THE MUSICO-DRAMATIC EVOLUTION OF RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN’S "SOUTH PACIFIC"

DISSERTATION

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By

James A. Lovensheimer, M.A.

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The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:
Professor Arved Ashby, Adviser
Professor Charles M. Atkinson
Professor Lois Rosow

Approved by

________________________
Adviser

School of Music Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

Since its opening in 1949, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Pulitzer Prize-winning musical *South Pacific* has been regarded as a masterpiece of the genre. Frequently revived, filmed for commercial release in 1958, and filmed again for television in 2000, it has reached audiences in the millions. It is based on selected stories from James A. Michener’s book, *Tales of the South Pacific*, also a Pulitzer Prize winner; the plots of these stories, and the musical, explore ethnic and cultural prejudice, a theme whose treatment underwent changes during the musical’s evolution.

This study concerns the musico-dramatic evolution of *South Pacific*, a previously unexplored process revealing the collaborative interaction of two masters at the peak of their creative powers. It also demonstrates the authors’ gradual softening of the show’s social commentary. The structural changes, observable through sketches found in the papers of Rodgers and Hammerstein, show how the team developed their characterizations through musical styles, making changes that often indicate changes in characters’ psychological states; they also reveal changing approaches to the musicalization of the novel. Studying these changes provides intimate and, occasionally, unexpected insights into Rodgers and Hammerstein’s creative methods.

Early versions of the script further suggest an occasionally abrasive polemic that is modified in the final version. Changes made in characters’ expressions of intolerance, for instance, or in their criticism of racism in American society, demonstrate a tempering of the show’s tone. While some sketches indicate striking similarities to aggressive writings about intolerance by the
Writers’ War Board, of which Hammerstein was an active member, final versions of the same scenes are more restrained. This study provides thorough analysis of these alterations.

Changes in the structural and thematic materials of *South Pacific* are examined within the context of the postwar era, a time in which attitudes towards race and women, two issues important to the musical, were being transformed by an intensifying Cold War. These changes suggest a heightened awareness of the needs of the musical, as well as of the problematic tenor of the times in which it was created, and they resulted in one of the great works for the American musical stage.
Dedicated to my parents
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VITA

July 10, 1950....................................................Born - Chillicothe, Ohio

1968 - 1972....................................................Attended University of Cincinnati,
College-Conservatory of Music

1994..............................................................B.M. Music History, University of
Tennessee, Knoxville

1995 - 2002....................................................Graduate Teaching Associate, The Ohio
State University

1997..............................................................M.A. Music, The Ohio State University

2002 - present................................................Lecturer, Vanderbilt University

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Major Field: Music
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Until the last decades of the twentieth century, the American musical remained largely outside the realm of scholarly investigation. Musicological research was especially uncommon, perhaps because many scholars viewed the commercial and collaborative genre as a frivolous diversion, a mass-produced genre exemplary of what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer described as the “culture industry.”1 Thus, Dwight MacDonald, in coining his term “midcult” for highbrow culture “watered down” for middle-class, middlebrow American audiences, singled out as examples “the folk-fakery of Oklahoma! and the orotund sentimentalities of South Pacific.”2 Such dismissals of American musical theater are becoming rarer, however, and scholarly studies of the genre, and of particular works for it, now appear with increasing frequency.3 They assume an


3A discussion of the literature is found below in this chapter.
important place in the literature about American music, the American musical stage, and American cultural studies.

Very little of this literature, however, addresses the joint creative output of composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist-librettist Oscar Hammerstein II. From 1943 to 1959, Rodgers and Hammerstein together wrote nine musicals for the Broadway stage, as well as one original film musical and one musical for television.4 Both men also were important creators for the commercial American stage before their collaboration. Hammerstein worked notably with Rudolf Friml (including *Rose-Marie*, 1924), Sigmund Romberg (including *The Desert Song*, 1926, and *The New Moon*, 1928), and Jerome Kern (especially on the landmark musical *Showboat*, 1927), while Rodgers’s teaming with Lorenz Hart, primarily in the 1920s and 1930s, produced innumerable hit shows and an impressive catalog of songs, many of which are still standard in the repertory of popular American music. The teaming of Rodgers and Hammerstein, in addition to uniting two already established men of the theater, brought together two artists who shared a long-standing concern with integrating the elements of the musical -- plot, character, music, and dance -- into a dramatically and musically cohesive work. In his autobiography, Rodgers acknowledges this pre-existent concern when he dryly notes that, after *Oklahoma!*, “Everyone suddenly became ‘integration’-conscious, as if the idea of welding together song, story, and dance had never

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4The Broadway musicals were *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *Allegro* (1947), *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), *Me and Juliet* (1953), *Pipe Dream* (1955), *Flower Drum Song* (1958), and *The Sound of Music* (1959); the film was *State Fair* (1945), and the musical for television was *Cinderella* (1957). Stanley Green, ed. *Rodgers and Hammerstein Fact Book: A Record of Their Works Together and with Other Collaborators* (New York: The Lynn Farnol Group, Inc., 1980).
been thought of before.”\textsuperscript{5} Both men saw this integration as a goal for the genre, and their individual creative careers moved in this direction.

Some of the earlier works of each artist integrated the structural elements of the musical more than most works of the time. The soaring lyricism and historical setting of \textit{Showboat} recalled operettas, for instance, while its comic scenes and numbers also displayed elements of musical comedy. Yet both elements were used to explore serious plot issues, and \textit{Show Boat} was, for its time, unusually character- and plot-driven; \textit{Show Boat} also contains early successful examples of the musical scene, a form perfected by Rodgers and Hammerstein and discussed below in Chapter Two. Rodgers and Hart’s \textit{Pal Joey} (1940; Broadway opening 1941), while maintaining many characteristics of musical comedy, was more character-driven than most examples of that genre, going so far as to use an anti-hero as its main character and, anticipating \textit{Oklahoma!}, a dream ballet at the end of the first act; \textit{Pal Joey} also contains examples of Rodgers using song types to deliver subtle messages about plot and character, a practice also discussed in Chapter Two.

Not until their collaboration on \textit{Oklahoma!}, however, were Rodgers and Hammerstein able to realize their aspirations for musico-dramatic unity. Their two subsequent works -- \textit{Carousel} and \textit{Allegro} -- took the technique of integration to a higher level and further experimented with the use of dance and movement as a means to propel their respective plots. By 1949, the so-called “Rodgers and Hammerstein musical” (a term with problems addressed below) was a paradigm of the genre and an important influence on subsequent musicals. Musicologist Geoffrey Block has borrowed terminology from Harold Bloom and referred to the “anxiety of influence generated by Rodgers and Hammerstein” on later

generations.6 A critical investigation of any of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, therefore, could be useful and important to scholarship on American musical theater, given both the status of those musicals as a culmination of earlier ideas and trends, and the powerful influence they exerted on later works.

The 1949 musical *South Pacific* provides a particularly valuable object for such an investigation. There are three principal reasons for this: (1) the Oscar Hammerstein II and Richard Rodgers collections at the Library of Congress contain many sketches that document the musico-dramatic evolution of *South Pacific* and reveal that, between its initial phases and its Broadway opening, the show underwent major structural and thematic changes; while many shows experience such changes, the wealth of materials tracing the creative journey of so highly-regarded a work as *South Pacific* is notable; (2) *South Pacific* holds a prestigious critical and popular position as a representative of the genre; and (3) the post-war, pre-1950s years when *South Pacific* was created and produced, coupled with the musical’s message about American prejudice, present the opportunity for studying an American musical in a critical social context. The fundamental goal of the present study, therefore, is to illuminate, through the study of sketches and other primary sources, the structural changes in book and score that *South Pacific* underwent from its initial conception to its Broadway opening and beyond, and to demonstrate how these changes altered not only the structure but also the tone, although not the message, of the underlying theme. Knowledge of these changes is important to understanding Rodgers and Hammerstein’s approach to the musical in general, as well as to the genesis of this particular work, and it reveals the creative and self-critical processes of two creators for the American musical theater at the peak of their careers. In providing

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us with a better understanding of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s work, the present study may help to explain their extensive influence on subsequent developments in a genre that was, by the end of the 1940s, what musical theater historian Ethan Mordden has called “central to American culture.”

We might ask, of course, what the value is in looking at the developmental process of so highly regarded a work. If *South Pacific* was, and continues to be, a critically and commercially successful work -- that is, highly regarded by contemporaneous and subsequent critics and well-attended in thousands of performances since 1949 -- why do we need to know more about it? Shouldn’t the work “as it is,” or at least “as it was” when it opened, be enough? This question can be addressed by asking another equally important question. Is the work, or was it ever, a “finished” construct meant to stand fixed and unalterable? In other words, is there a work “as it is?” Stephen Banfield suggests that the answer is no:

Scholarly criticism must after all be based on the technical detail of the source material, and source material for the musical theater is ill-grounded in “authentic” documents. A musical exists in no definitive form, and a performance is created from no single source. The vocal score and the script are separate, the orchestral parts separate again and, as it were, invisible in the absence of an accessible orchestra score . . . , and the choreography and staging may not be fixed in notation at all. The original cast recording is widely considered a show’s most authoritative source, fallaciously in view of the many ways in which it may differ from (let alone foreshorten) what was heard in the theater.

*South Pacific* is particularly interesting in light of this issue. Rodgers and Hammerstein added material to the Broadway production months after it had

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opened,9 which, by 1949, was an unusual gesture by them or anyone else; Broadway shows were usually “frozen,” or unaltered, after their opening. The 1958 film version restored the song “My Girl Back Home,” cut when the show was previewing out of town, and rearranged the scenes and songs. The television version of 2000 also rearranged and rewrote sections of the play and cut the number “Happy Talk.” The recent (2002) Trevor Nunn production in London added previously cut dialogue from the first rehearsal script to emphasize racial intolerance; the production also restored two musical numbers missing from the first Broadway version, “Now Is the Time” and “My Girl Back Home.” All these changes suggest that there is no definitive or “final” version of *South Pacific*,

This lack of a “final” version of the work in turn supports the examination of sketches in order to learn about the work at any given point of its continuing evolution. After all, the added and / or restored material in these subsequent productions all existed in the sketches and drafts of the work not found in the original Broadway version. We can observe from the sketches, moreover, how the work reached the form that secured its status as a pinnacle of the Rodgers and Hammerstein repertory. Gaining an understanding of this process through sketch studies allows us a perspective into the version of the work that opened on Broadway as a product of its authors’ thinking, rather than as a finished masterwork. Because a survey of the earlier versions of *South Pacific* shows us what was important to its creators and how that changed, it also gives some idea of the social context and imperatives when the work was being written, thereby helping us to understand just how strong its intended social criticisms were. This is reflected in, among other things, the changes undergone by several characters, especially Nellie Forbush, in the different versions of the work. Finally, such a source-based survey brings us closer to understanding how *South Pacific* served

9See the discussion of act 2, scene 4 (2, 4) in Chapter Six.
post-war writers as a model of the genre. By revealing for the musico-dramatic evolution of *South Pacific*, in other words, the authors’ sketches support Philip Gossett’s observation that, “Whether or not we wish to invoke for a specific analysis information garnered from sketches, they affect both our more general understanding of the work and the kinds of questions we ask about related works.”

The thematic concern and primary social criticism with which the creators of *South Pacific* labored was racial intolerance, as noted above. This controversial issue, and the effect that it had on the show’s reception, was one of the few problems with the reception of *South Pacific*; it was the element of the musical that received, and continues to receive, the most negative response from critics and audiences. Critics especially targeted the second-act song “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught,” perhaps the most controversial song ever written by Rodgers and/or Hammerstein, together or apart. The tone of this sociopolitical issue was muted throughout the creative process in order to edify the audience without offending it, an outcome that Rogers and Hammerstein did not ultimately achieve, as we shall see. Hammerstein biographer Hugh Fordin has noted that Hammerstein “did not set about writing a play with a ‘message,’ but a strong theme critical of racial prejudice existed in the work he was adapting and he did not shy away from it.”

The source work was James A. Michener’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Tales of the South Pacific*, a collection of stories connected by two narrative techniques: (1) a single setting -- an island outside the perimeter of battle during World War

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Two; and, (2) characters who appeared throughout the various stories. While the book lacked a linear plot, it contained situations and characters that Hammerstein turned into one. Furthermore, while racial conflict was only one element of the many plots of the novel, the two stories that Hammerstein and Rodgers decided to adapt as the principal sources for their musical (“Fo’ Dolla” and “Our Heroine”) revolved around the racial intolerance of two Americans and how that intolerance was or was not resolved. In the end, as Ethan Mordden notes, “the entire show is about racism.”

While the book, music, and lyrics of South Pacific have always been well-received critically -- individual productions may have fared less well, of course, for any number of reasons -- the show’s theme of racial prejudice has had a more problematic reception. This again encourages us to consult the sketches, recalling Douglas Johnson’s question, “Are there problems in . . . completed works which can be elucidated by the sketches?” An investigation of the sketches for this musical suggests an affirmative answer to Johnson’s question (despite Johnson having answered the question negatively in his essay). While Hammerstein lightened the sociopolitical tone of the show somewhat during the creative process, he did not completely solve the problem of how to include a strong sociopolitical message in what is essentially a romantic musical play. The sketches demonstrate why this is so, and how Rodgers

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and Hammerstein worked with the play until it reached a satisfactory, if perhaps still somewhat problematic, form.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{South Pacific} is an important and unique example of post-war American cultural history, as the sketches reveal. In 1943, the creative team for \textit{Oklahoma!} drew on historical American popular song types and dance styles for that musical, as well as on visual iconography, such as works by regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton, for scenic aspects of the production (as noted by Graham Wood).\textsuperscript{15} By 1949, however, the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein had themselves achieved the status of icons of American popular culture, important cultural, as well as artistic, expressions. This status, however, has been somewhat misunderstood and misrepresented, and the use of the term “Rodgers and Hammerstein musical,” which appears frequently in the literature, is also questionable. The following passage from a dissertation by Lee F. Orchard is telling:

> A vigorous and hope-filled spirit of idealism has often permeated the musical, a spirit frequently embodied by “cock-eyed optimists,” who exhort all within earshot to “dream impossible dreams,” to “whistle happy tunes,” and to keep “lovin’ dat man,” even when circumstances seem to suggest more realistic alternatives.\textsuperscript{16}

Three of the four quoted lyrics are by Oscar Hammerstein, and the first is from \textit{South Pacific}. Orchard continues as follows:

\textsuperscript{14}Despite some critical reservation about the more dogmatic characteristics of the book and lyrics for \textit{South Pacific}, the show and its actors received unanimously rave reviews. Upon its premiere, the musical won nine Donaldson Awards, eight Antoinette Perry, or Tony\textsuperscript{TM}, Awards, the New York Drama Critics Award for best musical, and the 1950 Pulitzer Prize in Drama (Green, 567).


Another reason often given for the popularity of the musical is its alleged simplicity of treatment. Musical designs which render up easily reproducible and hummable tunes; simple musical structures (most often AABA form); fundamentally linear plotlines, often serving as excuses for lovely melodies, leading through modest complications to predictable, yet desirable happy endings; pleasant, unsophisticated, and even naive characters, and affirmational, uncontroversial thematic statements are all illustrative of such simplicity of treatment which has brought to the musical not only popular reception but often critical disdain.17

Orchard is not the only representative of this view, of course. No less a theater critic than John Lahr has written about the American musical from a similar perspective. In an article highly critical of composer-lyricist Stephen Sondheim, Lahr refers to musicals as “tall tales of the urban middle class,” going on to note the following:

For nearly half a century, the musical has been refurbishing with new words and rhythms the well-worn clichés of the middle class. Social comment is as unwelcome to most Broadway producers as syphilis is to a whore.18

This view of the American musical, and of Rodgers and Hammerstein in particular, is perilous, especially in regard to South Pacific. Such an overview hinders viewing South Pacific as the unique example of post-war American cultural history that it is. Although its plot is linear, South Pacific has neither the “modest complications” nor the “uncontroversial thematic statements” of Orchard’s prototype, and the tunefulness of its score often masks musical structures that are far from simple, as I shall attempt to demonstrate in subsequent chapters. While Rodgers and Hammerstein strove to use song, dance, dialogue, and scenic effects to the end of plot and character development in all their works for the stage, they did not adhere to a single format or deal with thematic issues in the same way.

17Orchard, 7.

from show to show. Investigation of the sketches for *South Pacific* shows the individual character of the show, just as it points out the pitfalls of generalizing about the genre.

The five years preceding and including the creation of *South Pacific* were post-war years witnessing far-reaching cultural changes in America. The sociopolitical content of the sketches suggests a connection between *South Pacific* and these cultural changes undiscussed in the literature. Understanding this connection sheds light on the problematic content of *South Pacific*, as well as on the way its problems were dealt with. From December 1941 to the end of World War Two in 1945, Hammerstein was actively involved writing essays and editorials critical of American race relations for the Writers’ War Board (WWB), an organization founded on December 9, 1941, by playwright Howard Lindsay at the prompting of Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Although it functioned under the guidance of the Office of War Information, the WWB was officially an independent organization. Created to promote the sales of war bonds, the WWB became increasingly active in additional areas of the war effort, and by 1944, for instance, the organization had formed a Committee to Combat Race Hatred in which Hammerstein was also an active and outspoken participant.

