet later in the same scene. Andrews describes the "My Favorite Things" scene and her process:

Seven kids would have to get on one's nerves, so I tried to show once in a while that I might be slightly exhausted by them. On the bed, when they asked me to do this or that and

[said], "What kind of things do you mean?" . . . I thought, "Oh, my God! Children always do ask questions like that."¹¹

Clearly, Martin and Andrews were different women and different actors with different careers, and Martin created the role that Andrews remade. If Martin capped off the heyday of her stage career with a character who at once buoyed up her femininity and supported a valorization of the nuclear family without sacrificing her spunk, Andrews began her film career as the same character, but in her case, the role ultimately locked her into a governess image. Andrews was adored in *The Sound of Music*, by fans more than by critics, like never before or since. The rest of her career can be viewed as her effort to get out of playing Maria.

The ephemerality of a stage play means that its influence fades, while a film's lives on. Martin's performance reverberates with its cultural moment at the end of the 1950s, a seemingly placid moment poised on the edge of cultural, political, and social explosion, while Andrews's, produced during a volatile time, still seems timeless, transcendent. Although Andrews has had a longer and more diverse career on stage, in television, and in films, there is no doubt that she is most famous, if not infamous, for her portrayal of Maria in the 1965 movie musical. So iconic is her status as the nun-turned-wife-and-mother that the mere mention of her name recalls the film and mentioning the film recalls her.

The Meanings of Julie

In mainstream culture, "Julie Andrews" invokes sweetness and light, innocence and virginal freshness. In the 2 November 1999 episode ("The Dirty Joke") of Fox's series *Ally McBeal*, for example, Ally is likened to Julie. Renee, Ally's roommate, accuses her of being "just like Julie Andrews," which Ally resents because, she admits with some embarrassment, she'd been voted "Most Likely to End up Playing Julie Andrews" in high school. Renee first asks, "What have you got against Julie Andrews?" as if it's incomprehensible and unforgivable not to love her, but at the same time, she understands Ally's objection. Renee then argues that Andrews did make other movies and even "pared her

breasts." Ally, though, who detests being "perky," responds, "I saw that movie. Her breasts were perky. She had little, optimistic nipples." In this scenario, Julie Andrews denotes Ally's inescapable performance of innocence. In the rest of the episode, Ally, in spite of her earnestness, only confirms her innocence, as she is unable to tell a dirty joke well. She is too sincere. (In addition to cementing her connection to Andrews, the failed joke, as per Freudian theory, underlines Ally's social powerlessness.) Ally repeatedly rejects the comparison, but songs from *The Sound of Music* are sung throughout the episode. Like Julie, Ally can try to undo her "perky" reputation by engaging in sex talk, but the episode suggests it won't work.

The Andrews motif in this episode signifies doubly; it also signals the prominent lesbophilia of the early years of the series. While *Ally McBeal*, both the show and the character, presumes to be aggressively heterosexual, the most developed, sustained, and intimate relationship in the series during the first season was that between Ally and Renee, her African American roommate. In subsequent seasons, lesbian themes have also appeared. In one episode, Ling and Elaine compete as a couple in a dance contest, looking butch and femme. In another, Ally thinks that she has a crush on Ling, and they have dinner and kiss.

The perhaps unintentionally queer but very lesbophilic *Ally McBeal* premiered and became hugely successful the same season that Ellen DeGeneres (and her character, Ellen Morgan) came out as lesbian and DeGeneres's show was subsequently cancelled. Julie Andrews was differently invoked that same season on ABC's *Ellen*. In the 19 November 1997 episode ("Emma") shortly after Ellen's coming-out, Emma Thompson plays herself as a lesbian actor from Dayton, Ohio; that is, Emma Thompson plays herself as if she were a famous actress named "Emma Thompson" (which she is) and a lesbian American (which she is not). She only pretends to be British, she says. She confesses to Ellen, hired as her assistant, that she "learned the accent from the Julie Andrews movie," which the audience knows is *The Sound of Music*, the movie itself conflated with Andrews. Thompson comes out doubly in the episode, as American and as lesbian, both fictitious, powerfully evocative, and parodied identities. In this example, Andrews represents the authentic British, one so authentically recognizable that she (or rather, her accent) provides the basis for imitation. But once Julie is invoked in one coming-out, she stands in for the other coming-out, too. Julie Andrews, by way of Thompson's won-

derfully funny impersonation of herself, serves as the pretend marker of real British speech and real lesbian identity.

If, in a play or movie or television show, Barbra Streisand fandom signals the presence of a gay man, then Julie Andrews fandom might be said to signal the presence of a lesbian. A passage from Meg Wolitzer's 1995 novel *Friends for Life* in which the character Ann comes out as lesbian to her straight friends is typical in its use of Andrews in *The Sound of Music* as a clue to sexuality. Ann says, "I had crushes when I was little." The scene continues:

"Crushes," said Meredith, all suspicious. "On who?"

"On Julie Andrews," said Ann. "She looked very beautiful in *The Sound of Music*. I told my mother I wanted to be a nun, too, but she said they'd never take me because I was a Jewish girl, and that's all I'd ever be. But I always imagined living on that mountain with Julie Andrews. We'd be nuns together. It would be very peaceful."

"You had a crush on Julie Andrews?" said Lisa. "That seems illegal."¹²

Wolitzer sets up the distinct perspectives of lesbians and heterosexual women vis-à-vis Andrews. The novel also articulates multiple and expansive modes of lesbians' identificatory uses of icons: Ann has a crush on Julie Andrews—she desires her. But her desire means that Ann at once finds Andrews beautiful (is attracted to her) and wants to be like her and wants to be with her. Heterosexual Meredith and Lisa, in contrast, can only hear "crush" in one way, as sexual attraction.