During the war, when Rodgers and Hammerstein were creating *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* (1945), Hammerstein remained active with the WWB, and much of what was being written by the members of the WWB, including Hammerstein, was very similar in content to what Hammerstein would subsequently write for *South Pacific*. The sketches for Act Two, scene four, in which the characters climactically confront the issue of racial intolerance, are especially reminiscent of WWB statements, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Six of this study. Indeed, one of the attractions of the Michener work for Hammerstein could have been its
expression of ideas close to those espoused by the WWB. Examination of these sketches suggests that Hammerstein, reflecting the strong tone of the WWB’s wartime concern with what it called the fascism inherent in American racism,\textsuperscript{19} began writing a script more overtly critical of America’s racial tolerance than the Broadway version might imply. The serious and polemical musico-dramatic intent implicit in the sketches, and its transformation in the version of \textit{South Pacific} that opened in 1949, will be an important focus of this work..

**Review of the Literature**

The use of sketch studies as part of the musicological investigation of a musical is not without precedent. Geoffrey Block’s study of Frank Loesser’s sketchbooks for \textit{The Most Happy Fella}\textsuperscript{20} came only two years after Charles Hamm’s important 1987 source-based investigation of cuts and changes in George Gershwin’s score to \textit{Porgy and Bess}.\textsuperscript{21} The presence of both articles in scholarly journals is encouraging, although apart from these two instances, a close examination of sketches has been rare in the study of American musicals. (We should perhaps note here that both these works have been referred to as operas, which gives them a certain “legitimacy” for some scholars that other works for

\textsuperscript{19}Third Annual Report of the Writers’ War Board (January 1945), 17.

\textsuperscript{20}Geoffrey Block, “Frank Loesser’s Sketchbooks for \textit{The Most Happy Fella},” \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 73 (1989), 60-78. Block’s study investigates all 385 pages of Loesser’s sketches, and he finds many indications of that composer-lyricist’s compositional methods, most of which were previously undiscussed in the literature, as well as a creative history of an enduring masterwork of the American stage.

\textsuperscript{21}Charles Hamm, “The Theatre Guild Production of \textit{Porgy and Bess},” \textit{Journal of the American Musicological Society} 40 (Fall, 1987), 494-532. Hamm’s article was an argument that \textit{Porgy and Bess} should be performed with the cuts and changes made by Gershwin before the New York opening. These changes are not included in the published “complete” vocal score, but they exist in scores and other sources used in preparation for the original Theatre Guild production.
the commercial stage lack. *Porgy and Bess*, for instance, was called a “folk opera” by its composer; *The Most Happy Fella*, however, was not, its composer arguing against that classification.)22

Such studies have been facilitated by several research aids, however. The 1981 *Resources of American Music History: A Directory of Source Materials from Colonial Times to World War II*, edited by D.W. Krummel, Jean Geil, Doris J. Dyen, and Deane L. Root, while not specific to musical theater, contains much information regarding the primary source holdings of many important libraries, public and private, in the United States. Listings of manuscripts and personal papers, among other items left by a composer, are invaluable for starting research. More specific to the field of musical theater, the *Catalog of the American Musical: Musicals of Irving Berlin, George and Ira Gershein, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Lorenz Hart*, edited by Tommy Krasker and Robert Kimball and published in 1988, contains information unavailable in any other source, concerning the library locations of primary source materials. The *Catalog* is especially intended for use by scholars and researchers.

Several recent books by music scholars deal with issues of the American musical stage, with varying results. Perhaps the most impressive is Stephen Banfield’s 1993 *Sondheim’s Broadway Musicals*. Graham Wood succinctly explains why:

> It is not simply the high quality of his work that matters, nor that his is the only approach; rather, it is his willingness to engage the central issues of this repertoire using a variety of methodological

22“We tell me there has been some discussion of the fact that I have called *The Most Happy Fella* a musical. I for one don’t understand that talk. Because that’s exactly what it is. It’s not a play with music; it’s not an opera (let no one mention folk opera!). It’s a musical -- with a lot of music.” (Frank Loesser, “Some Notes on a Musical,” quoted in Block, “Sketchbooks,” 60). The American musical is often compared with what Block calls “the European operatic ideal,” the more integrated and “organic” works getting a higher approval rating from the critics. This issue is considered more fully in this chapter.
tools (analysis, source studies, hermeneutics, philosophy, and so forth) and situating his research within a multi-disciplinary framework.23

Banfield is fluent in the vocabularies of musical analysis, critical theory, the history of the musical theater, and genre theory, and he puts all these disciplines to use in a wide-ranging discussion of Sondheim’s work through Into the Woods. Banfield also has some comments on the use of source materials that are pertinent to the present study:

. . . I am concerned about three problems [in this work]. . . The first is the assimilation of primary source material. The presence and availability of such methodological and comprehensive sketches and drafts may make Sondheim something of a special case in this respect . . . -- though in truth we cannot be sure of this until similar studies have been made of other composers and lyricists -- but special case or no, we must at least say that any study of Company, for instance, that took no account of the uncanonical attempts at an ending . . . would be an impoverished one.24

Banfield’s discussion of his work’s third problem (the second is the impossibility of considering music and lyrics separately in the musical theater) also informs the present study and, perhaps, any other forthcoming studies of the genre or individual works in it. Banfield’s third problem is the danger of emphasizing the music over other elements of the work:

. . . to privilege music in the critical discussion of musicals is both necessary, in order to right the balance of its previous neglect, and dangerous, in that music is only one contributor to a multi-disciplinary genre. It is inevitable that, given my own background as a classical musician and musicologist, the present book shows a particular bias towards Sondheim’s music. . . . But to base a critical methodology primarily on musicological precedents . . . leads all too easily to the premise that all musicals aspire to the condition of opera, a genre in which the composer, at least according to [Joseph] Kerman, is the dramatist.25

23Wood, 74.

24Banfield, 5.

25Ibid., 6.
Banfield’s disparaging comment about musicals aspiring to an operatic ideal is in part a criticism of Joseph P. Swain and his work, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey*. Swain’s “operatic orientation,” as Graham Wood calls it,\(^\text{26}\) is the basis of his chronological survey of the genre. Swain bases his analysis of musicals on a premise in Joseph Kerman’s *Opera as Drama*, a work arguing that, in opera, the primary dramatic expression is found in the score. Applied to the musical, this approach overemphasizes the role of the composer in a highly collaborative genre.\(^\text{27}\) While Swain’s work was, as Banfield notes, “the first sustained critical handling of the music in American musicals,”\(^\text{28}\) it is nonetheless highly problematic. Two excerpts from Swain’s introduction demonstrate this: (1) “The music of a good musical play informs the drama that contains it, and the composer is a dramatist in his own right, more important sometimes than the person who writes the words;”\(^\text{29}\) and, (2) “Even when it is agreed that any critical assessment of the American musical stage must include its music, it is entirely possible that the musical talent of Broadway is unequal to the ideal of music drama.”\(^\text{30}\) The use of a Wagnerian term for the critical

\(^{26}\)Wood, 53.

\(^{27}\)In his dismissal of *A Chorus Line*, for instance, Swain states, “Perhaps this musical . . . is the one in which dance succeeds music as the conduit of dramatic meaning.” Because this does not fit in with his Kerman-esque perspective, however, he then notes, “The dances . . . provide a spectacular visual element, no doubt, but spectacle by itself is not drama, and in the absence of a consistently dramatic dance, the play must fall back on its songs and lyrics, its music. For its composer and lyricist, the brilliant . . . conception proves too great a challenge. Their music, however inventive and memorable at times, fails to make convincing drama out of the frame story.” Joseph P. Swain, *The Broadway Musical: A Critical and Musical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 318.

\(^{28}\)Banfield, 5.

\(^{29}\)Swain, 3. Emphasis added.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 8. Emphasis added.
assessment of a popular genre reveals Swain’s bias, and the rest of the book substantiates it. While it is important as an early endeavor, Swain’s work is problematic.

Several other scholarly works on the musical theater are notable. Bernard Rosenberg’s *The Broadway Musical: Collaboration in Commerce and Art* successfully addresses some of the problems inherent in the critical consideration of a commercial genre. Other authors, such as Martin Gottfried and the late Lehman Engel, have written theoretically about the musical, although their work has been for general audiences. The 1996 collection *Approaches to the American Musical*, edited by Robert Lawson-Peebles, is one of the first collections of essays on the genre, although none of the entries deals with the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Geoffrey Block’s *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from ‘Show Boat’ to Sondheim* (1997) is a sophisticated analytical overview of the genre and perhaps the one most demonstrative of a successful scholarly approach to the musical since Banfield.

Some recent studies examine the genre from the perspective of gender and queer theory. Stacy Wolf’s *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*31 is an insightful look at musicals and women stars of musicals from a feminist and lesbian perspective. Wolf spends considerable time discussing Mary Martin’s performance in *South Pacific* and *The Sound of Music*, and her work informs Chapter Seven of this study. John Clum’s *Something for the Boys: Musical Theater and Gay Culture* examines the American musical from a gay perspective but, while he spends time noting Mary

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Martin’s androgyny in *South Pacific*, he more generally notes that, “It’s virtually impossible to queer Rodgers and Hammerstein.”

Popular works on the genre abound, of course. One that stands above the rest is Gerald Boardman’s *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (second edition 1992), which contains both a popular history and much data about the individual productions, reception, stylistic developments, and -- noteworthy among popular histories -- social and political contexts for the shows. Lehman Engel’s critical history, mentioned above, is still essential reading on the musical. Less essential, but quite readable, are Ethan Mordden’s volumes on the history of the musical and on specific periods in that history, all of which are listed in the bibliography. Mordden assumes a vast knowledge on the part of the reader, making comparisons between shows and songs that may or may not be generally known, and his frequently snide critical comments often reveal his own personality more than valuable insights. Nonetheless, his knowledge of musicals is encyclopedic, and his works are full of pertinent, if usually undocumented, information. Standard works by Stanley Green, David Ewen, and others were of little use in a study as specific as this one.

Almost no scholarly literature exists on Rodgers and Hammerstein. This is about to change, however, due to Rodgers’s centennial in 2002. Geoffrey Block is involved in several works; he has written the forthcoming *Yale Broadway Masters: Richard Rodgers*, for instance, and he edited Oxford University Press’s *The Richard Rodgers Reader*. Several related dissertations have been written, including Milton Kaye’s 1969 “Richard Rodgers: A Comparative Melodic Analysis of His Songs With Hart and Hammerstein,” and Fredrick Duane McKinney’s “Richard Rodgers: An Analysis of His Music” (1996), both of which provide rather superficial descriptive analyses of Rodgers’s work. The one

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exceptional dissertation is that of Graham Wood, already cited. This work considers Rodgers’s compositional style as one that frequently steps outside the traditional thirty-two bar popular song form (AABA), the standard from ca 1925-1930 throughout much of the remaining twentieth century. Wood provides an invaluable typology of song forms against which to compare Rodgers’s work. Wood also deals with issues of genre theory and, in his last chapter on Oklahoma!, how the song styles and visual iconography of that production demonstrated its cultural context. The study terminates with the beginning of Rodgers’s collaboration with Hammerstein, however, and Oklahoma! is the last work investigated. Another dissertation deals specifically with Oklahoma! Larry James Evans’s 1990 doctoral document, “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Oklahoma!: The Development of the ‘Integrated’ Musical”33 is a thorough examination of that seminal work.

Popular literature on Rodgers and Hammerstein is easier to find, and I make practical, if cautious, use of it for this study. Hugh Fordin’s 1977 biography of Hammerstein, Getting to Know Him contains much information from what was then the private collection of papers and book and lyric sketches, now in the Library of Congress. In particular, Fordin provides important information concerning Hammerstein’s involvement with the Writers’ War Board. Likewise, the work of Ethan Mordden, mentioned above, reveals much archival research, although little of it is documented. Stephen Citron’s The Wordsmiths: Oscar Hammerstein and Alan Jay Lerner provided one item of special importance: the text of a skit written by Hammerstein concerning racial stereotypes on the stage; the original text also may found in the Library of Congress Hammerstein collection, although Citron incorrectly dates the skit’s performance and the group for which it was performed. (This skit, and the discrepencies in the literature

concerning it, are discussed below.) This kind of error is not uncommon in the popular literature. Biographies of Rodgers, including the recent (2001) *Somewhere For Me* by Meryle Secrest, and general works on Rodgers and Hammerstein, listed in the bibliography, provide anecdotal information, although most of it is undocumented. Biographies and autobiographies of James A. Michener and Joshua Logan, along with the collections of their materials in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division, have also been indispensable to this study; the same is true of several critical studies of Michener’s work.


*South Pacific* was created at an important juncture in American history, and cultural studies about the United States during and after World War Two are abundant. Two general, although not recent, guides to American studies are David W. Marcell’s *American Studies: A Guide to Information Studies* (1987) and Robert Merideth’s *American Studies: Essays on Theory and Method* (1968).

Despite the early dates of these works, however, they are useful starting points in the search for related materials. General considerations of the period in question, such as David Halberstam’s *The Fifties* or George H. Douglas’s *Postwar America* and the *Incubation of Our Times*, are quite useful for overall perspectives on post-war American society. The wartime United States is explored in innumerable works. These range from collections of essays such as *America At War: The Home Front, 1941-1945*, edited by Richard Polenberg, to individual considerations such as John W. Jeffries’s *Wartime America*, to name just two. Works specific to the wartime efforts of the various propaganda groups that include considerations of the Writers’ War Board are also plentiful and include Allan M. Winkler’s *Politics of Propaganda* and Wallace Carroll’s *Persuade or Perish*. A wide variety of works specific to the wartime effort and post-war culture have been consulted. Additional titles can be found in the bibliography.

Outside the Rodgers and Hammerstein collections at the Library of Congress, sources about the initial presentation of *South Pacific* and the public and critical response to it include reviews of the original production, contemporaneous articles about it, the original cast recording, the published script, and the published piano-vocal score. These items provide a useful background against which the sketches can be studied and, in regard to the reviews and articles, a perspective from which the 1949 version of the work can be viewed.

In addition to the newspaper and periodical reviews of the original production mentioned above, reviews of the subsequent London production are of interest because of their differences from the American response. Letters in the Hammerstein and Rodgers collections also supply telling responses from audience members, both famous and unknown, who felt compelled to let the creators what
they thought of the work, in particular its thematic content. Coming as they did on the brink of the American civil rights movement, these public and private responses to *South Pacific* occur within a fascinating cultural context.

### An Overview

I have already indicated the principal intent of this study, which is to explore the musico-dramatic evolution of *South Pacific* and reveal, in the structural changes the work underwent, changes in the socio-political tone of the work. In order to better understand this exploration, I found it necessary to review the earlier creative output of Rodgers and Hammerstein individually and, later, as partners. To this end, Chapter Two is an investigation of structural and thematic concerns of each man’s work for the musical stage before 1949. As we shall see, the innovations exhibited in *Oklahoma!* had precedents reaching far back into the history of the genre. Even if the creative team of Rodgers and Hammerstein had never formed, each man would have figured prominently in the development of the American musical theatre; Chapter Two demonstrates this observation.

Because the plot and underlying message of *South Pacific* has its seeds in James A. Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*, a knowledge of that work and its thematic concerns is essential to our understanding of how it was adapted into the form of a musical play. Chapter Three is a tripartite discussion of Michener’s novel. First, we examine the book in light of what Michener himself has said about its genesis, its purpose and its content. An analysis of the novel’s structural, thematic, and narrative elements follows. The final section provides information concerning Rodgers and Hammerstein’s attraction to the work and their initial
decisions about its transformation. This sets the stage for an examination of *South Pacific* itself.

My concern in Chapter Four is how Rodgers and Hammerstein refine their representation of the psychology of complex and conflicted characters through musical and dramatic means. After this refinement, which is the product of much rewriting, structural elements such as song, musical soliloquy, and orchestral subtext, among others, contribute to the realistic portrayal of subtle but believable characters. As a way to focus this discussion, I center it on the development of act 1, scene 1, which, in its completed form, addresses and exhibits Rodgers and Hammerstein’s structural and thematic priorities for the entire work.

After observing in Chapter Four how Rodgers and Hammerstein establish characterization through musico-dramatic means, we are able to examine, in Chapter Five, how the team deploys those means to reflect changes in the characters in the course of those characters’ dramatic evolution. The changing musical representations of Nellie, de Becque, and Cable provide examples of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s sensitivity to, and expression of, the evolving musico-dramatic needs of these characters. As in the previous chapter, examination of particular scenes, as well as the sketches for those scenes, provides us with a focus for exploring the development of these musical representations.

The principal concern of Chapter Six is the softening of the socio-political polemics of *South Pacific*. This is demonstrated principally through exploring the working out of act 2, scene 4, and the modification of the underlying theme that takes place in that development. This exploration also indicates influences on the show’s thematic message beyond Michener’s novel. Other sections of the work also are explored that indicate a tempering of Nellie’s racism and de Becque’s response to it.
Finally, Chapter Seven locates the cultural context of *South Pacific*. Examination of the socio-political climate of the postwar era allows us to see *South Pacific* as an expression of its time as well as a reflection of it; this examination also suggests reasons behind some of the musico-dramatic evolution of the work, including the distillation of its political and social criticism. While social, racial, and feminist criticism of the work from a post-twentieth-century perspective is fascinating, my concern is its contextualization within the post-war period. To this end, I examine the racial climate, as well as the changing depiction of women, in that era. Contemporaneous texts offer substantial perspectives from which we can view the work, and they help us understand the creative process, as well as the artistic result, of *South Pacific*.

In studying the musico-dramatic evolution of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*, we have the opportunity to witness two creators at work on a highly successful and, at the time, controversial American musical play. This investigation provides insight not only into the workings of this by now legendary team; it also affords an understanding of the work’s place in its social and cultural environment. As the body of work concerning Rodgers and Hammerstein continues to grow, it is my hope that this study will offer observations that clarify what is already known, as well as provoke further investigation into this and other works by the team.

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35 For instance, see Andrea Most, “‘You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught’: The Politics of Race in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*,” *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000), 307-37. This article is addressed in Chapter Seven.
CHAPTER 2

STYLISTIC PRECEDEnTS FOR SOUTh PACIFIC IN THE WORK OF RICHARD RODGERS AND OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II

As noted in the previous chapter, and in all the literature on the American musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Oklahoma! (1943) achieved musico-dramatic integration on an unprecedented level. Each subsequent Rodgers and Hammerstein musical through The King and I (1951) raised the bar for this stylistic unity, and the popularity of those shows, with the exception of Allegro (1947), assured the integrated musical its place as the structural paradigm for the genre. As we shall see, other structural models existed, and eventually were accepted as viable alternatives to the integrated musical, although even tentative exploration of those alternatives took place only after the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein was completed. (While this collaboration reached its artistic peak in 1951, its dominance lasted until the end of their collaboration in 1959 and after.)

To understand how Rodgers and Hammerstein achieved this stylistic dominance of the American musical in the 1940s and 1950s, and to demonstrate the artistic roots of that dominance, we must investigate the presence of integrated elements (or lack thereof) in earlier works by each man. Only after exploring Rodgers’s and Hammerstein’s continued use of integrated structural elements to create increasingly coherent, and cohesive, musical plays before their collaboration can we see how South Pacific fits into the evolution of that ideal.
Chapter Two, therefore, is an exploration and analysis of Rodgers’s and Hammerstein’s creative concerns, apart and then together, before the creation of *South Pacific*.

In this chapter, after an introductory section on the integrated musical as a concept, I first investigate Rodgers’s concern with musico-dramatic unity in the shows he created with lyricist Lorenz (Larry) Hart and various book writers. The innovations of many of these shows are underestimated in much of the literature, and this chapter serves as a re-evaluation as well as a brief history. Following the discussion of Rodgers’s work, we turn to Hammerstein and his discernible trend towards combining elements of operetta with those of musical comedy in order to create increasingly plot- and character-driven works for the commercial musical stage. This reflects a similar trend in the non-musical theater towards a naturalism that also reaches a peak in the 1950s in works by playwrights such as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, among others.

In addition to tracing the stylistic evolution of Hammerstein’s work, I also explore his World War Two writings for the Writers’ War Board (WWB), which are strongly recalled in the tone and sometimes even the wording of sketches for *South Pacific*. These writings, as well as Hammerstein’s earlier works for the stage, are important to understanding the evolving message and, ultimately, the structure of *South Pacific*. For this reason, I discuss them in the context of Hammerstein’s other writings.

Chapter Two concludes with a brief stylistic analysis of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s joint Broadway musicals before *South Pacific*. This analysis accepts *South Pacific* as a culmination of the stylistic traits discussed earlier in the chapter.
The “Integrated” Musical

Many reviews of the original production of *South Pacific* mention the work’s successful blending of structural elements -- book, music, and lyrics -- into a seamlessly integrated plot- and character-driven musical play. Even critics unsatisfied with one or another of those structural elements note that, because those elements work together so well, the whole is often more successful than its parts. A sampling of these reviews demonstrates the critical emphasis then placed on the integration of a musical, as well as the critical appreciation of how Rodgers and Hammerstein achieved that integration in *South Pacific*.

John Rosenfield, for instance, writing in the *Dallas Morning News* of the first national tour of the show (which opened in 1950), noted that, “Without the music, the plot fails to move, without the plot, the music stands as a somewhat lesser, more derivative contribution. The two elements together make a new and stunning effect for the theatre . . .”¹ Joseph Wood Krutch observed that the Broadway production was made up of “standard ingredients . . . [that are] superficially novel enough not to seem standard, and they have been handled with smooth expertness.”² Brooks Atkinson, perhaps the dean of the New York critics at the time, wrote in the *New York Times* that *South Pacific* “is not an assembled show, but a thoroughly composed musical drama,” going on to note its “high standards of characterization.”³ William Hawkins of the *New York World-


Telegram called the show “the ultimate modern blending of music and popular theatre to date,” noting more specifically that “every song has something to say that immediately advances the story or the characters’ relationships . . .” 4 Finally, as if to continue Hawkins’s last observation about the songs, George Marek commends Rodgers for using music “as an operatic composer does, to express the play through the music, to create a consistent dramatic mood and delineate the characters musically.” 5

While Marek’s review might remind us of Joseph Swain’s idealization of the musical as opera-in-waiting, Marek does not go as far as Swain does; he suggests only that the composer is sensitive to the expressive needs of the book. His comparison of Rodgers to an operatic composer does not stress one element of the collaborative process over the others. We nonetheless should remember Stephen Banfield’s warning that privileging music over the other contributing elements of a musical can be “dangerous, in that music is only one contributor to a multi-disciplinary genre.” 6 Furthermore, the emphasis on music above other elements does not figure historically into the concept of the integrated musical. 7

The small-scale, but greatly influential, Princess Theatre musicals in the first decades of the twentieth century are probably the earliest demonstration of


5 George Marek, Good Housekeeping (December, 1949). In Green, 566. This review suggests that the composer-as-dramatist idea expressed by Joseph Kerman and Joseph Swain (see Chapter One) is not an original idea of either. Marek’s review reminds us that the operatic ideal was already the standard when South Pacific opened; Marek’s appreciation of the musical delineation of character and expression of the play refers only to Rodgers’s music with no mention of Hammerstein’s words. Nonetheless, his review praises the way all the elements of the musical work together.

6 Banfield, 6.

7 My analyses, therefore, are of all the elements of South Pacific; while I accept the music as an important aspect of the work, I do not emphasize it over the other elements.
concern for integrating the elements of a musical. Guy Bolton and P.G. Wodehouse, together or individually the authors of the more memorable Princess shows, credit composer Jerome Kern, with whom they collaborated on those musicals, for initially articulating, and then emphasizing, structural integration, but all three eventually sought it in their work for the musical stage. The first such show was *Nobody’s Home* (1915), by Kern and Bolton, and it is regarded as an early attempt to bring together the structural elements of a musical in pursuit of dramatic unity. Although the producers insisted on interpolating a few numbers by other authors -- a common practice in the early musical theater -- the show, as Bolton / Wodehouse / Kern biographer Lee Davis writes, nonetheless “flowed forward . . . It was in the construction of the show, the smooth transitions and the interdependence of book, music, and lyrics, that the young duo established the pattern that would soon both elevate and signify American musical comedy.”

Three years after *Nobody’s Home*, Bolton noted the following about this new approach to the musical:

> Our musical comedies depend as much upon plot and the development of characters for success as upon their music, and because they deal with subjects and people near to the audiences. . . . Every line, funny or serious, is supposed to help the plot continue to hold. . . . If the songs are going to count at all in any

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8These shows were a series of musicals produced by Bessie Marbury at the 299-seat Princess Theatre on Manhattan’s West Thirty-Ninth Street. The more distinguished of these involved the collaboration of composer Jerome Kern with authors Guy Bolton and, later, P. G. Wodehouse. Marbury’s formula for the shows follows: “There would be no more than two sets . . . , a chorus of between eight and twelve . . . , and an orchestra of eleven. . . . The stories would be contemporary, so that costuming would not be expensive; the performers would be young . . . ; and the composers and librettists would be fairly unknown. . . .” Lee Davis, *Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern: The Men Who Made Musical Comedy* (New York: James H. Heinman, Inc., 1993), 69.

9The first melodies of Jerome Kern heard on New York stages, for instance, were interpolations into other composers’ scores. Kern debuted with two songs in *An English Daisy* and several more in *Mr. Wix of Wickham*, both English imports in 1904. Bordman, 199, 203.

10Davis, 75-76.
plot, the plot has to build more or less around, or at least with, them.\textsuperscript{11}

This practice continued with these three men, and eventually, in 1927, Kern would hit another highwater mark of the genre with \textit{Showboat}, a collaboration with Oscar Hammerstein II that I address below.

Authors and critics continue to discuss the integrated musical in general, some extolling it and some wondering why it continues to be the principal critical standard for the genre. But at this point we can ask more specifically, how were Rodgers and Hammerstein more successful than their predecessors at integrating the structural elements of the musical? What structural formulas culminated in their works that became influential on the genre? Ethan Mordden partly answers those questions in his discussion of \textit{Oklahoma!}:

Its immediate and all-encompassing influence takes in: a cycle of shows with historical American subjects; a fascination with characterful rather than plot-filled stories and with conversational lyrics, leading to a concomitant decline of the genre number; a proliferation of musical scenes, especially in the addition of a few spoken lines between the vocal choruses, . . . ; a layout of long first act and short second act (because the stronger stories need more exposition time and the act break must now arrive at a genuine dramatic climax . . .); and in a sudden emergence of . . . narrative dance . . .\textsuperscript{12}

We might also add the following: an appropriateness of music and song-type to character and dramatic situation (recalling Bolton’s comment above about plot building “with” the songs); a life-affirming, although not necessarily cheerful, conclusion; and, thematic messages of increasing depth. While each of these elements of the “new” musical had been present in varying degrees since at least 1927, the year of \textit{Showboat}, it was with their first joint creation that Rodgers and Hammerstein successfully brought them all together in one work. While each of

\textsuperscript{11}Guy Bolton, quoted in Davis, 177-78.

\textsuperscript{12}Mordden, \textit{Beautiful Mornin’}, 78.
Rodgers and Hammerstein’s following four musicals was received as a unique and unprecedented example of the genre, three of them were also praised as finely made -- read “well-integrated” -- musical plays. (Allegro was a special case, and deserves its own study.)

We should note that, while the reviews quoted above reveal the attention critics payed to structural integration in the late 1940s, as based on the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, other styles of musicals were produced during the same era. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, however, the dominance of the Rodgers and Hammerstein model was powerful enough to relegate these alternative forms, discussed below, to the background. Only later, after Rodgers and Hammerstein’s creative period (1943-1959), were these alternative styles exploited. Pal Joey, a 1940 musical by Rodgers, lyricist Larry Hart (the last work by this team), and writer John O’Hara, for instance, pointed in a somewhat different, and only much later generally followed, direction. Theater historian David Hirst comments as follows on the different stylistic approach in Pal Joey:

> Not only do lyrics cut across music to striking ironic effect, but the whole show is structured around a series of revue sketches rather than a developing plot. Each scene works for itself, and the music is employed as commentary, not as emotional extension of character and situation.\(^\text{13}\)

In other words, while the structural elements of Pal Joey are integrated into the concept of the show, that concept provides a different stylistic model than the Rodgers and Hammerstein works that follow. The style of this model -- the “non-integrated” musical, which is discussed in more detail below -- remained relatively unexploited until 1970.\(^\text{14}\) From the opening of Oklahoma! until a


\(^{14}\)See below, pp. 42-45, for further observations about the co-existence of other structural models during the Rodgers and Hammerstein era and after.
decade after Hammerstein’s death in 1960, however, the integrated musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein were the paradigm, the standard towards which most other creators strove.

Richard Rodgers’s Early Attempts at Structural Integration

Like Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers was first represented on Broadway by a song interpolated into another score. The song was “Any Old Place with You,” and it was an early collaboration with lyricist Larry Hart. The legendary Lew Fields bought the song and put it into his show *A Lonely Romeo*, although he personally did not perform it. Rodgers notes, “So it was that on August 26, 1919, at a Wednesday matinée, the career of Rodgers and Hart was professionally launched.”

Rodgers acknowledges the early and lasting influence of Jerome Kern’s music on his own. Describing the influence of Kern’s score for *Very Good Eddie* (1915), Rodgers comments as follows:

. . . it was the score of Jerome Kern that captivated me and made me a Kern worshiper. The sound of a Jerome Kern tune was not ragtime; nor did it have any of the Middle European inflections of Victor Herbert. It was all his own -- the first truly American theatre music -- and it pointed the way I wanted to be led. . . . [Kern’s songs] were certainly different -- and far more appealing to me --

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15Rodgers, 30. Meryle Secrest provides conflicting information on the actual date of the song’s appearance. “Rodgers remembered that the song was introduced on August 26, a Wednesday matinée. That date was queried by Armond and L. Marc Fields in their comprehensive biography of Lew Fields, *From the Bowery to Broadway*, which established that an actors’ strike -- it led to the formation of Actors’ Equity -- had by then shut down *A Lonely Romeo*. The show did not reopen for a month, but the day finally arrived in September when the song . . . had its premiere . . .” (Meryle Secrest, *Somewhere For Me*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001, 26-29; Rodgers 1975, 20-21 )

16Secrest, 38.
from the overblown operettas, mostly imported, that dominated the Broadway scene . . .\textsuperscript{17}

Rodgers was also influenced by Kern’s concern with “verismilitude” -- Kern’s term -- in a musical. Kern was less interested in writing a formulaic musical (although he did so when necessary) than a work demonstrating what Lee Davis describes as “the feasibility of interrelating music, lyrics, and libretto, of fusing the music into the show, rather than tacking it onto it.”\textsuperscript{18} Later, recalling his initial meeting with Hart, Rodgers insists that what united the composer and lyricist from the beginning was “our mutual conviction that the musical theatre, as demonstrated by the pioneering efforts of Bolton, Wodehouse, and Kern, was capable of achieving a far greater degree of artistic merit in every area than was apparent at the time.”\textsuperscript{19} From their very first collaborations, they demonstrated a desire to create according to this conviction, although commercial considerations often meant that their conviction was not shared by the other contributing collaborators.

The first professionally produced Rodgers and Hart show -- \textit{The Garrick Gaieties} (1925), presented by the Theatre Guild -- featured what the composer called a “jazz opera,” which seems to have confused the audience. Rodgers later noted, “Though I’m not sure the audience quite got the hang of an opera form written in popular style, everyone seemed to appreciate our attempt at something a little daring . . .”\textsuperscript{20} The piece also contained some social criticism. Concerned with a clerk and a salesgirl locked in a department store overnight, the work also,

\textsuperscript{17}Rodgers, 20.

\textsuperscript{18}Davis, 56.

\textsuperscript{19}Rodgers, 27-28.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 64.
as Secrest tells us, “described the long hours and miserable pay of such workers; as the opera ends, the owner faces a near-riot.”

While he found operetta and its music uninteresting, Rodgers, as we can observe from this early effort, nonetheless was stimulated to write an “opera” in a vernacular musical vocabulary; later, as we saw above in Marek’s review of *South Pacific*, he was praised for writing a show with “operatic” musical expression. Instead of trying to infuse the musical with an operatic musical style, however, his emphasis in this early experiment was on the expressivity of the popular style within an operatic framework. After this early endeavor, Rodgers’s flirtation with opera never resumed. (But his flirtation with different ways to write songs for a musical continues throughout his career, as we shall see.) When *The Garrick Gaieties* was picked up for a commercial run -- it originally was intended as a two-performance benefit for the Guild -- the “opera” was cut from the show.

Other early works demonstrate practices that appear throughout Rodgers’s career. In *Dearest Enemy* (1925), a musical set during the American Revolution, Rodgers uses musical topoi to indicate the period and the social status of the characters. (The second act, for instance, opened with a gavotte.) Jerome Kern scholar James Randall demonstrates that, much earlier, Kern also used musical styles to indicate individual characteristics of the characters, as well as the comic or romantic natures of their relationships, thus indicating another of Kern’s influences. In an in-depth analysis of Kern’s first full score, *The Red Petticoat* (1912), for instance, Randall demonstrates how Kern uses topoi -- in this case, song and dance styles -- to portray different stock character types. (This was

21 Secrest, 63. This observation is especially interesting in that *The Cradle Will Rock* (1936), Marc Blitzstein’s innovative and now legendary work, in large part concerned with worker exploitation, was eleven years in the future.

pre-Princess Theatre, and the characters are somewhat more generic than those of
the later shows.) For instance, the two romantic leads find musical expression in
an operetta style, particularly Viennese-style waltzes; the secondary and more
comic characters sing in American vernacular styles represented by ragtime and a
4/4 Schottische-like duet that Randall offers as an early example of the foxtrot;
and the older comic character roles use a musical vocabulary from vaudeville and
variety, including a dialect song and parodies of a minuet and a sentimental
ballad.