In a different context, Andrews's lesbian meanings were well understood. At the 1998 Astrea benefit at Cooper Union in New York, lesbian cartoonist and humorist Alison Bechdel performed excerpts from the comic-strip version of her coming-out story. In college, as she showed and told, she thought she was a lesbian, so she tried to get to know the people in the Gay Student Union. She felt like she had nothing in common with them, since they told her things like "Don't give directions by saying 'straight' and instead say, 'gayly forward,'" which made no sense to her. She felt alienated from them until one woman told her that she "had a wicked crush on Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* when [she] was four." Not only did Andrews provide recognition to Bechdel of a fellow traveler, but her name got a big

laugh of recognition out of the Astrea audience—actually, one of the loudest laughs during Bechdel's hilariously endearing performance.

In another gay context, *The Advocate*, lesbian comedian Kate Clinton, in a column on her adolescent relationship to movies, explains: "In *The Sound of Music*, when Baron von Christopher Plummer was in the rainy-night gazebo finally about to kiss Julie/Maria, it was me. And I was not singing, 'Perhaps I had a wicked childhood, perhaps I had a miserable youth. . . .' I was fixing to lay a big one on her."¹³

An Ethnographic Interlude on Nostalgia and Spectatorship

I want to move now from general cultural uses of "Julie Andrews" in mainstream and "lesbian" cultures to a more detailed exploration of the connections between Andrews in *The Sound of Music* and lesbian identity.

While I was working on this book, many friends and colleagues and sometime strangers confessed stories about their love of Julie Andrews and their past or current obsession with *The Sound of Music*. I was always struck by the fact that in relating these stories, women connected adoration of Andrews with their lesbianism or, in the case of many heterosexual women who told me similar stories, their feminism, evincing the complexity of the relationship among fandom, sexual desires, and sexual practices. The desirous attachment of many heterosexual women to Julie Andrews and *The Sound of Music* indicates again that spectating practices are more connected to cultural competencies than to identity. Out of curiosity, my own fascination with these stories, and my belief that these stories demonstrate the multiple, complex, often contradictory ways in which lesbian spectators make use and make meaning of a "heterosexual" text, I decided to do an ad-hoc exploration of lesbian readings of *The Sound of Music*.

Unlike the rest of the book, this section focuses on the interpretative practices of real spectators, however reimagined over time and in memory. Those spectators whom I interviewed do locate themselves and do identify themselves as lesbians and feminists, and they are white, African American, and Asian American. I'm working with conscious, articulated responses from a number of friends and acquaintances.

ances. These memories were gathered in taped interviews, E-mail exchanges, and casual conversations. Still, I find these stories useful and would suggest that they're not at all atypical. My point here is not to summarize an empirical study but to show the multiple and compelling ways that lesbians have used *The Sound of Music* and Julie Andrews. As Christine Gledhill asserts, "It is this haphazard, unsystematic viewing experience, and its aftermath that the cultural analyst must investigate if she wants to determine the political effects of textual ideologies."¹⁴ As my "respondents'" stories show, "haphazard" spectating is patterned and quite compelling. In some ways, this interlude "proves" what I have been arguing all along about lesbian and feminist spectators' active meaning-making.

Although my so-called informants are predominantly middle class and in their thirties or forties, they vary greatly in terms of the ages when they came out. Some think of themselves as always having been lesbian. Some articulate a self-awareness of desire for women or lack of desire for men from adolescence. Others came out as adults, perhaps first becoming aware of desire for women in their first lesbian relationship. But all of these women now negotiate their identities in relation to the most pervasive narrative in lesbian subcultures: the coming-out narrative. This narrative is precisely the opposite of a nostalgic one, deriving its logic from its conclusion. The prevalence and cultural weight of the coming-out narrative preclude the possibility that a lesbian's past, especially her adolescent past, could have been happier than her present. Still, the coming-out narrative encourages, and in fact necessitates, reexamining the past for signs of the present. Even women who became lesbians later in life are prompted by the structure of coming-out narratives to mine for previously unnoticed warnings. I would suggest that this reconstruction of one's past, based on cultural competence and experience, differentiates a lesbian reading of developmental narratives from others. This use of *The Sound of Music* complicates what we think of as nostalgia.

Nostalgia, as Ann Friedberg writes, "means a painful return, a longing for something far away or long ago, separated by distance and time."¹⁵ The opening legend of the film of *The Sound of Music*, which places the setting as "Salzburg during the last golden years of the thirties," invokes nostalgia. In fact, several critics in 1965 panned the film precisely on this point, noting that early Nazism was hardly a golden era for some occupants of Europe. For Julie Andrews, *The Sound of*

Music continues to be the locus of critics' nostalgic investment in her career, as they insist on seeing her still as Maria and disparage her more-than-thirty-year effort to change that image. Gerald Mast, writing about the entire Rodgers and Hammerstein canon, calls it "a nostalgic regression," noting that virtually all of the characters and songs are imitations of those in earlier Rodgers and Hammerstein shows.¹⁶ But what is the nostalgia of, say, a forty-year-old lesbian for a film she saw as a not-quite-lesbian at age six?

The women with whom I spoke and corresponded are well aware of the sappy sweetness of *The Sound of Music*. They are familiar with filmic conventions and with conventions of musicals. Like the women spectators interviewed by cultural studies theorists, these spectators deal with the film postmodernly, simultaneously accepting its veracity and its constructedness. In other words, these are hardly duped spectators. Yet they use the film with, I'd say, a vengeance.

All of the women I spoke to expressed nostalgia about the actual experience of first seeing *The Sound of Music*. They fondly remembered huge movie theaters and sitting in the balcony; they remembered going with their mothers or with babysitters or being the babysitter themselves. For some of the women, this was the first movie seen alone or the first movie seen at all. Each woman stressed the significance of her first viewing of the film and remembered the situation of the viewing in detail. For example, one woman said, "There were so many people in the theater that my mom and I had to sit in separate places in order to get into that showing, reinforcing in my child-mind that what I was about to see was a truly great film." As soon as they started talking about specific parts of the film, though, the distinction between past and present blurred. As each described what she remembered loving about the movie, past tense became present tense: "I was totally in love with her" became "I adore her." As Jonathan Friedman notes, "The past is always practiced in the present because subjects in the present fashion the past in the practice of their social identity."¹⁷

The women acknowledged that having seen the film numerous times made it impossible to separate past reactions from present ones. And not surprisingly, conversations about the movie produced memories never before remembered. Like the memories of women in Jackie Stacey's study of white heterosexual women fans of women movie stars in the 1940s and 1950s, these memories themselves tended to be

either structured in story form, like movie narratives, or in still images that had become iconic, like photographs.¹⁸ A narrative example:

I first saw *The Sound of Music* when I was babysitting and working as a lifeguard for this family for the summer (the family was rich and they had this in-ground swimming pool). She was Catholic and he was Jewish and had converted to Catholicism. They always had a lot of people around. One time in the summer they had a group of nuns over and one of them couldn't swim and she got too close to the deep end. It dropped off and she panicked because she couldn't stand anymore—she was in her forties or fifties. And I had to rescue her. That became a good story. There was somehow an aura about nuns. My life has had a lot of nuns.