Rodgers exploits this practice in many works, including *South Pacific*,
where he imitates styles ranging from old French folksongs to popular American
song styles and uses topoi to delineate specific characters. (Nellie, for instance,
often sings in American popular-song styles, while de Becque sings in more
extended, European-influenced styles.) We can only wonder at how Rodgers
responded to reviews such as Percy Hammond’s, which referred to *Dearest
Enemy* as a “baby-grand opera,”23 or the unsigned review in the *New York
Times*, which said that “by reason of the full-toned quality of the music and the
richly colored design of the plot, it is operetta, with more than a chance flavor of
Gilbert and Sullivan.”24 Probably more to his liking was the notice of Frank
Vreeland that suggested, “We have a glimmering notion that someday they
[Rodgers, Hart, and book author Herbert Fields] will form the American
counterpart of the once-great triumvirate of Bolton, Wodehouse and Kern . . .”25

23Percy Hammond, *New York Herald Tribune* [a review of *Dearest Enemy*’s opening in
1925]. Quoted, without date, in Green, 30.

24*New York Times*. Quoted, without byline or date, in Green, 30.

The following year, Rodgers, Hart, and Fields demonstrated the influence of the Princess Theatre shows by creating a musical play (their term).26 Peggy-Ann (1926) was based on the comedy Tillie’s Nightmare, an earlier vehicle for Marie Dressler, and it was Rodgers’s -- and the American musical’s -- first exploration of dreams and the Freudian interpretation of them. Indeed, most of the plot took place in the titular character’s dreams, often surrealistic in nature, and the entire show concerned what Rodgers has called “subconscious fears and fantasies.”27 (This interior landscape was revisited most notably in Oklahoma! and its dream ballet expressive of the leading female character’s sexual anxiety.) Fields and his collaborators decided that the unusual subject matter warranted a novel structure, and they eliminated the then standard opening and closing choruses, waiting until the dream sections to introduce any choruses. This practice anticipates not only the quiet and intimate openings of Oklahoma! and South Pacific; it also anticipates the structure of Moss Hart, Kurt Weill, and Ira Gershwin’s inventive and successful Lady in the Dark (1940), which uses musical numbers only in the dream sequences representing the heroine’s neuroses.

The structural invention of Peggy-Ann was noted by the critics, several of whom followed the authors in calling the work a musical play. Alan Dale, for instance, writing somewhat whimsically in the New York American, called the show the “unasuallest and captivately concise and imaginative little musical play we’ve had for some time . . .”28 Bide Dudley called it “futuristic;”29 Alexander Woollcott noted that, while the songs “are gay and sweet and good, . .

26Secrest, 92.

27Rodgers, 91.

28Alan Dale, New York American (1927). Quoted in Green, 54. (N.B. The show opened at the end of December, 1926, so the reviews appeared in early 1927.)

29Bide Dudley, New York Evening World (1926). Quoted in Green, 55.
. it is the libretto which arrests attention . . .;”³⁰ and Percy Hammond suggested that if he were “asked to recommend a musical play that does not appear to have been written by twelve-year-olds for twelve-year-olds, I shall wave my hand in the direction of the Vanderbilt [Theater] . . .”³¹

_Chee-Chee_ (1928), probably the only Broadway musical at that time whose plot explicitly -- or implicitly, for that matter -- concerns castration, was, perhaps predictably, less than a hit. (“Maybe we could shock people into liking it,” Rodgers later mused about his wary response to the project.³²) It presented the composer with an opportunity to write according to a new structural plan, however, and it presented him with the challenge of creating music for a story set in a different time period (which he had already done with _Dearest Enemy_) and, more importantly, a different culture (ancient China). _South Pacific_, and, after that, _The King and I_, also presented the second of these challenges, although with cultures other than ancient China.

As for the structural challenges, Rodgers, with Hart and Fields, who again wrote the book, decided to introduce what Rodgers called “an entirely new concept within the framework of the musical theatre”:

To avoid the eternal problem of the story coming to a halt as the songs take over, we decided to use a number of short pieces from four to sixteen bars each, with no more than six songs of traditional form and length in the entire score. In this way the music would be

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³⁰Alexander Woollcott, _New York World_ (February 27, 1927). Quoted in Green, 55.

³¹Percy Hammond, _New York Herald Tribune_ (January 24, 1927). Quoted in Green, 55. _Peggy-Ann_ was successful and ran 333 performances.

³²Rodgers, 118. Rodgers added, “No matter what we did to _Chee-Chee_ it was a musical about castration, and you simply can’t get an audience at a musical comedy to feel comfortable with such a theme. If I learned anything from this experience, it’s that if there’s a basic problem with a show -- and _Chee-Chee_’s was as basic as you can get -- no amount of beautiful scenery, theatrical effects or musical innovations can hide it.” (Rodgers, 119)
an essential part of the structure of the story rather than an appendage to the action.\textsuperscript{33}

In other words, the team took integration to a new level, developing long musical scenes that often eschewed dialogue. When they used it, they often created rhyming dialogue that was mixed with recitative-like verse. We should remember that they were not attempting to write opera. They were trying to write a tightly organized musical, the elements of which were equally important. In fact, Rodgers, Hart, and Fields were so confident in this new form that they inserted an announcement in the program alerting the audience to the structural innovation. It read, “The musical numbers, some of them very short, are so interwoven with the story that it would be confusing for the audience to peruse a complete list.”\textsuperscript{34}

It then listed the principal musical numbers of standard form and / or length.

The program notice had a precedent. In 1924, the program for \textit{Rose-Marie}, book and lyrics by Otto Harbach and Oscar Hammerstein II and score by Rudolf Friml and Herbert Stuart, carried the following announcement:

\begin{quote}
The musical numbers of this play are such an integral part of the action that we do not think we should list them as separate episodes. The songs which stand out, independent of their dramatic associations are \textit{Rose-Marie}, \textit{Indian Love Call}, \textit{Totem Tom-Tom}, and \textit{Why Shouldn’t We?} in the first act, and \textit{Door of Her Dreams} in the second act.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

The wording of both announcements, including the listing of several numbers the authors thought the audience could pick out of each score, indicates a similarity between the two, and the popularity of the long-running \textit{Rose-Marie},\textsuperscript{36} suggests

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34}Quoted in Green, 93.

\textsuperscript{35}Quoted in Green, 293.

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Rose-Marie} ran 557 performances (September 2, 1924-January 16, 1926), a remarkably long run at the time.
that one or both of the creators of Chee-Chee might have seen it. (Ethan Mordden comments that Rodgers was “a tireless theateregoer.”) Before 1927, at any rate, both Rodgers and Hammerstein had written shows each believed to be so successfully integrated that their programs contained no ordered list of the individual songs. This would never happen in their collaboration, although the shows they create are generally considered the high point of the integrated musical.

The other challenge that Chee-Chee presented to Rodgers was how to write music evocative of ancient China without trying to imitate Chinese music. In South Pacific, he was faced with the problem of creating music for Tonkinese and Eurasian characters; and in The King and I, the musical vocabulary reflects the setting of Siam (now Thailand) and characters indigenous to that setting. Later, in Flower Drum Song (1957), Rodgers created music for three generations of Chinese Americans. Rodgers considers the problem of writing the score for Chee-Chee as follows:

Obviously it would have been inappropriate for me to write typically “American” music, but equally obviously, even if I could have written “Chinese” music, Broadway audiences would have found it unattractive -- to say nothing of the impossibility of Larry’s finding the proper words to go with it. The only solution was to compose my own kind of music but with an Oriental inflection, reproducing a style rather than creating a faithful imitation.

Years later, Rodgers wrote of the similar situation he encountered with South Pacific:

. . . for months Oscar and I had been talking about a song for Bloody Mary which would evoke the exotic, mystical powers of a South Seas island. I knew the melody would have to possess an Oriental, languorous quality, that it would have to be suitable

37Mordden, Beautiful Mornin’, 55.
38Rodgers, 118.
for a contralto voice, and even that the title was going to be “Bali Ha’i.”

Two other elements of Rodgers and Hart’s collaborations merit investigation. The first is the team’s yearning for independence from an outside librettist. Rodgers notes that, post-Showboat, few librettists “seemed concerned with anything really fresh and imaginative.” While Hammerstein was a possibility, the team realized that he probably would not be interested in providing a book without writing the lyrics. “Since Larry and I simply could not wait around for the odd chance that something novel and worthwhile would turn up,” Rodgers continues, “we had to accept the best offers we could get.”

The duo first attempted to write the book for On Your Toes (1936), but when the going got rough -- and the resulting book got confusing -- director and veteran “book doctor” George Abbott stepped in and made the necessary changes. All three received program credit for the book. The team was more successful with the book for Babes in Arms (1937). Based on the modest idea of a group of young people putting on a show, and cast with extremely young performers, the show was buoyed by a youthful energy that made a brilliant book superfluous. Rodgers calls the book “serviceable,” and most of the reviews

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39Ibid., 262. James A. Michener recalls another story about the “sound” of South Pacific. “At one three-hour [exploratory] session he [Rodgers] asked me only one question: ‘Jim, do I have to use wailing guitars and ukuleles?’ I replied: ‘Only musical instrument I ever heard the natives play was two clubs beating the hell out of a gasoline drum.’ ¶‘Thanks,’ he said with a deep breath, ‘I hate guitars.’” Michener, The World is My Home (New York: Random House, 1992), 291.

40Rodgers, 120.

41 Ibid., 121.

42Rodgers, 181.
agreed. Typical is that of Brooks Atkinson in the *Times*, which noted, “Not an inspired book, but one that is full of good feeling.”

In 1938, Rodgers and Hart again wrote their own book for *I Married an Angel*. At least, the team wrote the first act. When Rodgers left Hart and director Joshua Logan in Atlantic City to finish the second act, Hart stopped working and took up drinking; he was a lifelong chronic, and incorrigible, alcoholic whose erratic work habits had been a challenge for the disciplined Rodgers from the beginning of their collaboration. When Hart finally provided a second act, it was unintelligible, and Rodgers, with the help of Logan, rewrote the act and pulled the show together. Only Rodgers and Hart received billing for the book, however. Rodgers’s aspirations for freedom from a third collaborator were fulfilled by his later collaboration with Oscar Hammerstein II. Of their joint works, only the final one, *The Sound of Music* (1959), had a book by someone other than Hammerstein.

The use of ballet to further the story of a musical is another practice developed in a Rodgers and Hart show. Dance had been an integral part of musicals from their beginning, but ballet (or any other kind of dance) had never been used as a structural element that grew from the book. Commercial theater audiences already had been exposed to ballet in revues, such as the 1933 *Three’s A Crowd*, featuring dances by Albertina Rasch, and *As Thousands Cheer*, with balletic work by Charles Weidman. However, the use of dance, and especially of ballet, as a plot-related element, was relatively unexplored until *On Your Toes*. Choreographed by the young George Balanchine, the show exploited both

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44The book for *The Sound of Music* was written by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse.

vaudeville-inspired popular dancing and ballet in the story of a vaudevillian who leaves that genre for classical ballet. The big second act ballet, which was both a “ballet-within-a-play,” as Ethan Mordden calls it, and a part of the book’s plot, was the well-known “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue,” probably Rodgers’s best-known musical work without lyrics. Mordden disputes the standing of the ballet as book-integrated, however, noting the following:

Only toward the ballet’s end did plot collide with set piece when the hoofer learned that two gangsters were planning to gun him down . . . at the end of the number. Exhausted, terrified, he must keep dancing to save his life until help comes, and thus a ballet sequence in On Your Toes turned into the On Your Toes plot.47

Geoffrey Block challenges Mordden’s criticism, noting that the entire plot of On Your Toes is built around the conflict of high art and popular art. “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue” represents high art, as it is conceived by one of the characters, and as such is well within the structure of the plot. The extra plot dimension -- the murder attempt mentioned above -- emphasizes the ballet’s relationship to the book but does not create it.48 Block’s observations concur with Rodgers’s:

One of the great innovations of On Your Toes . . . was that for the first time ballet was being incorporated into a musical-comedy book. . . . We made our ballet an integral part of the action; without it, there was no conclusion to our story. ¶This ballet . . . had always been part of the script . . . 49

Rodgers returns to plot-centered ballets, most notably in the first two shows written in collaboration with Hammerstein (Oklahoma! and Carousel).

46Ibid.

47 Ibid.


49Rodgers, 175.
Formal choreography is almost entirely absent from *South Pacific*, however, setting it apart as an anomaly.

Although *Pal Joey* (1940), which is Rodgers’s last score with Hart, is a high-water mark for the genre, its taut combination of music, lyrics, book, and choreography does not point to the integrated musical of Rodgers and Hammerstein, as noted above on page 30. While the structural elements of *Pal Joey* work together perfectly to express the show, they do not create what theater critic David Hirst has called “musical naturalism,” a term descriptive of the integrated style codified by Rodgers and Hammerstein only three years after *Pal Joey*. (Hirst notes that this musical naturalism, mirroring the dramatic naturalism of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller in the 1940s, “was most successful in moving ‘logically’ from spoken dialogue, through heightened recitative, to song and dance as a gradual opening out of emotional potential.”) Rodgers, Hart, and author John O’Hara, on whose *New Yorker* stories *Pal Joey* is based, instead created a musical told through book scenes and nightclub numbers, the latter sometimes commenting on the former.

Like Michener’s stories, O’Hara’s were unconnected except by a few central characters, and they lacked an ongoing storyline. (The stories -- and the musical -- concern Joey, a self-serving loser and second-rate nightclub performer who unsuccessfully tries to charm and / or sleep his way to the top.) O’Hara created a plot for the musical, but it was thin and based more on the personalities of the characters than developing situations. Because he had never written a

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50 Hirst, 26.

51 Ibid.

52 While O’Hara gets sole billing for the book, director George Abbott is known to have reworked much of it. (Mordden, *Beautiful Mornin’*, 50-51). For David Hirst’s brief description of the structural technique of *Pal Joey*, see above, page 30.
musical, his book was not formulaic. As Mordden observes, “O’Hara’s ignorance of musical comedy tradition led him to supersede it . . .”53

Some of Rodgers’s contributions to this uniquely structured work anticipate his collaboration with Hammerstein, while others reflect already established practices that continue in the later partnership. The first act of Pal Joey, for instance, ends with a dream ballet that reprises music heard throughout the first act. Three years later, this same idea, when coupled with Agnes De Mille’s unique choreography and a darker subtext, was acclaimed as highly innovative in Oklahoma!

Rodgers also uses contrasting song types to represent particular situations and characters. Mordden succinctly explains this practice in Pal Joey as follows:

Rodgers differentiated the character songs from the hip, syncopated sound of the club numbers, as if creating two worlds, one devoted to . . . all brass and blue notes, and . . . [the other] given to legato and strings. . . 54

Despite the differences in these styles, Rodgers maintained the unsentimental tone of the show throughout the score. He and Hart, writes the composer, “were scrupulous in making every song adhere to the hard-edged nature of the story.”55 What’s more, Rodgers and Hart sometimes use one of the above styles in ironic contrast to another; noting the ironic contrasting styles, Rodgers writes that, in “Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered,” for example, the music is “legato and strings,” while the lyrics are “unsentimental and self-mocking.”56

53Mordden, Beautiful Mornin’, 50.

54Ibid., 54. Mordden adds, “What unites them is Joey, the sole character who appears in both halves of the music and who also ties the choreography to the book with his heavy involvement in both.”

55Rodgers, 201.

56Ibid., 201. Rodgers explains that he and Hart found this technique “particularly effective” for comedy songs.
Rodgers’s sophisticated use of styles for irony and humor, as in the numbers for the nightclub, pervade the score.

At least one critic has seen Pal Joey as the forerunner of a style of musical different from the integrated musical of Rodgers and Hammerstein. David Hirst thinks the show anticipates the work of Stephen Sondheim. He writes that some of Sondheim’s works “have explored different methods of interrelating the components of a musical play and have evolved a presentational style which is concerned to discover alternatives to the structure utilized by Rodgers and Hammerstein.”

Because the success of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s structural model has distracted attention from the earlier development of other styles, we should be aware that, even before Pal Joey, the evolution of the genre was multidirectional. Pal Joey did not appear out of a vacuum, in other words. Marc Blitzstein’s controversial 1936 musical, The Cradle Will Rock, for instance, was created as a series of sketches that were held together thematically and presented as non-chronological flashbacks presented by a central character. Blitzstein was much influenced by Berthold Brecht, to whom Cradle is dedicated, and by the music of Kurt Weill, whose work Blitzstein’s musical pastiche often recalls. Blitzstein also exploits familiar popular styles for ironic effect.

Post-Oklahoma! but pre-South Pacific, Love Life (1948), by Alan Jay Lerner (book and lyrics) and composer Kurt Weill, ignored the integrated style so in vogue at the time and, more in the style of Pal Joey, created a musical epic that exploited musical pastiche for dramatic effect. Ethan Mordden notes, “The structure consists of story material punctuated by commentary in the form of show-biz tropes, as if the rise and fall of a typical American marriage were to

57Hirst, 26.
occur while the radio was on.”

What Mordden calls tropes included an African-American quartet, a soft-shoe number, a magic act, etc., and they were used, as he notes, “to shed ironic light on the Coopers’s [marriage] saga.” This style would not be explored again for a long time after *Love Life*.

Divergent styles related in various ways to the example of *Pal Joey*, however, continued a co-existence with the Rodgers and Hammerstein prototype. *Hair*, an influential work that opened in 1967, was a notable exception to that prototype. It was an experimental improvisatory collection of scenes, based loosely on one character’s getting drafted and going to Viet Nam, that was held together by an unusually tuneful pastiche of rock and pop styles. Provocative and loud, *Hair* received mixed notices but was a huge popular success. Its very character -- subversive, improvisatory, playful -- set it apart from the by-then standard old-fashioned integrated musical of Rodgers and Hammerstein, although the latter continued to exert its influence on popular shows from the same season, such as *1776* and *Promises, Promises*.

When David Hirst mentions *Pal Joey* as a forerunner to a musical scored by Stephen Sondheim, he refers to *Company* (1970), a highly original work with a book by George Furth. *Company* uses musical numbers in various ways. The numbers develop characters, provide commentary on plot action by characters not involved in the scene, offer ironic and often satiric perspectives both by and about characters, and present plot turns in a quasi-vaudeville song-and-dance style. The musical, in the words of Lehman Engel, “might best be described in a musical term ‘Variations on a Theme.’ I believe,” Engel continues, “that it would be possible to rearrange the sequence of most scenes in nearly any other order,

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58Mordden, *Beautiful Mornin’*, 222.

59Ibid.
and the impact of the show would be about as effective as it is now.”

This structure recalls *The Cradle Will Rock* as much as it does *Pal Joey*, and it is a style to which Sondheim returns, most notably in *Assassins* (1991).

This short digression into structural styles different from those of Rodgers and Hammerstein demonstrates the strong influence and staying power of the latter. This influence is evident even in the early twenty-first century, when musicals that challenge the traditional format are still seen as innovative and, if they are successful, welcomed as fresh new perspectives on the genre. The plethora of revivals in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, particularly of shows from the Rodgers and Hammerstein repertory, suggests that the paradigm of the integrated musical is still a major factor in the American musical theater. Before we examine specific examples of that paradigm, however, we need to explore Hammerstein’s structural concerns prior to his collaboration with Rodgers.

**Oscar Hammerstein II’s Early Attempts at Structural Integration**

*Showboat*, the 1927 collaboration of Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern, is generally considered the first great American musical, mostly because of its dramatic unity and the sophisticated contributions Kern’s score makes to the overall dramatic coherence of the show. But we have already noted Kern’s concern with the dramatic and structural integrity of earlier efforts for the musical stage, and, as we are about to see, Hammerstein also had similar concerns before

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the 1927 landmark. In fact, Hammerstein’s concern with structural unification -- the integration of the musical’s elements -- was notable from the beginning of his career.

Oscar Hammerstein II was the third generation of his family active in the theater.62 His grandfather and namesake was as colorful as he was successful. After building the Harlem Opera House in uptown New York City in the 1880s (which exists today as the Apollo Theatre), he continued to build theaters and opera houses. By the late 1890s he was so successful that the Metropolitan Opera bought him out to eliminate the competition. Oscar II’s father, William Hammerstein, was also a successful producer and the manager of Hammerstein’s Victoria Theatre, a popular vaudeville house in Manhattan. While Oscar II’s father wanted his son to eschew the theatre in favor of a career in law, Oscar could not resist the call of the theatre, and he left law school in his second year to pursue a writing career.

While I have found no documentation that Hammerstein was familiar with the Princess Theatre shows of Kern, Bolton, and Wodehouse, Kern’s friendship with the Hammerstein family is documented.63 Because Hammerstein was at Columbia in 1915, the year of the first Princess show, and because he was already serious about his activity in theatrical performances in college from that year on, his attendance at the new and innovative shows written by an acquaintance of his father and grandfather would be no surprise. In any case, his interest in the

62See Fordin, 3-40. A succinct but thorough history of the Hammersteins, including Oscar I’s various opera houses and their dates, is given in the first chapter of Fordin’s biography of Oscar II.

63See Fordin, 60-61. David Ewen writes that Kern and Hammerstein first met in 1924, at Victor Herbert’s funeral, and immediately agreed to collaborate on the musical Sunny, a star vehicle for Marilyn Miller. David Ewen, Richard Rodgers (New York: Holt, 1957) 204). Fordin, however, writes that, by 1924-25, Kern and Hammerstein “had met . . . once or twice, but he [Kern] had been introduced to the Hammerstein family in 1902.” Fordin, 60.
structural integrity of the musical was apparent early in his creative career, whether or not he experienced the accomplishments of Kern and his partners. Ethan Mordden notes the following about Hammerstein’s early years as a librettist:

[Before Show Boat ] Hammerstein had been slowly building up to a show that would fuse all the elements of musical comedy organically -- that is, writing the work as a whole, with music defining character instead of intruding on it.

Tickle Me (1920), Hammerstein’s second produced musical, already demonstrates this concern and marks the initial presence of Otto Harbach in Hammerstein’s career. Hammerstein noted that “this union was the first important force in his creative career.”64 The principal reason for Harbach’s importance to Hammerstein was that Harbach always insisted on trying to integrate the elements of a show. Early in their partnership, Harbach dictated two rules concerning the book for Tickle Me, or any other show. First, the plot had to be interesting to the audience on its own merits, before the addition of songs. “The second,” notes Fordin, “was that all elements must be integrated in the show; neither songs nor jokes could be put in unless they were germane to the plot.”65 (This second rule was in response to the practice of building a show or, especially, an operetta’s book around the songs.66) The reviews for Tickle Me suggest that Harbach and Hammerstein’s concern with a good book were successful. An unsigned and

64Fordin., 46. Fordin further notes that “Oscar often said he was born into the theatrical world with two silver spoons in his mouth, referring to Otto Harbach as the second” (47).

65Ibid.

66“Situations didn’t cry out for songs; songs were written that then required situations, and these situations were dropped into the plot . . .”) Mordden, Roses, 102.
undated review in the New York Telegram notes “a plot more cohesive than the average, and it holds the laughs together nicely . . . ,”67 and Burns Mantle noted that the book “is rather better than the lyrics for a change . . . .”68

Hammerstein followed the success of Tickle Me with books to shows featuring scores by Herbert Stothart (his first composer-collaborator, who has somehow become a relatively invisible figure in much of the literature on the early American musical), Vincent Youmans (who shared composition duties with Stothart on several shows), and, finally, Rudolf Friml (who also shared compositional duties with Stothart). The works between 1920 and 1924’s Rose Marie, however, were mostly formulaic and seldom satisfied Hammerstein or Harbach; most of the shows during this period were star vehicles whose main concern was providing ample songs and jokes for Frank Tinney, Nora Bayes, or Edith Day, all musical comedy stars of the early 1920s.

In 1924, however, Hammerstein and Harbach had a critical and commercial success with Rose Marie (score by Rudolf Friml and Herbert Stothart).69 Their confidence in the integration of the show’s musical numbers is noted above, in the paragraph from the program for Rose Marie, and while the show still largely followed the basic pattern of dialogue, song-cue, song, dialogue, etc., the critics nonetheless found the work exceptional. For instance, one critic said the show “. . . looked like one of the best mixtures of music and drama that has yet cracked its shell in the early season incubating . . . ,”70 while another thought it

67Quoted in Green, 260.

68Burns Mantle, New York Evening Mail. Quoted, without date, in Green, 260.

69“Not surprisingly, it was Stothart who penned the comic-‘tainted’ songs . . . in the subplot, while Friml wrote the title song, “Lak Jeem,” “Indian Love Call,” “Pretty Things.” and “The Door of My Dreams.” Mordden, Better Foot, 95.

70Wells Root, New York World. Quoted, without date, in Green, 293.
“... should be seen by every Diogenes who has been searching for an honest-to-goodness musical play.”71 Singling out the book, Arthur Hornblow described it as “a book that is head, shoulders and waist above the customary dribble about Prohibition and Brooklyn.”72 Ethan Mordden, in a more recent evaluation of the work, describes the score for *Rose Marie* as being “geared to the ... book with unusual care for those days, some of the music actually moving the action forward . . .,” and he cites the finale of Act One as an early example of a musical scene, “with dialogue interspersed with song . . .”73 While dated by today’s standards, *Rose Marie* was forward-looking in its own time.

Hammerstein first collaborated with Jerome Kern in 1925, the year following *Rose Marie*. The result was the musical *Sunny*. For the two champions of the integrated book musical, *Sunny* must have been somewhat disappointing, despite its commercial success. Recalling the experience with some amusement, Hammerstein wrote the following:

> Our job was to tell a story with a cast that had been assembled as if for a revue. . . . [The] producer had signed . . . [Ukelele Ike], who sang songs and played the ukelele . . . His contract required that he do his specialty between ten o’clock and ten fifteen! So we had to construct our story in such a way that Ukelele Ike could come out and perform during that time and still not interfere with the continuity. In addition to Marilyn Miller, the star, there was Jack Donahue, a famous dancing comedian, and there was Clifton Webb and Mary Hay, who were a leading dance team of the time, . . . [and] a star comedian . . . In addition to the orchestra in the pit, we had to take care of George Olsen’s Dance Band on the stage. Well, we put it together and it was a hit.74

71Quoted in Green, 294.


73Mordden, *Better Foot*, 95.

74Quoted in Mordden, *Better Foot*, 75.
If *Sunny* fell short of Kern and Hammerstein’s structural ideals, however, their next collaboration, in 1927, demonstrated that both men were capable of executing those ideals on an unprecedented artistic and commercial level. *Show Boat* is not only the first real turning point of the genre; it is also the first successful demonstration of structural and thematic concepts that Hammerstein develops throughout the remainder of his career. Basing his book on Edna Ferber’s 1926 novel, a sweeping, multi-generational story about a theatrical troupe on a Mississippi showboat, Hammerstein focuses on the importance of the family unit and its relationship to its environment, in this case the river. The further the characters move from their home -- the boat and the river -- the more troubled and chaotic their lives become. It is the return of some characters to their roots and values that saves them from the unhappy fates befalling those who are permanently torn away from the river and destroyed by the big city. Hammerstein returns to this theme in his shows with Rodgers. (*Allegro* provides an early and obvious example: when protagonist Joe Taylor realizes that his life as a rich and successful big-city doctor has alienated him from his initial goal of helping people, he divorces his unfaithful wife, who has been “seduced” by the glamour and prestige accompanying her husband’s success, and returns to his small hometown to practice family medicine.) Lessons of tolerance -- racial and social -- are emphasized, and the ability of love to overcome tests of intolerance and self-absorption is critical to the plot’s outcome. These themes return regularly in Hammerstein’s work, especially in *South Pacific*.

Hammerstein’s structural technique comes into its own with *Show Boat*. Mordden neatly sums up this technique in the following:

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75 Mordden notes that “*Show Boat* marked a turning point in the history of the musical, possibly the only turning point it ever had,” commenting further that earlier musicals, with notable exceptions like a few of the Princess Theatre shows and the Hammerstein-Harbach collaborations mentioned above, “achieved form and got very versatile, but ... still couldn’t tell a legitimate story that wasn’t an excuse for jokes, interchangeable love ballads, or a star turn.” Mordden, *Better Foot*, 101.

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It would be foolish to discuss the impact of *Show Boat* without taking Kern’s music into account, but it was really Hammerstein who pioneered the basic layout of musical comedy that served the genre through its developing maturity and sometimes still turns up today. In simple terms, this is the scene-song scenario: plot action capped by a song to delineate character; blackout; lights up on a new set; further plot action; another song; and so on. It may look primitive on paper, but before Hammerstein the songs didn’t necessarily connect with the preceding book scenes. Wonderful as the tunes might be, they were noncontextual pieces suitable for any show. . . . But the [earlier] practice began breaking down [with *Show Boat*] . . .

Hammerstein did not just connect the scenes with the songs, however. He also experimented successfully with what has come to be called the “musical scene,” a technique that reaches maturity in his work with Richard Rodgers. Musical theatre conductor and theoretician Lehman Engel describes the musical scene as follows:

A theatrical sequence [i.e., extended scene] -- dramatic, lyrical, narrative, or a combination of several of these -- set to music, for one or any number of characters. It may include a song and may be held together formally by its literary structure, guided by a feeling of musical balance. It may include speech, recitative, song, and incidental music (underscoring).

We have seen how this technique was exploited as early as 1925, in the Act 1 finale of *Rose Marie*, and we shall see in subsequent chapters how it reaches its apex in *South Pacific*. But *Show Boat* offers excellent examples in its first two scenes.

The long opening scene is remarkable. In it, Hammerstein manages, with the musical cooperation of Kern’s motivic score, to establish nearly all the information the audience needs for the rest of the play. Within moments of the opening curtain, for instance, the opening number reveals the disparity between

76Mordden, Ibid., 105.

the conditions of the black and white characters: the blacks toil on the docks, the whites await the arrival of the showboat, or harass the blacks. The showboat then arrives and with it all but one of the principal characters of the plot; they are introduced by Cap’n Andy in a musical promotion for that night’s show. In addition to the characters, three essential plot elements are set up in the first scene. First, the unity of the showboat’s extended family; second, the racial conflict of Julie, the mulatto star of the showboat’s productions; and, third, the attraction of Magnolia and Gaylord Ravenal (who is introduced later in the scene), which serves as the principal catalyst for all the action of the piece. In the course of this intricately executed exposition, three major musical numbers are introduced, two of which have become classic standards of American song.

“Make Believe” brings the two romantic leads together for the first time, and “Ol’ Man River,” whose opening melody is an inversion of the showboat theme, closes the scene. In addition to these numbers, Gaylord is provided with an introductory character soliloquy that anticipates later soliloquies in the Rodgers and Hammerstein repertory (Billy’s in Carousel, most notably, or those for Anna and the King in The King and I). The deft and continual interweaving of dialogue and musical numbers in this scene is unprecedented in the genre, and the musical relationships of themes and motives demonstrates Kern’s compositional sophistication.

Act 1, scene 2, is known as the “pantry scene” because of its setting in the showboat’s kitchen and pantry area. This is the domain of Queenie, the African-

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78See Miles Kreuger, Show Boat: The Story of a Classic American Musical (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1977) for a detailed history of Show Boat. Kreuger’s work is the first published detailed study of a single musical. Because Kreuger is a theatre scholar, however, its concern with the score is minimal. Joseph Swain considers the score in more detail, although his discussions of key relationships should be approached with caution: often songs in musicals are in the keys that were most suitable for the singers who first performed them, and their key relationships are the result of convenience, not compositional intent (see Swain, 15-49).
American cook and wife of Joe, a handyman for the boat. What makes this a particularly impressive musical scene is that it uses only one song -- “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man” -- and interspersed dialogue to provide plot and character information about four characters and their relationships. We see Julie and Magnolia’s deep friendship, which will become pivotal to the plot late in Act Two; we see -- and, more importantly, hear -- Julie’s black heritage in her performance of the song, a performance that arouses first suspicion (“... ah didn’t ever hear anybody but colored folks sing dat song . . .”79) and then appreciation from Queenie; we observe the quarrelsome but tender relationship between Queenie and her husband Joe, who sang “Ol’ Man River” in scene one; and we witness Magnolia’s complete acceptance of, and comfort with, the black community on and around the showboat. The scene is held together by choruses of “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man,” in which Kern uses syncopation and blue notes to indicate a connection to African-American music and culture, and thus provide a musical clue to Julie’s background. In one ten-minute scene, Hammerstein and Kern create a succinct prototype for the musical scene, a prototype that will be developed fully in the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein.

After Show Boat, Hammerstein had several hits before floundering somewhat. The New Moon (1928), an operetta with a score by Sigmund Romberg, was a success after Hammerstein’s extensive revisions of the book. His work was noticed by the critics, particularly Brooks Atkinson, who wrote, “It is not merely a good book; it is almost too good and begins to weigh a little on the entertainment in the first act.”80 Rainbow (1928; music by Vincent Youmans), produced on the heels of The New Moon, met a different fate. The show,


according to Fordin, “was clearly intended to follow the direction of Show Boat with integration of the musical’s elements in a colorful, realistic plot . . .”81 But while many of the New York critics appreciated the work’s avoidance of musical comedy stylistic clichés -- Brooks Atkinson observed that the show “never succumbs to the general musical comedy fol-de-rol,”82 and Howard Barnes observed that “the conventional musical comedy pattern was ever in peril of being rudely shattered”83 -- the production failed to connect with audiences and closed after only twenty-nine performances.84

Much of the preliminary work on Sweet Adeline (1929), Hammerstein’s next work, and his first with Kern after Show Boat, was done at Kern’s Palm Beach retreat. (Hammerstein was visiting Kern while waiting for the Reno divorce proceedings of Dorothy Blanchard Jacobson, the soon-to-be Dorothy Hammerstein.) The two men’s work process, recorded by Fordin, reveals their initial emphasis on character and plot elements over musical numbers. Selecting the American 1890s as the setting, the team established the overall “atmosphere” of the work and then began developing the characters and mapping out the plot structure. After these first steps, Fordin notes, they proceeded in the following manner:

While Oscar wrote a full draft of the dialogue, Jerry worked on the music. They then worked literally together, assembling the material and deciding where the songs should go, after which Oscar wrote the lyrics. Before they finished, they liked to have every detail

81Fordin, 94.


83Howard Barnes, New York Herald Tribune. Quoted, without date, in Green, 398.