And an iconic example: "I have this picture of Maria on the mountain with her arms out and singing. I have that picture in my head." Their memories unfolded in a variety of forms, textures, and colors, some involving the women in action, others pulled directly from the film itself.

Furthermore, the women I spoke to peppered their accounts with phrases that connected their attachment to the film with self-conceptions of developing lesbian sexuality—for example, "I think the movie tapped into my budding lesbianism," or "Then there's the lesbian piece. When I was ten or eleven, I was fascinated by girls' bodies who were thirteen and fourteen," or "I think lesbian things were going on for me with the movie, but I had no idea, no clue, and I didn't talk to anyone about it." *The Sound of Music*, as interpreted and used by these women, is not the site of an idealized desire for the past. The film functions differently but multiply—first, as evidence of lesbianism: "I should have known I was a lesbian because I was in love with Julie Andrews"; second, as assurance that the past is over: "There is so much that I longed for when I saw that movie and now I've achieved it because I'm a happy, out lesbian"; third, as an actively negotiated and constantly refigured connection between the past and the present: "I still love Julie Andrews and I think of her differently, yet still pleasurably and with desire today."

If they identified with Liesl, the sixteen-going-on-seventeen-year-old—although more of them were either just curious about her,

repelled by her, or attracted to her or her dress—then they negotiated their reading by privileging a subplot over the film's central narrative. And even if they identified with the Captain—either because they wanted to be, as one woman said, “powerful enough to get them all over the Alps” or because, more typically, they wanted to “dance with Julie Andrews in the courtyard” or, like Kate Clinton, “kiss her in the gazebo”—then they practiced what Stuart Hall has coined an “oppositional” reading.¹⁹ In other words, all of these readings, identifying across gender, age, and sexuality, are well within those theorized by cultural studies reception scholars. As Tanya Krzywinska writes, “Our continuous reworkings of fantasies and desire are hooked onto the images or icons that in some way are related to early questions about our own identity, particularly our sexual identity.”²⁰ For many lesbians, Julie Andrews as Maria von Trapp is one of these icons.

Because these women grew up in cultural conditions already saturated by star-actor dynamics, by the multiple cultural meanings of the star, identifying simultaneously with Julie Andrews and Maria falls well within an expected or “preferred reading” of the film. All of the women I spoke with had a fascination for Julie-as-Maria that included admiration for her spunkiness, strength, and intelligence. Whereas the film encourages spectators to perceive that Maria does not fit in at the abbey, all of the women I spoke to saw Maria's decision to leave the abbey as solely her own.²¹ They all gave Maria more self-conscious activity than a typical reading of the film might imply. Andrews's short hair, perfect posture, poise, and British accent were mentioned as reasons for fascination. Interestingly, some of the women explained their attraction to Andrews because she was “beautiful” or “cute” or “handsome,” but others said they were in love with her because she was *not* beautiful or stereotypically womanly.

Identification with Maria was sometimes articulated in terms of identification *with* her and sometimes in terms of desire *for* her. If heterosexual spectatorial identification is limited to the desire *to be like*, lesbian identification, even sensed consciously, adds the desire *to have* sexually. The women in my group demonstrated both kinds of identification; for example, one woman said:

She played the guitar, and I played the guitar. In some ways I identified with her but she was too femme for me, and in some ways I wanted to be the Captain and sweep her off her

feet. She was totally freaked out by her feelings and didn't know it. There was a part of me that was freaked out by any sexual feelings at all. The convent was a safe place to go with those feelings. That must have stuck in my brains because that's what happened to me, too.

And another alluded differently to a desire to be her. She said: “I was captivated by her short hair and by the fact that she ran around on the tops of mountains by herself waving her arms about. She just had such a spirit of abandon. I loved ‘How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria’ because no one could domesticate her.” And another woman imagined herself not as Maria but with her. She said:

I remember feeling like I was there in Austria with Maria at the abbey, then at the von Trapps, and later hiding from the Nazis. When I discovered the original soundtrack at home, I would sit in my room and listen to it over and over again, studying the pictures on the back cover.

I also found a surprising range of responses to the heterosexual romance in the film, which suggests a great degree of spectatorial activity. About half the women enjoyed the love story and were taken in by the romance. They especially noted the party scene in which Maria and the Captain first dance together. One woman was struck by the forcefulness of Maria's denial of desire, and she linked that explicitly to her own denial of lesbian desire. Another woman saw the romance as any other romance and said simply, “I love romance.” But not one of them wanted Maria to fall in love with the Captain, and not one of them wanted to be Maria falling in love with or marrying him. As one woman said: “I do have a memory that once she got married and she turned heterosexual, there was something sad about it. At that point in the film, my identification switched to the Captain. Then it seemed more fun to have her than to be what happened to her.” Or as another woman said, laughing, “I didn't think he would be any competition for me.” Their identification with Maria always focused on her freedom, on her connection to nature and to the community of women, the nuns. Further, some of the women ignored the love plot entirely and did not see the conflict in Maria's situation. *The Sound of Music* may be a love story, but not for some lesbian spectators.

Jackie Stacey points out that many of the women in her study expressed nostalgia as they talked about movie stars and remembered themselves as girls. They felt themselves to be aging and so, as they said, losing femininity and desirability.²² In contrast, none of the women with whom I spoke in any way referred to lost femininity. Again, I would suggest that this trend points to the possibility of an alternative narrative of sexuality and desirability for many lesbians, a different notion of past and present and of aging and an aging body than in a heterosexual and heterosexist dominant culture.

Across a range of uses, meanings, identifications, and interpretations, *The Sound of Music*, for many lesbians, helps to constitute identities and consolidate communities. Lesbians hold in tension the memory of spectatorial pasts and the memory of spectatorial presents. Susan Stewart reminds us that "nostalgia, like any other form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as a narrative, and hence, is always absent."²³ Engagement with the film and with Julie Andrews's voice and body are, of course, narrativized, and fantasies are structured ideologically. At the same time, these are eminently useful, productive fantasies that can help us rethink the assumed nostalgia of spectatorship of musicals.

Broadway and Hollywood

The qualities that render *The Sound of Music* so appealing to many lesbian and feminist spectators—a woman-centered world, a feisty "natural" woman, a failed heterosexual narrative, a plethora of queer supporting characters—are key elements of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical in both its play and its film form. At the same time, both versions of the musical do extensive and very conservative ideological work. The film version—with a different cast, luscious scenery, and some scenes and songs altered, added, cut, or rearranged—is both spectacular and intimate in ways that a Broadway musical can never be. Not surprisingly, the mass-culture venue of the film also compromises the political edge of the play version.

In spite of its popular appeal, *The Sound of Music* has only met with disappointment and disgust from musical theater and film scholars. As Mast summarizes the Broadway version, "Written in placid peacetime, between the war in Korea and the war in Vietnam,

the show is too confident that the storms have all been walked through and every mountain climbed."²⁴ He also argues that the five years' difference between the Broadway production and the film release gave the film greater political relevance than the show. Mast explains:

In those five years, a popular and attractive president had been assassinated, a Caribbean neighbor had become an enemy, blacks were accusing American society of persistent racism, and American boys were dying in a distant place called Viet Nam. . . . The film transported a scarred generation of Americans out of the present's lack of political clarity and social cohesion, back to a past when Western moral values and American social purpose seemed clear and coherent. Where and how could clarity and coherency be found again if not back there—in what America was and what Americans believed in the battle against the Nazis?²⁵

Although the U.S. cultural context of the film provides a more overtly politicized setting for its issues, the film itself elides the strong political sentiments of the Broadway version. The show was more direct in its political investments. In the film, for example, the Captain and Elsa break off their engagement because she is too rich and too powerful. She wants a life in Vienna, and he wants to stay in the country. He has already fallen in love with Maria, the feisty but vulnerable and penniless girl-child who adores his children. In the Broadway version, however, Elsa and the Captain repeatedly argue about politics. Like Max, she refuses to take a stand against the Nazis and thinks Georg is crazy to do so. The song "No Way to Stop It," sung by the three, stresses their differences, at once expressing the competition of egos among them and serving as Elsa and Max's attempt to convince Georg to forget about the government and simply worry about himself. In a song whose melody is as circular as its argument, they sing: "You may be bent on doing deeds of derring-do / But up against a shark what can a herring do? / Be wise, compromise! / Compromise, and be wise! / Let them think you're on your side, be noncommittal."²⁶ Georg decides he cannot marry a woman who lacks political convictions. The song was cut in the film, effectively replacing a political dispute with a solely personal and individual squabble.

Another difference between the two versions concerns the character of Rolf, the love interest of Liesl, the eldest daughter; they sing the duet, "Sixteen Going on Seventeen." In the last scene of the musical the von Trapp family is hiding in the abbey's cemetery, and Rolf, now a Nazi soldier, spots them. In the play version, Liesl, according to the stage directions, "looks pleadingly at Rolf," hoping that he will not arrest them, and he obeys, shouting to his commander, "No one out here, sir!" enabling their escape.²⁷ In the film, however, the Captain treats Rolf like a child and attempts to disarm him by saying, "You'll never be one of them."²⁸ Rolf, humiliated, shouts to alert the other soldiers of the family's hiding place. The Broadway version paints Rolf more hopefully, while the film creates a sense of fear and anxiety, even among those one supposedly trusts. The Broadway version prioritizes the faithfulness of young romance, while the film focuses on a competitive father-son relationship. In the play, a woman influences a man. In the film, men have power over the fate of women, but less politically than personally. Rolf betrays the von Trapps not for political reasons but because his feelings are hurt by the Captain, the father, the guardian of his almost-lover.

Director Robert Wise's camera work—its shots and countershots, breathtaking views of the Swiss Alps and extreme close-ups—creates two very different moods for the film. At some moments, it looks like a travelogue. The musical numbers seldom seem "stagey" because Wise has the characters travel through Salzburg and across the countryside as they dance and sing. As one of the last moneymaking Hollywood musicals, the film looks more like a feature film than film musicals of earlier decades. At other moments, glances, gazes, looks, and expressions subtly convey a campiness, a sharp, self-conscious irony in the film. Christopher Plummer's performance as the Captain is particularly arch. He took much convincing to play the role and during filming referred to the picture as "The Sound of Mucus" because of its saccharine sweetness. Eleanor Parker as the Baroness and Richard Haydn as Max fill out the campy roles of a stereotypical lesbian and gay man couple, she the quintessential vampire lesbian and he the gay esthete. After Maria dances with the Captain at the party, for example, Max invites her to dinner, and she goes upstairs to change her dress; Maria is already flustered, and Elsa follows her. In the bedroom scene, Elsa drives Maria away from the von Trapp household by informing her that Maria is in love with the Captain and that

"the funny thing is, he thinks that he's in love with [her], too." Parker draws out the long vowel sounds; raises each eyebrow separately; sends desirous gazes Maria's way; and, mouth twitching, fails to cover her smirk when Maria begs her not to tell the Captain that they spoke. "I wouldn't dream of it." Elsa positively coos. According to Wise and producer Saul Chaplin, they strove to eliminate some of the saccharine of the playtext. I think that they often replaced it with camp. They also eliminated much of the Broadway version's political punch. Still, both versions of *The Sound of Music* have undeniable, ineluctable appeal to many lesbian spectators. So while the film sacrifices large political points on the level of content and dialogue, it provides a lesbian and feminist cultural politics through nuanced wryness on the level of specific performance choices.