84Fordin blames the book in part for the failure. Despite the positive notices, he comments that, “for all its strength, the script is marked by some fatal flaws: characters who are basically unsympathetic, weak motivation, some corny, obvious humor and some dialogue that was too raw for audiences in 1928.” Fordin, 95.
worked out, even the stage business, which is why they preferred not to have an outside director for their shows.\textsuperscript{85}

Critical and audience response indicated that the process was successful. After such comments as Robert Littell’s -- “. . . rarest of all in a musical show, it all hangs together -- it seems to have been made out of one piece . . .”\textsuperscript{86} -- the show settled in for a run of 234 performances.

Much as he did with “Ol’ Man River” in \textit{Show Boat}, and as he would later do with several songs in \textit{South Pacific} and finally with “Edelweiss” in \textit{The Sound of Music}, Hammerstein created a folksong-like lyric for \textit{Sweet Adeline}. “Es war schon damals so,” a ballad reprised as “’Twas Not So Long Ago,” was an imitation of a German folk ballad that, along with Kern’s pastiche melody, fooled many audiences into thinking that the song was authentic and had been interpolated into the score.

Hammerstein continued innovating in \textit{Free For All} (1931; music by Richard A. Whiting). He eliminated the singing and dancing ensemble, creating a show inhabited solely by principal characters (and prompting critic Percy Hammond to comment that, “There were evidences last night that musical comedies are more enjoyable with chorus girls than without . . .”\textsuperscript{87}). The characters are primarily a group of leftist college students who decide to test their infatuation with communism by forming a commune in Nevada. Unfortunately, Hammerstein failed to find the right tone for this quasi-political plot -- and

\textsuperscript{85}Fordin, 100-01. While Hassard Short directed \textit{Sunny}, Hammerstein directed \textit{Show Boat} (although he was uncredited for doing so) and co-directed \textit{The New Moon} (with co-authors Frank Mandel and Laurence Schwab). Despite Fordin’s observation, however, \textit{Sweet Adeline} was directed by Reginald Hammerstein, Oscar’s brother. Oscar’s close relationship with his brother suggests his influence on the production. Green, 305; 349; 384; 403.

\textsuperscript{86}Robert Littell, \textit{New York World}. Quoted, without date, in Green, 406.

\textsuperscript{87}Percy Hammond, \textit{New York Herald Tribune}. Quoted, without date, in Green, 423.
audiences in the 1930s were getting used to increasingly sophisticated political theater\textsuperscript{88} -- and the show folded after running a little more than a week.

*Music in the Air* (1932) was Hammerstein’s last successful musical on the New York stage until *Oklahoma!* in 1943. Satisfying his desire to write about a music publisher’s office, Hammerstein also explored the professionalism of that business, as well as of the theatre, in his book.\textsuperscript{89} The result was, for the time, exemplary writing for the musical stage. Kern and Hammerstein integrated the elements of the show as well as they ever had in the past, Hammerstein even metrically synchronizing some dialogue to the rhythm of the song that followed. Their staging -- both men received directorial credit -- kept action flowing even while some characters sang, thus creating continuous scenes of musical dialogue that did not stop the action just because someone was singing.\textsuperscript{90} Brooks Atkinson noted the accomplishment of the creative team as follows:

> At last the musical drama has been emancipated . . . Without falling back into the cliches of the trade, Hammerstein has written sentiment and comedy that are tender and touching. It is an amusing story and an effortless piece of craftsmanship, and it provides a perfect setting for Mr. Kern’s score . . .\textsuperscript{91}

By the time *Music in the Air* became a hit, the creators of shows were the centers of as much critical and public attention as those who performed in them. As Mordden notes, “Less and less would producers sign up stars to arrange on a

\textsuperscript{88}In 1930, the organization eventually to be known as the Group Theatre was formed. Harold Clurman, Clifford Odets, Franchot Tone, Stella Adler, and Lee Strasberg were among the politically left wing artists who hoped to free themselves from the commercial aspects of theatre and create socially relevant work. By the mid-1930s, this and other groups were producing much agitational - propaganda (“agit / prop”) theatre. For a detailed discussion of this movement, see Jay Williams, *Stage Left* (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1974).

\textsuperscript{89}Fordin, 117.

\textsuperscript{90}Fordin, 122.

stage like cake trimmings, for the triumph of *Show Boat* . . . and *Music in the Air* was one of material, not just performances.” Mordden continues, “Not only *Show Boat* in 1927 but *Sweet Adeline* in 1929 and *Music in the Air* in 1932 made the Kern - Hammerstein duo the ideal choice for musical comedy that would be popular and uplifting at the same time.”92 The statement is ironic because the team never again had a hit musical.

Hammerstein followed *Music in the Air* with two unsuccessful musicals in London (*Ball at the Savoy*, 1933, and *Three Sisters*, 1934). After these disappointments, he moved to Hollywood where he worked on a number of films, most of them unsuccessful and unmemorable. He wrote only sporadically for the stage, and usually without success. He provided lyrics for Romberg’s score to *May Wine* (1935); the moderately successfully show (213 performances) featured a book by Hammerstein’s former collaborator Frank Mandel. *Gentlemen Unafraid* (1938), a collaboration with Kern and, on the book, Otto Harbach, played the St. Louis Municipal Open Air Theatre but never went to New York. *And Very Warm for May* (1939), his final collaboration with Kern, ran only 59 performances. In 1942, Hammerstein began his adaptation of Bizet’s *Carmen* that became *Carmen Jones*, but it was not produced until after the opening of *Oklahoma!* For eleven years, Oscar Hammerstein’s innovative and successful contributions to the American musical theatre were appreciated only in the past tense.

While in Hollywood during the mid 1930s, nevertheless, Hammerstein pursued one activity that we should note in relation to his future participation with the Writers’ War Board (WWB) during World War Two. His political activity first found voice in 1936, in the Hollywood League Against Nazism (informally referred to as the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League). According to Hammerstein’s

biographer, this was Hammerstein’s first pursuit of any activity outside work or home.93 With an executive council that included Hammerstein, Dorothy Parker, Frederic March, Florence Eldridge, and Donald Ogden Stewart, among others, the League was founded primarily to raise the consciousness of Americans about the seriousness of the Nazi threat to civilization.

Hammerstein soon became the head of the cultural commission, which, according to Fordin, “. . . organized radio broadcasts, articles and short films about the threat to ‘cultural liberty’ posed by the Nazis.”94 In 1937, the cultural commission was included in the League’s new interracial commission; Hammerstein chaired the newly combined group. The mission statement of the interracial commission describes the group’s goal to “combat racial intolerance and thus combat Nazism, which uses intolerance as a weapon to attain power.”95 This connection between racial intolerance and fascism is a theme that returns in WWB materials found in the Hammerstein collection at the Library of Congress and, as we soon shall see, in early sketches for South Pacific. And the theme of racial tolerance, which Hammerstein first explored in his book for Show Boat and continued to support through his work with this commission, is a theme that becomes prevalent in much of his work from South Pacific on.

Some studio executives and others ceased active participation in the League, even withdrawing their support of it, because of the growing controversy as to whether or not it should also be against communism. This seems to have been an issue of some import to Hammerstein, since among the few documents pertaining to the League in the Hammerstein collection, two address the issue, one at length. The latter is a memo from Henry Meyers, of Paramount

93Fordin, 141.

94Fordin, 143.

95Quoted in Fordin, 143.
Studios, concerning changing the name of the League (presumably to include “anti-communist,” or something similar). He urges Hammerstein not to let the change take place, arguing that the rumors of the League’s being communist, or at least soft on communism, are being circulated by only a few. Some of the memo follows:

I do not believe that very many people really have an idea that the League is communistic; all those who have said so, would say so anyway. I think that when we approach the general, non-studio public, and get out of our own backyards, there will be little or none of this. I think that when we approach the general, non-studio public, and get out of our own backyards, there will be little or none of this. In my opinion, the rumor is being circulated maliciously, as part of a plan to spoil our effect . . . This rumor, I believe, is being helped along by those who pretend to be our friends. I make no accusation, but I ask you to observe that the same argument on the subject invariably starts up from the same place. . . . Also, it is not possible to avoid being called a Red, if you belong to what is mistakenly called the intellectual class. May I remind you that you yourself told me that I am a type you would ‘naturally’ suppose to be a Communist.96

Evidently, Hammerstein took Meyer’s memo to heart. Fordin quotes part of a speech he made at a League meeting concerning the issue of Communism:

My interest now is to do all I can to stamp out Nazism, which I think is the greatest to threat to our culture and our safety. If there are Communists in this organization, and if they are willing to help me do this, I can work with them without becoming a Communist myself. If there were a forest fire outside of Los Angeles and we all ran out with buckets to pour water on it, I would not ask the man at my shoulder what his philosophy was . . . 97

Hammerstein remained quite active with the League until he left Hollywood in 1938; a year later, he terminated his membership. Hammerstein’s membership in the League, which remained under suspicion for being a haven for Hollywood communists, came up during the 1950s when the State Department questioned his

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96Memo to Oscar Hammerstein II from Henry Meyers, Paramount Studios. Ca. November 7, 1936. In the Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Box 21 (Correspondence & Misc. by subject), the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

97Quoted in Fordin, 143.
membership in what they saw as a “doubtful activity.” 98 Hammerstein’s reputation survived the investigations intact, despite his outspoken liberal political expressions before, during, and after World War Two.

Within days of the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Writers’ War Board (WWB), mentioned in the previous chapter, 99 was founded to promote the sales of war bonds, rationing and other war-related activities. The WWB was also especially aggressive in its attack on domestic social conditions that it viewed as antithetical to the ideals America was fighting to preserve. In other words, their propaganda was intended not just to boost wartime morale, but also to change the social conditions of America in general. Consider the following, which is from the “Third Annual Report of the Writers’ War Board,” January 1945:

The Writers’ War Board was founded on December 9, 1941, at the request of the Treasury Department to enlist the help of writers in selling war bonds throughout the country. Within a short time the board broadened its scope to meet requests from other government agencies and from patriotic organizations. . . . ¶Throughout 1944 the Board’s basic function has continued to be the fulfillment of requests for all kinds of writing required to win the war. The Board has also continued to concern itself with the nature of the Japanese and German enemy, and with the rising tide of prejudice against racial, religious, and other groups here at home. We believe our military success must not be jeopardized by sentimental illusions about our enemies or bigoted notions about our Allies and fellow-citizens. 100.

Elsewhere in this report is a passage, considered at some length in Chapter Six of this study, that equates the prejudice mentioned above with a “native

98Fordin 143.

99See Chapter One, page 11.

100”Third Annual Report of the Writers’ War Board,” January 1945. In the Oscar Hammerstein Collection, Box 21, the Library of Congress. 3. Emphasis added. Note that Fordin says the WWB was founded in the spring of 1942. Fordin, 211.
American fascism,” a term of exceptional power at a time when the United States was fighting fascist regimes on two fronts. And in a 1944 memo found in the Hammerstein collection, we find a reference, also quoted in Chapter Six, stating unequivocally that practitioners of prejudice against minorities are enemies of the United States. Also suggesting that children learn their prejudices from adults, this passage presages the lyrics to “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught,” a controversial number from the second act of *South Pacific* to be discussed in detail below. In short, the idea of equating an American attitude of bigotry with the attitudes of America’s wartime enemies is prevalent throughout the sketches, especially those for act 2, scene 4, as we shall see; these sketches, later diluted, reflect the powerful perspective of the WWB. None of these memos or articles from the WWB has ever been mentioned in the Hammerstein literature, although Fordin stresses Hammerstein’s strong commitment to his activities with the WWB.102

The WWB produced a mass of materials for the public. Historian Benjamin Colby distills the following list from WWB records:

By January 1945, material was being sent to 3,500 writers, 1,150 army orientation officers and camp newspapers, 2,600 house organs of industrial plants, and 270 comic strip artists. Canned editorials were being sent to 1,600 daily newspapers, and editorials were supplied regularly to a syndicate with a clientele of 600 newspapers. Radio scripts went to 750 local stations, and dramatic

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101Ibid., 17.

102“Rex Stout, who headed the board, was amazed to find that Oscar almost never missed or was even late for any of the board’s all-day Wednesday meetings, no matter how busy he became in those years. In 1943 Oscar set up a committee of people in the music industry to look for songs that would help the morale of the country and war effort. . . . Distressed by the racism and anti-Semitism existing in America even while it fought the Nazis, the board not only tried to change attitudes, but pressured the government and other organizations to stop racist practices. Its efforts were instrumental in getting the Army to hire black medical personnel and the Red Cross to stop typing blood by racial group.” Fordin, 211.
material was distributed on request to 2,716 organizations. But the board’s most effective work was conducted by personal contacts with editors, writers, and radio networks.103

The collection of WWB materials at the Library of Congress includes over 73,000 items; this indicates, along with the numbers above, the breadth of the board’s reach.

As the WWB became more involved in various aspects of the war effort, it formed various sub-committees for specialized interests. Among these was the Music War Committee of the American Theatre Wing, of which Hammerstein was chair. Hammerstein’s interest in this effort is documented in a letter to producer Max Gordon from January 8, 1942, in which Hammerstein writes of his desire “to write a good song that might do something for the nation’s war morale.” Hammerstein continues, “I am convinced that all the war songs I have heard so far are on the wrong track. But I know that there is a great situation for a great song and I am going to hunt it out . . .”104 While he never did write the song he sought -- Oklahoma! probably did more to raise morale than any one war-specific song could have -- he did receive a plethora of ideas for such songs from the WWB. A May 10, 1943 memo on WWB letterhead paper , for instance, suggests several song ideas, including a “United Nations idea . . . showing that whether you speak Chinese, French, Russian or English you can still fight and work for freedom and one contribution is as good as another -- we are all brothers.”105 The brotherhood idea reappears in the next suggestion, which is to “possibly take ‘One World’ or ‘World Unity’ or ‘We’re All Brothers’ and get the Russian,


104Letter from Oscar Hammerstein II to Max Gordon, January 8, 1942. Quoted in Fordin, 175-76.

105”Song Ideas.” Memo from Bob Colwell, Writers’ War Board member, to Oscar Hammerstein II, January 8, 1943. Found in Oscar Hammerstein II collection, Box 21.
Chinese, French, etc. way of saying it.” A curious suggestion is for a comedy song sung by a WAAC who, also referring to a Highlander and a traditionally-uniformed Greek soldier, argues that “people fight better in a skirt.”

Another sub-committee of the WWB in which Hammerstein was active was the Committee to Combat Race Hatred. This group, in its own words, “came to the conclusion that the writers of the United States because of their habitual employment of ‘stock characters’ were unconsciously fostering and encouraging group prejudice.” The committee commissioned a study by Columbia University to research the validity of this conclusion. The study investigated cases of negative racial stereotyping and found that various media ranged from good to poor in “presenting minority characters sympathetically and honestly.” The stage was found “the most liberal of all the media” in such representations; advertising copy, which “is openly and self-admittedly addicted to the Anglo-Saxon [superiority] myth,” and short stories were found to use the most stereotypes.

Months before this report came out on January 11, 1945, the WWB presented a meeting at the Barbizon Hotel titled “The Myth That Threatens America.” One of several “presentations,” as the program calls them, was a skit by Hammerstein called “Ol’ Man Author.” Hammerstein wrote new lyrics for four weary characters, set to the tune of “Ol’ Man River.” Each character was a stereotype complaining, “We are as old as the Mississippi / Stereotyped as inferior

106Ibid.

107Ibid.


109Ibid., 12.
men.” In the skit, Hammerstein berates authors for continuing to write characters who are racial and cultural stereotypes. While the entire text of the skit has been printed elsewhere, a few passages demonstrate Hammerstein’s point. The four men -- an Irishman, an African-American, an Italian, and a Jew -- are dressed in caricature: the African-American shakes dice, the Irish man wears a bright red wig and green tie, the Jew wears an oversize derby, and the Italian wears a “well-fitting coat wrinkled up by a belt which holds a gun and a stiletto.” Together they sing, “We are the men of amusing races / Fated to be eternal jokes, / Dialect men with amusing faces, / Never are we like other folks.” The direct relationship of the skit to the war is best demonstrated by the verse given the Jewish caricature: “I’m a Jew / And I like money. / Wealthy Christians think that’s funny! / I’m a comic, scheming scamp -- / Comic as a Nazi Concentration Camp.” The skit ends with the men throwing off their caricatured “paraphernalia, as if they were freed of chains,” and singing, “We keep tryin’, we’re in there flyin’, / We’re in there fightin’, we’re in there dyin’, -- / But ol’ man author, / He keeps on writin’ us wrong!”

Works on which Hammerstein collaborated were not all free from the accusation of stereotypes, despite his vociferous opposition to such representations. Consider the following from a letter from Mrs. Paul Robeson


112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid. Hammerstein’s father was Jewish.

115 Ibid.
after seeing *South Pacific*:

And please, may I make one small suggestion, very respectfully? In thinking back over the play, it troubled me a little that the Negro soldier was ALWAYS jitterbugging. It is very possible that I am unduly sensitive, racially, but so are a lot of us, and it would help enormously if just once, he appeared with his comrades NOT cutting up. I agree that he does it beautifully, and that you-all probably hadn't [sic] thought of the sum total of the impression, and even that I may be wrong. Could be . . . . Now don't [sic] misunderstand me. The jitterbugging is marvelous, and belongs there, but I'd like to see him once NOT do it.116

Hammerstein’s response suggests that the irony of a constantly jitterbugging black character, played by dancer Archie Savage, in a work concerned with racial tolerance and dignity had bothered him as well. “Thank you very much for your letter, and the gratifying comment therein. Since you have seen the play, and before I received your letter, we have inserted an episode in which Archie Savage is not jitterbugging.”117 During the war years, Hammerstein was particularly sensitive to such issues, as his skit and other writings for the WWB indicate, and this sensitivity is integral to the underlying theme of *South Pacific*. Just how much the WWB experience informs the early sketches for *South Pacific* will be demonstrated below, when we turn our attention to the actual evolution of the work.