Maria's Difference

Sister Berthe: (singing) She's a headache!

Sister Margareta: She's an angel—

Mother Abbess: She's a girl . . .

(They all assume the attitude of prayer, eyes toward heaven.)

—*The Sound of Music*, act 1, scene 3

Before Maria has spoken a word in the Broadway version of *The Sound of Music*, the nuns try to describe her, but the audience already knows that Maria is a problem not because she is a girl but because she is a tomboy. She is seen in the first scene (which precedes this one), in which she sings and doesn't speak, "lying on her back at the base of a tree." The stage directions note, "Her position, with one foot high in the air and her petticoat showing, is unpollutant-like."²⁹ Refusing the terms of femininity defined by the abbey, Maria is uncontrollable, indefinable, virtually unnamable—a "problem."

Maria wants to be a nun and comes from a convent, a typical representational location of lesbian proclivities. The nuns in *The Sound of Music*, unlike representations that use a convent to show women without men as "repressed/repressive, hysterical and unbalanced," are likeable and quite wise.³⁰ They are portrayed as heterosexually innocent but curious, their later titillation over Maria's wedding neg-

ligea easily read as lesbian amusement rather than virgin fear. They are thoroughly accepting—perhaps more than a lesbian spectator—of Maria's transformation into heterosexuality and marriage. They are clever and enterprising, too, when they hide the von Trapp family during their escape from the country, even stealing the battery from a Nazi's car to slow down their chase.

In the Broadway version, Maria's first song, "The Sound of Music," is framed by the nuns' opening number, in which they sing a sober, beautiful hymn in Latin, and their "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?" scene. The nuns' perspective introduces notions of proper femininity within this context of an all-women's community. On one side, there is solemnity and unity, on the other side, humor, sharp observation, and much disagreement. But from the beginning, it is clear that Maria does not fit in.

The film, in contrast, opens with the famous, extended, breath-taking helicopter shot that begins by surveying the snow-capped mountains and harsh crags as the wind howls. The camera then swoops down from the sky to take in the mountains, the meadows, the town of Salzburg, and finally Julie Andrews solo on a hilltop. In the film, Maria gets the first word, and the scene literalizes the song. The abbey appears dark and foreboding in the second scene. Thus the "problem" set up by the film version is that the abbey is clearly an inappropriate place for Maria. The film strongly establishes Maria's point of view as central. The nun's song is extremely static, staged almost as a live concert, with little camera movement. The film emphasizes the difference between Maria's movement, what one reviewer calls her "slightly angular buoyancy," her connection with the outdoors, nature, and freedom, and the abbey's darkness and its restrictions.³¹ In both versions, Maria's dissimilarity from the nuns is evident not from signs of heterosexuality but from other, individualized signals of lesbianism—her athleticism, her untamed behavior, her wild spirit that causes her to sing and tromp fearlessly over the mountains. As the opening stage directions of the play version note, her petticoat is up and she is lying on the ground. In the film, Andrews's first clear gesture is to run her hand through her very short hair in a movement of exhilaration. Thus, both versions of *The Sound of Music* open with an entirely lesbian world: the community of the nuns and the tomboy autonomy of Maria.

Maria's indifference to heterosexuality becomes clearer as the

play proceeds. She fails to see the Captain as a potential suitor, and her intense, passionate longing is focused on nature and singing. No one imagines her as an object of heterosexual desire, and when the Captain first looks at her, he comments only on her dress, which the stage directions in the play describe as "designed by an enemy of the female sex."³² In the film, Plummer looks at Andrews with an undisguised air of disgust. He asks her to turn around, which she does, but this movement that might locate her as an object of desire only positions her as something polluting the pristine house.

Maria does not signify lack, but rather opportunity. As a lesbian fantasy of self-generation, she has no family. Not bound by class, she has no money, but it matters not to her will, her charisma, and her success. The film version contains an additional short scene in which Maria goes into a gilded, mirror-walled ballroom. She imagines someone asking her to dance, smiles, waves a nonexistent fan, curtsies flamboyantly, and begins to waltz around the room before she is discovered by the Captain, who tells her not to go into rooms with closed doors again. The image of Andrews dancing creates multiple reflections of Maria, again emphasizing her independent selfhood. She does not dance alone but dances with herself.

The Sound of Music's ideological work hinges on Maria's mobility in an American cultural context. Although it takes place in Austria and is peppered with "folk songs" like "Edelweiss," the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical portrays a white American family reinventing itself through innocence and energy, and Maria is the source of that energy. The film never claims directly that Maria is American, although according to Rick Altman, "the set of character traits and values that she represents make her identity as a 'symbolic' American quite clear."³³ The musical creates a series of binaries typical of what Altman calls the "fairy tale musical": female/male, American/European, working-class/monied, free/constrained.³⁴ Maria represents an unsocialized femininity, and the musical ultimately values Maria's disorder and negates the discipline of the nuns, of the Captain, of the Nazis. But the boundaries of disorder, in the context of late 1950s and early 1960s American musicals, are still closely guarded. Maria's lack of socialization is temporary: she becomes the unifying force of the musical's dualisms, creating a world that balances and values both sides.

Furthermore, Maria's irrepressible spirit is prized solely because she is white.³⁴ The nature of *The Sound of Music*, with which she is

metaphorically and, in the film, literally linked, is the nature of whiteness—mountains, blue sky, pastures, and fields of flowers dotted with the civilization of castles and chocolates, not the nature of darkness and primitivism. Kobena Mercer explains how the label “Caucasian” (“the name chosen by the West’s narcissistic delusion of superiority”) originated in 1795 when Friedrich Blumenbach used it to describe white Europeans in general, “for he believed that the slopes of the Caucasus mountains [in Eastern Europe] were the original home of the most beautiful European species.”³⁵ Maria’s whiteness ensures that her natural disorder is aestheticized. The film’s spectacular scenery, with which Maria is intimately connected, so much so that she appears quite literally to have been born from the mountains—she tells the Mother Abbess, “I grew up on that mountain”—reaffirms the value of her whiteness.

In addition, particular inflections of Maria’s so-called disorder mitigate any possible threat to the social order. Like the tomboy, the chaos caused by Maria is temporary. She is easily recuperated, tamed, and appropriated by a heterosexual nuclear family. Also, her form of mayhem is extremely practical; thus, she exemplifies a peppy version of the “angel” side of womanhood. She knows, of course, that children need to play, sing, get wet, and get dirty. She doesn’t want to waste money and so can sew clothing out of curtains. Even as a governess-tomboy, Maria is an excellent midcentury American housewife.

In spite of her eventual move into heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood, the character of Maria holds great appeal for lesbian spectators because of how active, independent, and singular she is. The recurring visual image of the Broadway version of *The Sound of Music*, an often-reprinted publicity photograph on the cast album’s cover, exemplifies Mary Martin in this way, as well. It shows her standing stage right with legs spread and head up—not unlike her Peter Pan pose—guitar in hand and smiling broadly. The seven children are gathered stage left in a group in sailor suits, all but one bent over, hands on knees, looking up at Martin and smiling. Lauri Peters, who played Liesl, stands behind the other children and eyes Martin/Maria suspiciously or perhaps with curiosity or with desire. Despite the publicity about Martin growing her hair for *The Sound of Music*, it is very short, and she looks quite boyish next to Peters’s softness and longer hair. The photograph pulls one’s gaze toward Martin,

confident, competitive, and uninvolved with the children. Martin looks up and out, not directly at the camera but over the heads of the imagined audience in the orchestra section of the theater. While Martin—the star—and the children were the show’s great appeal, the photograph conveys not an image of nurturance or interaction but one of independence. The guitar serves both as a marker of power and as a physical barrier. Although she claimed to be delighted to be “singing legato for a change,” this image is typical of Martin the tomboy.³⁶ Martin’s performance resists the play’s normalizing forces of heterosexual femininity; she stands apart.

Andrews’s portrayal of Maria in the film version also stresses her independence and singularity, tempered by a certain emotional vulnerability and physical awkwardness. The song “I Have Confidence,” written by Rodgers and added to the film, provides some insight into Maria’s character. A variation on a “pass-along number,” the song moves Maria geographically and emotionally.³⁷ “I Have Confidence,” like the title song, is notable for its lack of a diegetic audience in the film. In other numbers, Maria is identified as a singer; she often sings for and with others, and she gains much through her singing. In contrast, this is a song of self-assurance, self-disclosure, sung for herself. Musically, the song contains phrases that descend in the first section, then ones that ascend in the middle section to achieve the sense of climbing and striving. Maria is frightened and intimidated but is also able to buoy her own spirits. Andrews croons in even 4/4 time, “I have confidence in sunshine, I have confidence in rain.” She sings to herself, convincing herself that nature is on her side, that she can and will succeed as the new von Trapp governess: “I have confidence in confidence alone!” The song consists of a series of phrases that build, then retreat, mirroring her emotions of assurance and anxiety. The number’s choreography also expresses both her energy and her awkwardness as she propels herself forward and trips over her own feet. As one reviewer described Andrews’s performance: “She brings to Maria and the film a unique mixture of naivety [*sic*], zanyness [*sic*], and joy.”³⁸

In the Broadway version, Maria gathers strength from the Mother Abbess, with whom she sings “My Favorite Things.” Bonding with a woman gives her courage to face a new life. In the film, however, which emphasizes American spirit and individualism, Maria must become her own source of strength.

Both versions of *The Sound of Music* contain an extraordinary

number of women characters who "play" stereotypical lesbians. Sister Berthe, who insists that Maria is a "demon," and Frau Schmidt, the maid, both represent the stereotype of the asexual, humorless, spinster lesbian, while Elsa signifies the voracious, overly sexual bitch, the vampire lesbian. Elsa is positioned symbolically as masculine—"handsome," as the stage directions in the Broadway version indicate—and self-serving: her first gesture in the play is to help herself to a pastry. Introduced as the object of the Captain's gaze—"Captain von Trapp is standing center, admiring Elsa"—she quickly rhetorically castrates him by reminding him that she is a corporation president.³⁹ Elsa laughs that she'll never learn the children's names, since she's too busy with more important things, while Maria learns them instantly. Maria is constructed against these representations of stereotypical lesbians.

In the film, Eleanor Parker's Elsa contrasts with Andrews's Maria in every way, from her breathy speaking voice (compared to Andrews's crisp tones) to her icy-blond elaborate hairstyle (compared to Andrews's sandy-blond tomboy cut) to her sheath-style dresses with jackets and heels (compared to Andrews's dirdnds and flats). Elsa doesn't eat in the film (she takes the pastry in the beginning but never actually consumes it) but instead smokes cigarettes, a marker of sophistication, as well as of inappropriate behavior in the pristine setting, and a sign of her conniving ways. Her dialogue with Georg is marked by suggestiveness, sarcasm, and teasing, precisely the opposite of Maria's literalness and direct confrontations. Furthermore, because a character's not singing in a musical renders her less sympathetic, the fact that Elsa's two songs from the Broadway version were cut from the film reinforces the sense of her exclusion from the world of the von Trapp family.

Part of Maria's representational attractiveness stems from her lack of money, the key difference between her and Elsa. The play's Austrian setting displaces the racialized social conflicts of the United States onto class issues, valuing restraint over pretentiousness. Max, described in the stage version as a "charming dilettante," and Elsa represent stereotypical gay characters because of their duplicitous, excessive self-performances, their narcissism, their frank desire for money, and their lack of political convictions.⁴⁰ Max portrays a dandy; as Michael Bronski writes, "The dandy catered to the autocratic sensibility: all style and no content . . . Taste was life's most important attain-

ment: any politics, emotions, or ethics that conflicted with this goal were to be disregarded."⁴¹ Max says: "I like rich people. I like the way they live. I like the way I live when I'm with them." And when he receives a telegram from a Nazi officer, he shrugs it off, saying: "Georg, why don't you look at it the way I do? What's going to happen is going to happen. Just be sure it doesn't happen to you."⁴² In the Broadway version, Elsa too lacks political convictions; the proposed marriage between her and the Captain fails because they are both rich and because she refuses to take a pro-Austrian political stance.