As mentioned above, Hammerstein’s quest for a satisfying unhackneyed song for World War Two was never fulfilled. Instead, it was the first of his works with Rodgers that served to boost national morale and encourage a sense of solidarity in the face of danger. Secrest argues that *Oklahoma!* and *Carousel* are


117Letter from Oscar Hammerstein II to Mrs. Paul Robeson, undated. In the Oscar Hammerstein II collection, Box 21, the Library of Congress. Emphasis in the original.
related to World War Two “in one way or another.” In the sense that Secrest means this statement, I would include Allegro as well. The relationship of these shows to the war is explained in the following passage from Secrest’s biography:

Given the mood of the times, they [Rodgers and Hammerstein] could hardly avoid dealing with subjects that a world at war had brought to the surface, e.g., the fragility of life itself, the courage of ordinary people in extraordinary situations, and the longing for a belief in life after death. To this Hammerstein added his particular set of homilies: hatred could be unlearned, there was light at the end of the tunnel, and “you’ll never walk alone.” . . . Part of his and Rodgers’s success in those days was an ability to redeem such statements from cliché . . .

But if the three shows preceding South Pacific reflect the wartime culture of the United States, they also reflect trends in the American musical that had been developing over the course of several decades.

The next section of this chapter concerns, briefly, the first three collaborative works of Rodgers and Hammerstein and what elements in those works anticipate South Pacific. These three works -- Oklahoma!, Carousel, and Allegro -- are seen as having a relationship to the works that led up to them as well as the work that follows them.

The Structural Roots of South Pacific in the First Three Works of Rodgers and Hammerstein

Despite having been used almost universally for the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, the term “musical play,” as Ethan Mordden points out, was not

118 The full quote is, “Of their five most successful musicals: Oklahoma!, Carousel, South Pacific, The King and I, and The Sound of Music, four are concerned in one way or another with World War II.” Secrest, 287.

119 Ibid.
“coined” for those works. In the 1920s, operettas were sometimes referred to as musical plays, and we encountered above several reviews referring to Rodgers and Hart shows with the term. But post-Oklahoma!, “musical play” almost always refers either to the integrated musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein or musicals written in that style. Mordden goes on to make the following particularly useful point:

An important difference between musical comedy and the musical play is that, in the former, characters aren’t really “singing.” The musical itself is singing. In the musical play, the characters are singing. They have to -- or the audience won’t know how they feel.

As we have seen, Rodgers and Hammerstein were each concerned with making the structure of the musical more character- and plot-driven through integrating its elements, insuring the dramatic motivation of music, lyrics, book, and dance. We should not be surprised that this concern became an agreement between the two of them when they decided to work together in 1942. To this end, they developed a method of working that was different than either had experienced previously; this method proved advantageous to their individual needs, and it was critical to their success as a writing team.

For much of the creation of a musical, each man worked independently of the other; the closest periods of collaboration were at the very beginning and the very end of the process. At initial meetings, for instance, Rodgers and Hammerstein would make basic decisions about the work they were adapting and how to adapt it. They created what Fordin calls a “blueprint” for the show that detailed what would be sung and what would be spoken, where the songs would

120 Mordden, Beautiful Mornin’, 83.

121 Mordden, Ibid., 88.

122 Rodgers first approached Hammerstein in 1941, when Hart’s alcoholism had brought about irreversible physical and mental deterioration and Rodgers needed a new lyricist. Hart died not long after the premiere of Oklahoma!
go, what kind of song was needed, perhaps even a lyric or melodic idea (Rodgers sometimes came up with a song title or an idea for a lyric, and Hammerstein sometimes had a particular musical style or structure in mind). When this preliminary work was complete, they parted ways and Hammerstein began writing the book and lyrics. With only a few exceptions -- two of them are in *South Pacific* and will be discussed below -- the words preceded the music. When Rodgers got the lyrics, he already knew from earlier meetings what the song was going to be about, and he composed the music with relative quickness. (Rodgers has noted that his reputation for composing quickly was overstated; the advance knowledge of what each song was to achieve and who each song was for meant that he could contemplate musical ideas before getting the lyrics, and the actual composition simply gave specific shape to the ideas he had already conceived.)¹²³ This method of creating was new to both, as was the control they maintained over their own creation. Writing generally about how “the hallmark of their composition was contemplation,” Mordden observes the following:

> [The] writing of the script became the fundamental act of composition, a clear break with the procedures of the 1920s and 1930s. In their youth, both Rodgers and Hammerstein had at times to work around the script, whereas now they invariably worked through it. The two men’s conversations and Hammerstein’s notes led to a sort of Platonic conception of the work from which would flow everything from love songs to comedy lines. If the R & H revolution could be boiled down to three words, they would read Story is Everything.¹²⁴

After *Show Boat*, creators of musicals occasionally demonstrated their ability to deal with weighty issues. Subsequent serious books, like those for *The Cradle Will Rock*, *Pal Joey*, or *Lady in the Dark*, although certainly not lacking humor, demonstrated that the genre could meet the challenge of a more sophisticated dramaturgy. The demonstrated success of ballet and serious dance

¹²³See Fordin, 191-92, Rodgers, 262.

as a dramatic force expressive of plot and character (as in *On Your Toes* and *Pal Joey*, among others) encouraged their continued integration into the musical. And the up-to-date urban settings of the musical comedy grew predictable and tiresome, as did operetta’s unrealistic depictions of a romanticized past. Even *Show Boat*, with its sensitive depictions of race relations in the American past, was rather idealized. What was needed in the early 1940s was a more realistic sense of the American past or present. All these elements awaited the right creators at the right moment to pull them together. About this moment, librettist / lyricist Alan Jay Lerner wrote the following pertinent, if somewhat lengthy, passage:

All that was needed was the atmosphere in which the proper lyrical and romantic subject matter required to bring all these elements together could bloom. The atmosphere was provided by the war. Political and social satire, [which were popular in the 1930s and] which by their very nature are critical, no longer suited the mood of a country that was rallying together to preserve a way of life that suddenly was seen clearly and deeply as precious as existence itself. If anything, people wanted to be reminded of who they were and the roots from which they had sprung; not what was wrong, but what was right. Looking back to earlier times may be an escape, but it can also be a reaffirmation. ¶In theatrical terms, writing of the past is intrinsically lyrical. And so consciously or unconsciously, Rodgers and Hammerstein fell into step with their time and found exactly the right subject in which all the theatrical arts could merge into what became known as lyric theater.¹²⁵

Of course, Rodgers and Hammerstein did not need the war to turn Lynn Riggs’s *Green Grow the Lilacs* into *Oklahoma!* As we have seen, both men were ready to create a work building on their previous attempts at integrated musicals. The successful integration of elements that make *Oklahoma!* such a landmark could have happened under almost any social or cultural circumstances. But the war gave resonance to the show’s themes, which were impressively expressed. What *Oklahoma!* had to say to American wartime audiences was important; the

fact that Rodgers and Hammerstein said it so well is why the show is legendary. It is in this creative and sociopolitical climate that *South Pacific*, a show written after the war but in response to it, finds its musico-dramatic roots.

In terms of its plot, *Oklahoma!* has only a symbolic relationship to the war; but that symbolic relationship is a powerful one. Set in the Oklahoma territory in the early days of the twentieth century, *Oklahoma!*’, like Riggs’s play, is, at least superficially, about little more than a young woman making up her mind whom to go to a box social with: the cocky but handsome cowboy who adores her, or the brooding hired hand whose interest in her is darker and more ominous. But Rodgers and Hammerstein gave strong voice to a subplot that spoke to Americans in the early and discouraging years of the war. By giving voice to this aspect of the plot, Rodgers and Hammerstein were also setting a precedent for their subsequent works, all of which are, as Gerald Mast notes, “musical debates on the pressing legal and social issues facing the American public and American public policy.”

The union of Curly and Laurie, the show’s principal romantic interest, is threatened by Jud, the sullen hired hand. Jud, when rejected by Laurie, threatens the couple, and the entire community, through acts of violence. When Jud attacks Curly and is accidentally killed, his threat to the well-being of the community, to the society moving towards unification, is eliminated. With the elimination of the anti-social element, the community can be joined to the larger community of the United States. In other words, a relatively peaceful domain seeking to become part of a larger identity is threatened by an outside enemy -- rather like the United States, attacked by Japan on the one hand and seeking to save the free world from Nazism on the other -- and overcomes it.

Mirroring the Jud - Curly - Laurie conflict is the antagonism, and its resolution, between the farmers and the cowboys that provides the conflict in “The Farmer and the Cowman,” the opening number of Act 2. The long-standing and often violent feud between the two groups is a deterrent to the cohesive social unit that must, through statehood, become part of an even larger social structure -- the United States. This reflection of the unity necessary on the home front anticipates the message of South Pacific -- the need for resolving racial intolerance in Americans for the improvement of American society.

These subplots and thematic messages, situated within an exceptionally well-executed and tuneful musical play, suggest what appealed to wartime audiences. This was a musical, as Mordden aptly describes it, “about what being American entails.” That was an important topic in 1943, when the United States was at war on two fronts.

The appropriateness of the work’s message was complemented by Rodgers’s use of musical styles to evoke characters and situations, a technique that, as we have seen, was used by Jerome Kern from his earliest score to the end of his career. Rodgers used it in his earlier work as well, and by the time he scored Oklahoma! he was quite adept at the technique. The references to song styles and forms -- especially those from an earlier era -- suggest a relationship between the songs in the score and their social (and musical) connotations. While much has been written about the opening scene of Oklahoma!, for instance -- the

127Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 29-30.

128See above, page 9-10; 19.
stage empty except for a solitary woman churning butter,\textsuperscript{129} the unaccompanied opening strains of “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’” -- few have noted that the form of the song is also evocative. As Graham Wood observes in his typology of Rodgers’s songs through \textit{Oklahoma!}, “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’” is written in a short and simple verse-chorus style, a structure comparable to many folk songs.\textsuperscript{130} The brevity of the song -- the chorus is only sixteen measures long -- also suggests a folk-like character. (We have already seen examples of Hammerstein’s ability to mimic the style of folk song lyrics.\textsuperscript{131}) Wood explains as follows:

\begin{quote}
In any case, for a musical written in 1943, a strophic verse-chorus song is an anachronistic gesture, and as the opening number it immediately evokes a time at or before the turn of the century. In addition, the form labels cowboy Curly as belonging to an older, and imminently outdated occupation.\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

Rodgers draws on verse-chorus form in \textit{South Pacific} when he wants to suggest a simple folk song topoi with the song “Happy Talk” or refer to an earlier popular song style in “Honey Bun.” Most of the songs in the later show, however, eschew verses.

\textsuperscript{129}The lack of an opening chorus was hardly an innovation; we have already discussed how Rodgers and Hart’s \textit{Peggy-Ann} did away with the convention, as did \textit{Lady in the Dark} and \textit{Pal Joey}, to name two shows also mentioned above. And, as Mordden notes, the opening mood and setting is given in Riggs’s stage directions. (Mordden, \textit{Rodgers and Hammerstein}, 46.) \textit{South Pacific} also opens quietly.

\textsuperscript{130}Wood, 238. Wood’s suggestion that “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’” is the only song in the score in strophic verse-chorus pattern is misleading. Most of the songs use verses to introduce their choruses, and “The Surrey With the Fringe On Top,” “People Will Say We’re in Love,” and “The Farmer and the Cowman” are examples of strophic verse-chorus structure. Nevertheless, of these only “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’” is evocative of folk song; along with its form, the song’s brevity, simplicity, and seemingly unsophisticated quality contribute to its successful recollection of an earlier time, as well as its form. (Unlike the other songs mentioned, however, “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’” uses the same lyrics for each repetition of the chorus.)

\textsuperscript{131}See above, 31-32.

\textsuperscript{132}Wood, 239.
Besides “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin,’” Rodgers uses triple meter only one other time in the score, and there, too, it is evocative of an older style. “Out of My Dreams” is sung by Laurie just before the anxious dream ballet, so its references to flying into and out of dreams is appropriate. The calm lyricism of the song, however, is reminiscent of an earlier style -- perhaps operetta -- in part because, as Wood reminds us, not only were waltzes “no longer a popular dance in the 1930s and 1940s,” the stylistic period familiar to the audience for Oklahoma!, but the waltz’s popularity “had already begun to wane earlier in the century.”133 While no longer popular as a dance, however, the waltz still summoned up romance. Rodgers uses contrasting waltzes at a critical juncture in South Pacific, as we shall see; one of those waltzes -- “This Nearly Was Mine” -- is, like “Out of my Dreams,” a recollection of an older romantic European style.

Other examples of Rodgers’s use of song topoi may be found in Oklahoma!, but these two are enough to indicate that similar uses of topoi in South Pacific reflect a continuing technique Rodgers used in his collaboration with Hammerstein.

The other structural element that reaches a new height in Oklahoma!, and which becomes a virtual trademark of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play, is the musical scene. We have already noted Hammerstein’s success with the musical scene in his early works with Kern,134 which indicates that the technique, in his work with Rodgers, is the culmination of a developing tradition and not an unprecedented innovation. With Rodgers, Hammerstein infuses the musical scene with a new sophistication. “The Surrey With the Fringe On Top,” which occurs during

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133Wood, 233. Will Parker even refers to this in the brief dialogue in the middle of the number “Kansas City”: “This is the two-step. That’s all they’re dancin’ nowadays. The waltz is through.” Oscar Hammerstein, Oklahoma! (New York: Random House, 1943) 18. Also cited by Wood, 234.

134See above, 51-52.
early in the first act, demonstrates various techniques used to create such a scene: using dialogue within a musical number; varying the mood of the music under the dialogue as well as from chorus to chorus; and developing character and/or plot within the number and scene. Another, not demonstrated in “The Surrey With the Fringe On Top,” is using contrasting musical numbers within a single scene, usually with dialogue, to create varied expressive styles for different characters.  

Two years later, Rodgers and Hammerstein further perfected their concept of the musical play with Carousel. Because this work continues the techniques developed in Oklahoma!, a detailed discussion is unnecessary. Nonetheless, a few observations are in order concerning the underlying thematic concerns of the second show. Mordden notes that, while Oklahoma! “tells of a community striving to perfect democracy,” Carousel is “far more about class and gender than about American life.” Perhaps this is true, but to the degree that it is about American life, it delivers a message particularly fitting to wartime America.

In the justly famous “bench scene” in act 1, a remarkable musical scene whose centerpiece is the song “If I Loved You,” Billy Bigelow looks to the stars and comments to Julie Jordan, “There’s a helluva lot o’ stars in the sky, / And the sky’s so big the sea looks small, / And two little people -- / You and I -- / We don’t count at all.” The rest of the play is about how they do matter, and how their love remains strong even after Billy’s death; it is about Billy’s slow realization of his, and everyone else’s, importance. This realization is inspired by Julie’s

135See also Engel’s description of the musical scene above, p. 52.

136Mordden, Beautiful Mornin’, 89.

137See Mordden, ibid., 87-89; Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 73-75; Swain, 116-20.

continued and unconditional love for Billy after his death. In 1945, when countless couples were torn apart by wartime death, this was a message of comfort and hope. Because Carousel opened months before the end of the war and continued to run after war’s end, its message of transcendent and unconditional love soothed the anxieties of wartime and comforted the losses that extended into the peace. “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” first sung by a benevolent mother figure to comfort Billy’s widow and, later, by the ensemble as the specter of Billy urges his widow to believe that he loved (and continues to love) her, is an anthem to the durability of the human spirit. Such an anthem was particularly resonant at the end of, and just after, the war; no matter what else Carousel is about, it carries this message.

The character of Enoch Snow anticipates an early sketch for South Pacific. In the first act of Carousel, Snow is the betrothed of Carrie, Julie’s vivacious best friend. Both women work at a mill, but Snow has ambitions to bring Carrie far from her humble origins. At first amusing, as in his duet “When the Children Are Asleep,” Snow, by the second act, is a successful capitalist and a social snob. He almost succeeds in destroying his wife’s friendship with Julie, who is far beneath the Snows’ social class; Snow’s financial success is matched only by his pomposity. Hammerstein’s contempt for Snow is not far beneath the surface, as his satirical portrait reveals. In an early sketch for the first scene of South Pacific, Hammerstein draws a similar portrait of Bill Harbison, a disagreeable character from Michener’s book. Hammerstein alters Michener’s Harbison, however, and creates a Snow-like character of social climbing
arrogance. Similar prototypes also occur in *Allegro*, the show between *Carousel* and *South Pacific*. Harbison and his scene are discussed in detail in the next chapter and in Chapter Five.