In the film, while Elsa claims to be concerned only with marrying Georg, she and Max are figured repeatedly as a couple. From their first scene in the car with Georg driving, camera shots include both Elsa and Max. They work as a team, their speaking voices almost overlapping, creating harmonies. As if the film can barely imagine her coupled with Georg, the two of them (Elsa and Georg) are often shot from behind. Because "How Can Love Survive," the duet between Georg and Elsa in which they attempt to work out their competition and the complexities of a dually rich marriage, and "No Way to Stop It" were excised from the film, it eliminates class tensions and political tensions and flattens out the secondary characters, making Maria and the children all the more central. Except for a few, very short scenes, the Captain is only revealed in relation to Maria and his eventual love for her. When the Captain turns toward Maria, the musical ignores how Maria has acquired a life of luxury; rather, it focuses on how she has changed the Captain.

Narratives of a Lesbian Musical

Brigitte: And the way you looked at him just now when you were dancing. You're in love with him.

(Maria stands in stunned silence.)

—*The Sound of Music*, act 1, scene 11

The Sound of Music illustrates the fine rewards of entering into heterosexuality within the context of Cold War ideology's effort to contain women within the family. Yet the narrative that apparently recuperates Maria into heteronormativity and proper femininity is shaky, gap-ridden, and ultimately unconvincing. If Maria naturally,

instantly, and delightedly becomes a mother of seven, her entry into heterosexuality is not as natural. Maria needs to "come out" as heterosexual. Rhetorically echoing a typical gay or lesbian coming-out, she tells the Mother Abbess that she "was frightened." She continues, the stage directions indicate, "with difficulty": "I was confused. I felt—I never felt that way before. I couldn't stay—I knew that here I would be away from it—that here I would be safe."⁴³ Maria does brave the move from homosocial to heterosexual, but she never enacts heterosexual. Her "straightening" takes place musically, as well: she sings the mildly chromatic opening number, but when she moves to the house and teaches the children "Do Re Mi," she sings only the diatonic scale.⁴⁴ Still, she makes the world to her own liking—she changes the Captain into a warm and loving man and brings music (back) into the household. She escapes from the abbey but can still depend on the nuns; she can play outside and sing whenever she wants. When the nuns sing a reprise of "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?" at her wedding, it serves as a reminder that, in spite of a wedding, Maria hasn't changed and the "problem" is still there.⁴⁵ Finally, Maria plays quite the unconventional mother, the child-ghost of the mother lost, not an ordinary mother.

The narrative of *The Sound of Music* can successfully transfer Maria into heterosexual marriage because of her whiteness, its seeming inevitability masking the white privilege that enables it. Her identity as a single, orphaned, penniless servant who somehow behaves as if she arrives at the von Trapp household by choice makes cultural sense because of what it's not—a Mammy figure. Like the representational Mammy, Maria has no children of her own, no history, no culture. She is a cipher. But unlike the Mammy, who despite her love and dedication to her white family remains outside it, Maria easily slips from servant-governess to wife-mother. It is also possible to read the Captain's anxiety about Maria's influence as racialized, as his children become white "pickaninies" under Maria's guidance. They wander around the countryside, singing, playing, and making mischief, with a "ragamuffin appearance [and] devilish habits."⁴⁶ Maria wears the clothes and the demeanor of Mrs. Captain von Trapp with frightening ease—after, of course, the critical transitional white wedding dress. Her transformation is enabled in part because perhaps the roles are not so different in a household like the von Trapps, a typical American home. Furthermore, her whiteness and, for both Martin and

Andrews, her thinness and excellent posture allow her unlimited class mobility.

The play and, even more clearly, the film also rework representation's assumptive male "gaze," or the historically presumed heterosexual male point of view of images and performances. Within its framed world, *The Sound of Music* does not eschew the gaze but rather opens it to variously gendered gazers and then turns it around. At first, Maria is to-be-looked-at: the nuns in the convent observe her; each person whom she meets in the von Trapp household scrutinizes her, from the butler to the maid to the Captain to the children; Elisa and Max look closely when they arrive. But what they see is not easily fetishized or (hetero)sexualized. Rather than objectify Maria, all of the characters eventually identify with her and in effect want (to be) her. In every case, from the nuns to the Captain to the children to Elisa, Maria looks back, and her desires propel the outcome.

Structurally, the musical moves through a series of scenes in which each character connects with Maria, reframing a conflict-driven plot. Maria's journey through the upper class barely presents her with obstacles. Through song and dance, Maria unknowingly charms and seduces each character. These moments of seduction pertain, of course, to the Captain, but Maria also captivates the women in the musical. In the film, for example, Frau Schmidt cannot resist confessing to Maria in a conspiratorial whisper that the Captain plans to marry. Maria responds, "How wonderful!" Later, when the Captain finds the children carousing in Maria's bed during a thunderstorm, he notes that Liesl was absent after dinner. Liesl stutters, and the camera moves back and forth several times between Liesl (played by Charmian Carr) and Maria, who then says that they've been "getting better acquainted." In these and other scenes, the film emphasizes the mutual exchange of looks between women, a filmic device that calls up lesbian desire.⁴⁷

None of the relationships between women in *The Sound of Music* are obvious friendships; rather, each is tinged with a clear power differential of age, status, money, or experience and exhibits the lesbian dynamics of "nurturance and dominance."⁴⁸ Maria's relationships with the Mother Abbess and Liesl exemplify such interactions. In the Broadway version, although the Mother Abbess symbolizes the play's first site of order (constructed as repression against Maria's desire for the freedom of music and nature), she soon admits similarities to

Maria. They bond in singing "My Favorite Things" together before Maria leaves the abbey for the von Trapp house. As Richard Dyer notes, the song is less about the particular things that cheer one up—raindrops on roses, whiskers on kittens, and so on—and more about the joy of music itself; that is, it allows understanding and bonding.⁴⁹ It is also a way for the Mother Abbess to admit their similarities and to temper her dominance over Maria, who strongly protests being sent away from the abbey, with nurturance. Despite the abbey's rules about singing, the Mother Abbess does so unabashedly after she admits that she too wanted to be a nun as a small girl. When Maria leaves the abbey, she knows that the Mother Abbess understands her deeply.

While the Mother Abbess both nurtures and dominates Maria, Maria in turn nurtures and dominates Liesl. In both the play and the film, Liesl is the eldest daughter, whose character is mainly delineated by her hovering on the edge of sexuality. She openly rejects Maria at first, insisting, "I don't need a governess." Maria responds, "We'll just be friends." Maria refuses a position of dominance, choosing to "seduce" Liesl through nurturance and friendship. They unite that very night over the secret of Liesl's sexual transgression (she's been out kissing Rolf and climbs in through Maria's bedroom window) in a presumably innocent bed. Liesl has been soaked in a thunderstorm and dons Maria's nightgown—an exchange charged with intimacy. Maria commands her: "Take your dress in there—and put it to soak in the bathtub. . . . Then come back here and sit on the edge of my bed and we'll have a talk." Liesl responds: "I told you today that I didn't need a governess. Well, maybe I do."⁵⁰

After this scene and their lie to keep the Captain at bay—a moment that only happens in the film—Liesl and Maria barely interact in the rest of *The Sound of Music*, except for a reprise of "Sixteen Going on Seventeen" in which Liesl confesses her confusion about love. Maria, both dominant and nurturing, suddenly heterosexual and suddenly Liesl's mother, advises her to "wait a year or two" for "this kind of adventure" when "you belong to him."⁵¹ In this humorous and unintentionally ironic song of seduction, Maria displaces Rolf. In both of the scenes with Maria and Liesl, men simply provide the topic through which the women become intimate.

The love plot between Maria and the Captain in *The Sound of Music* conforms to certain conventions of romance in musicals. Maria

and the Captain are introduced as opposites, expressed not by different musical modes but by the fact that she is fundamentally a singer and cannot resist singing, as she is chastised in the abbey for singing, and he sings not at all. Their union, then, does not take the form of a love duet but rather becomes clear when he begins to sing, takes up the guitar, and moves into her world of music.

Their relationship is also in accordance with the notion of a "companionate" marriage so pervasive by the end of the 1950s. As David Steigerwald describes it:

The companionate marriage joined men and women who had much in common, were usually of the same religious faith and economic class, and shared roughly the same educational background. The homes that such couples established were no longer the castles of dominating husbands but joint enterprises where men and women were friends and lovers as well as husbands and wives.

The Sound of Music simply elides the enormous differences of economic class and emphasizes instead the importance of music and of children. Steigerwald explains that in contrast to the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity, in which "the woman was to find fulfillment by subordinating herself to her husband's will," the 1950s "cult of the family" transferred a woman's purpose to the raising of the children.⁵² In the musical, romance is filtered entirely through concern for the children. And, reversing parent-child roles, Maria urges the Captain to ask the children for permission to marry her.

Even as the musical reflects conservative values of midcentury America, its representation of romance encourages nonheterosexual readings. It eschews love at first sight, the most prevalent representational signifier of heterosexuality, for a gradual bonding. As Chris Strayner writes of female bonding:

While love at first sight necessarily deemphasizes materiality and context, female bonding is built on an involvement in specific personal environments. Furthermore, the relationship acquires a physical quality from the presence of personal items that, when exchanged, suggest intimacy.⁵³

In spite of their being man and woman, Maria and the Captain enact "female bonding." Their relationship is founded solely on its familial context: they almost literally exchange the children, and she makes clothes from his curtains. Maria seems not so much to love the Captain as to love the children and music. She replaces her love of nature with love of family. Their marriage is one of convenience, compelled (in the play version) by their similar, pro-Austrian political views and (in the film) by her ability to tame the children through music.

Their affection is only expressed when Brigitta insists that they are in love and when Maria feels while dancing, according to the stage directions, an "emotion [that she has] never experienced [and] does not understand." The Captain asks her to wear the dress that makes her look "soft and white," and Maria tells the Mother Abbess that she "likes him" with no representational signs of heterosexual desire. The song in which they declare their love in the Broadway version, "An Ordinary Couple," underlines their domestic "normalcy" and emphasizes the "materiality and context" of "female" bonding, as the Captain sings, "For all I want of living is to keep you close to me."⁵⁴ They mostly seem like good pals. Rodgers wrote a new love song for the film, "Something Good," which is really Maria's confession that she's had a terrible life: "Perhaps I had a wicked childhood / Perhaps I had a miserable youth." In spite of its seductive melody, it's a very dark love song and not a duet. The number is also shot in heavy shadow, the actors' faces barely recognizable.⁵⁵

Their marriage does little to shift the female focus in the world of the musical. It rather pulls together the disparate parts of Maria's life—the abbey and the villa, the nuns and the children. By the end of the musical, Maria is still what Paula Graham calls an "amazon tart," as she practices an "extremely traditional protestant ideal of 'companionate' heterosexual femininity."⁵⁶

One reviewer of the film writes that Julie Andrews

can take the archness out of "My Favorite Things" in a way Mary Martin never could. . . . There is something irresistible about Julie Andrews. . . . She strides through the film offering warmth, guidance, and other sickly comforts and does it with a minimum of sentiment and a maximum of charm.⁵⁷

Another calls the film "pure unadulterated kitsch, not a false note, not a whiff of reality."⁵⁸ More recently, Rosie O'Donnell confessed that she had a difficult childhood and had wanted to be in the movie of *The Sound of Music* and have Julie Andrews "sew clothes out of curtains for [her]."⁵⁹ In the end, *The Sound of Music* is a lesbian musical fantasyland.