Apart from the dramatically critical character who recalls Mr. Snow, and who is prescient of the social-climbing Harbison, *Allegro* contained a structural element that greatly influenced *South Pacific*. *Allegro*, which was based on an original idea, was conceived around a staging concept: the show was to have no sets, only small set pieces; it was played on a virtually bare stage with evocative lighting; and it used a Greek chorus-like ensemble that commented on the action and moved in and out of scenes. The result was that the show never stopped moving, that one scene began before the previous scene was completely black. This eliminated the awkward time usually taken by scene changes, often made during orchestral repetition of music from the preceding scene. It also eliminated the use of an olio number or scene played in front of a downstage curtain to cover the change. The complete continuity was executed by designer Jo Mielziner, who later created a similar effect in *South Pacific*.

*South Pacific*, which took this concept of scenic fluidity introduced in *Allegro* and enhanced it, received much attention for this aspect of the production; the cinema-influenced technique of dissolving -- bringing up one scene while the previous one is still fading -- was made possible by the use of a scrim with pre-set actors and scenery, and often, as in the change between the first and second scenes, actors would appear for the next scene while the actors from the previous scene were exiting. This first transition is particularly jolting -- as de Becque and his children finish a playful but tender reprise of “Dites-moi,” a group of Seabees jumps out from nowhere and begins the song “Bloody Mary,”

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139The wife of the principal character is social climbing and insensitive. The climax of the show occurs when Joe decides to leave her, and his glamorous job as a society doctor and fundraiser, and return to his hometown as a general practitioner.
as opposite in mood and style as possible. The entire piece flowed, and the production team was singled out for this innovative approach. But it was introduced in *Allegro*, where all aspects of the production were so novel as to make the unique technique less noticeable.

**Conclusion**

Having investigated Rodgers and Hammerstein’s concerns and techniques evident in their works leading up to *South Pacific*, we are in a position to understand the musico-dramatic evolution of *South Pacific* in the context of its creators’ longstanding priorities. Before turning to that work and its sketches, however, we must first examine the book that inspired the creation of *South Pacific*. The following chapter demonstrates the problems inherent in the adaptation of Michener’s work for the stage, as well as structural aspects of that work that have not been discussed elsewhere. In exploring *Tales of the South Pacific*, we find the source of not only the plot elements of the musical, but also of the problems in making those elements into a linear plot for the stage. Michener’s book, which won a Pulitzer Prize, is a notable accomplishment; what Rodgers and Hammerstein do with it is an example of their skillful abilities at adaptation.
CHAPTER 3

AN ADAPTABLE SOURCE: JAMES A. MICHENER’S

TALES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

In his 1992 memoir, The World Is My Home, James A. Michener tells of an event that took place in his second duty tour late in World War Two. Sent by Commodore Richard Glass, an aide to Admiral William Calhoun, on four investigative trips to various areas in the then-quiescent eastern theater of the war in the Pacific, Michener found himself in a particularly unpleasant village in the Treasury Islands inhabited by “scrawny residents and only one pig.”¹

Michener’s final observation from this trip follows:

On a rude signboard attached to a tree, someone had affixed a cardboard giving the settlement’s name, and it was so completely different from ordinary names, so musical to my ear that I borrowed a pencil and in a soggy notebook jotted the name against the day when I might want to use it for some purpose I could not then envisage: Bali-ha’i.²

Perhaps the musicality of the village’s name increased with hindsight and because Richard Rodgers eventually set it to such memorable melodic and harmonic effect. After all, Michener wrote his memoirs approximately fifty years after the beginning of the war, and he had not yet decided to write commercially about his experiences in the South Pacific, or anything else, when he encountered


²Ibid. Rodgers and Hammerstein remove the hyphen and make the name two separate words: Bali Ha’i.
the village. Whatever the reason for the notation, however, it later resulted in the memorialization of a place name that came to represent personal paradise and private dreams.

_Tales of the South Pacific_, published in 1947, is the work that Michener eventually wrote about his experiences in the Pacific theatre of the war (and the one in which he used the name Bali-ha’i). An investigation of it is important to this study for several reasons. Because it is the first non-dramatic work adapted by the team of Rodgers and Hammerstein for the stage -- _Oklahoma!_ and _Carousel_ were based on plays, and _Allegro_ on an original concept -- and because they later adapted other prose works for the stage, their first joint adaptation of a novel demonstrates a technique that will be repeated and refined in their later adapted works. The non-linear structure of Michener’s collected tales, which is discussed below, challenged easy adaptation. Knowing the book’s structural, thematic, and narrative elements, therefore, illuminates the creative choices involved in the pursuit of a manageable storyline. These choices also determined the musical’s thematic message; the two stories providing the musical’s principal plots -- “Our Heroine,” which is about Nellie Forbush and Emile de Becque, and “Fo’ Dolla,’” which is about Lt. Joe Cable, Bloody Mary, and her daughter Liat, with whom Cable falls in love -- are romances that present

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3 _Oklahoma!_ was based on Lynn Riggs’s play _Green Grow the Lilacs, Carousel_ on Ferenc Molnár’s _Liliom_. While the film _State Fair_ (1945), which also preceded _South Pacific_, is based on a novel by Phil Stong, it is also influenced by the screenplay of the 1933 version of the film. Hammerstein had earlier adapted novels; the most famous and successful example is _Showboat_, based on Edna Ferber’s best-seller.

4 While _The King and I_ was billed as being based on Margaret Landon’s book _Anna and the King of Siam_, it was based as much, or more, on Talbot Jennings and Sally Benson’s screenplay for the 1946 film _Anna and the King of Siam_. _Pipe Dream_ (1955) was based on John Steinbeck’s _Sweet Thursday_. _Flower Drum Song_ (1958) was based on C. Y. Lee’s book of the same name, and _The Sound of Music_, with book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, was “suggested” by the book _The Trapp Family Singers_ by Maria Augusta Trapp. (Green, 579; 606; 621; 631)
problems of racial tolerance. They are also the book’s principal love stories, and each will be examined in detail below. Finally, the existence of Hammerstein’s handwritten notes, made while reading the novel, give us an insight into his first responses to the book, and they reveal the first stage of the creative process that led to the musical.\textsuperscript{5} Any study of the work’s evolution is aided by these notes.

The ensuing discussion of \textit{Tales of the South Pacific} is in three sections. The first explores author James A. Michener’s World War II background and his origins as a writer. Michener has written at length about his intentions in this book, his first, and these intentions are closely related to the work’s themes. The second section analyzes the novel’s structural, thematic, and narrative elements. The third section is concerned with Rodgers and Hammerstein’s attraction to the work and subsequent decisions about adapting it, including a discussion of Hammerstein’s notes. This section also relates the conflicting accounts of how Rodgers and Hammerstein came to the work in the first place.

\textbf{Michener and His Tales}

James A. Michener spent his first two-year tour of duty in or near battle zones, performing what he terms “tours of inspection.”\textsuperscript{6} These tours were vague

\textsuperscript{5}This study is the first time that these notes have been discussed in the literature. However, in preparation for the revised 2001 London production of \textit{South Pacific}, director Trevor Nunn had access to Hammerstein’s copy of the book, which also had notes and comments in the margins. Nunn has commented on the usefulness of that volume in preparing his production: “You could really sit down and choose three or four other stories . . . and never have to deal with colour prejudice. There are all sorts of ways you could go. What’s wonderful about having Hammerstein’s copy, with all the pencil marks, is you can see from his markings: ‘I’m interested in that bit of content. I’m interested in those things because they’re tough and contemporary and ask questions.’ ” (Quoted in “\textit{South Pacific: Check Out the Cheese},” \textit{Independent Enjoyment}, December 3, 2001. Found online at http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk) Hammerstein’s copy of Michener’s book is not currently available to this writer.

\textsuperscript{6}Michener, \textit{World}, 20.
assignments that came to Michener in a highly irregular fashion. Shipped to the South Pacific on a troop transport that was manned by merchant seamen, Michener describes an unusual aspect of the ship as follows:

Our ship was under the command of a Captain Brossard, an elderly man who so far as I knew had served many years in the merchant fleet. I have to be vague about him because during our entire trip of about a month, no one saw him, or heard him speak, or had any kind of communication with him. He remained in his cabin forward the whole time . . .7

The Army colonel in charge of the troops was equally reclusive, and Michener eventually learned from the four Marines who manned the ship’s one and only gun that the ship made the same two month-long round trip, over and over, transporting troops across the Pacific. At the end of the trip, an impulsive friend of Michener’s broke into the Captain’s office and forged papers that gave Michener what he describes as “a set of orders for me that gave me authorization to travel pretty much as I wished throughout the military zones of the South Pacific . . .”8 Michener used this authorization as follows:

. . . mostly I used it in the early days to travel those ominous islands of The Slot where the great night sea battles were fought between an aggressive Japanese force and a defensive American Navy striving to hold its own after the debacle at Pearl Harbor. Rarely has a forged document been put to livelier use.9

Michener assures his readers that these forged orders were later “augmented . . . by a battery of more legitimate ones, that enabled me to get started on my exhaustive exploration of the South Pacific.”10 He spent this time in battle areas, performing duties required by the subsequent orders; but he

7Ibid., 8.
8Ibid.
9Ibid., 20.
10Ibid.
observed many men who had just seen battle or who were waiting for it. He accompanied pilots on several night missions and witnessed several landings, seeing first-hand the action and the casualities of the war in the Pacific theatre.

When this first tour ended, Michener, who could have left the war zone and returned stateside, accepted instead a stimulating second tour. Because his master’s degree in history qualified him for it, he was offered a job writing a history of the Navy in the Pacific. Michener accepted the job for many reasons, most of which were personal and had to do with his lack of desire to return to the United States. Another reason was the increased freedom he would have to move about the Pacific islands. “I would spend two full tours of duty, nearly four years, in the tropics,” Michener observes, “the first two often in battle areas, the last two in paradise.”¹¹ The work that became South Pacific was produced during the years in paradise.¹²

Michener did not enter the war a writer, however. Before the war, he taught at several universities, including Harvard, and worked as an editor at Macmillan. His urge to write anything other than his assignment occurred after he survived a near plane crash on New Caledonia. After an insight into the need to refocus his life, writes Michener, he “began to listen with attention as men told stories at night . . .”¹³ This personalized what Michener called “the human terms” of the war in the Pacific and suggested to Michener that, in later years, “the men who complain most loudly out here will want to explain to others what it was like. I’m sure of it, so I’m going to write down as simply and honestly as I

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¹¹Ibid., 28.

¹²During this assignment, Michener received various other investigative assignments requiring him to gather information about personnel incidents that needed reporting. It was one of these assignments that led him to the Treasury Islands and the village of Bali’ha’i.

¹³Ibid., 265.
can what it was like. And then I reassured myself . . .”¹⁴ Soon after this realization, typing at night in a shed lit by a lantern that also kept away the mosquitoes, Michener began telling the stories that, in 1947, would earn him the Pulitzer Prize.

Structural, Thematic, and Narrative Elements in Tales of the South Pacific

Michener considered Tales of the South Pacific to be a novel, although it consists of nineteen stories that create no traditionally linear plot. The stories, however, are held together by several techniques, not all of them immediately apparent. These unifying techniques include the following: (1) the continuing references throughout the stories to preparations for a mammoth mobilization, called the “Alligator” operation, to capture the fictional island of Kuralei; the action of “Alligator” occurs near the book’s end, and its aftermath is recounted in the elegiac final chapter set in the cemetery at Hoga Point; (2) the settings, all of which are islands with some kind of plot connection to each other and, more generally, to the “Alligator” operation; (3) several characters who appear throughout the stories; (4) recurring references to racial intolerance and the nerve-wracking waiting for military action that tests the patience of the soldiers and sailors assigned to the islands; and (5) an overall arch structure that peaks in the central and longest story, “Fo’ Dolla,” and that also creates a palindrome.¹⁵ The symmetry and balance of the arch structure are mentioned neither in Michener’s discussions of the book, nor in the critical studies of it consulted for

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵See Appendix A, “The Structure of Tales of the South Pacific”, for a chart of the book’s structure.
this study. They are unmistakable, however, and the palindrome created within
the arch suggests a carefully planned structure. Furthermore, “Fo’ Dolla,’” the
story central to the structure and at the apex of the arch, is the story that first
appealed to Rodgers and Hammerstein as a potentially adaptable work. It is also
a story that Michener has singled out as one of four from his collected works that
he holds “in high regard.”

The centrality of the story to the book’s structure is also thematic; “Fo’
Dolla’” contains plot elements from all the other stories, except the ones that
describe battle action. (See Appendix A) The following themes found in “Fo’
Dolla’” are followed by the titles of other stories that deal with similar themes:
(1) Cable’s indecision about what to include and what to withhold from his
letters home reflect his growing confusion over his relationship with Liat (“Dry
Rot” and “Passion” also concern letters to and from home, what the writer does
or not include in his or her letters, and the effects of letters on those who receive
them; letters to and from home are also important to the action of “Our Heroine”);
(2) racial and cultural encounters and confrontations, as well as issues of class,
create the principal conflict of the story, as Cable decides that he cannot marry
Liat and take her home to Philadelphia and, subsequently, terminates the
relationship (“Our Heroine” and “A Boar’s Tooth” both deal with cultural
encounters, the former with a romantic relationship that is challenged by another
American’s cultural bias, as mentioned above); (3) “Fo’ Dolla’” ends with
Cable’s preparation and departure for battle (“Alligator” and “Wine for the
Mess at Segi” also both end in preparation and departure for battle); (4) Cable’s
relationship to the other soldiers and to the society of his upbringing is contrasted

16See Fordin 259-62; Rodgers, 258-59.

17Lawrence Grobel, *Talking With Michener* (Jackson, MS: University of Jackson Press, 1999), 241.
with his independent actions that go against the grain of his social and military background (“The Milk Run” and “The Airstrip at Konora” are concerned with individualism and the honor of a social group, and “An Officer and a Gentleman” and “The Strike” are concerned with individualism in opposition to the group); and (5) the secret island of Bali-ha’i provides a symbol of the private and sometimes internalized refuge from the war that Michener emphasizes in “The Cave” and “Those Who Fraternize.” The theme of waiting, which is an overall theme throughout the stories, is also emphasized in “Fo’ Dolla.”

The presence of all these themes in “Fo’ Dolla,” as well as its extended length and central position among the stories, suggests its primary importance to the structure of the book and, subsequently, the musical. These thematic elements also suggest a rich source for dramatic adaptation, although it is the melodrama of the love story and its conflicts that primarily appealed to the creators of *South Pacific*.

Overlaid onto the book’s arch structure, however, is another, more traditional structure that provides a climax of sorts near the end of the book. The eighteenth chapter is the battle towards which much of the book has been pointing, and many of the characters meet their fate in this battle. Michener’s handling of the final battle scene, however, is almost perfunctory. While the mention of “Alligator” throughout the book gives the reader a certain anticipation of the actual event, the presentation of it is succinct and not very dramatic. This supports what Michener has written about his goal in writing the book:

Rigorously I adhered to my commitment: to report the South Pacific as it actually was. By nature I stayed away from heroics and I was certainly not addicted to bombast; I had seen warfare but I shied away from talking much about it, and I had none of the excessive romanticism that had colored the works of my predecessors in writing about the Pacific . . . ¶What I did was what I would do in all my later books: create an ambience that would both entertain and

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18Michener, *Tales*, 144-46.
instruct the reader, invent characters who were as real as I could make them, and give them only such heroics as I myself had experienced or found credible. 19

Because Rodgers and Hammerstein place the book’s two romantic plots in the foreground, their plot resolution uses the climactic event of the “Alligator” operation as background.

Although it has elements of a war novel, therefore -- two of its nineteen stories describe the action of battle -- *Tales of the South Pacific* is more than that. Its themes and narratives are more concerned with waiting for action, and with the characters’ reactions to cultures other than their own as they wait. While the connecting plot element of the book is “Alligator,” a military operation, the actions of war are not central to the action of the book. Michener critic George J. Becker continues this analysis as follows:

The result, if not a war novel, is a novel about men at war in the Pacific during the crucial months of 1942-43 . . . It is not a blood-and-guts novel . . . There is nothing just like it about World War II. . . . [Yet] for those who wish to see it, [the book’s setting] is still an experience of a whole new world of values and behavior, just as it was for the hordes of soldiers, sailors, marines, aviators, and SeaBees in their late teens and early twenties whose eyes were opened, who were intrigued or shocked by the human landscape of the South Pacific. American provincialism encountered human beings of different hue with culture patterns of different texture, and during long periods of inaction waiting for action men at war pondered what the experience meant . . . It is no qualification of heroism that the novel gives an initial warning that all a man did in the Pacific theater was “sit on his ass and wait.” 20

The use of an evocative setting is an essential element of Michener’s work. As Marilyn Severson notes in her overview of Michener’s books, “Even in the shorter novels, he creates a sense of place that situates the reader directly in the

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19Michener, *World*, 266.

world where the narrative takes place. And in all his fiction, there is the impact of a view of life, of certain values that are promoted.”21 These values, in turn, bring forth the themes perhaps most basic to Tales of the South Pacific and Michener’s subsequent work; these are racial tolerance and courage. While the style of his books changes after Hawaii in 1959 -- with that work, Michener began creating the lengthy historical panoramas for which he is best known -- the thematic concerns remain consistent. He uses these themes, as we noted above, to “create an ambience that would both entertain and instruct the reader,”22 and this entertaining didacticism, as we shall see, is a critical element of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s adaptation.

Racial intolerance pervades Tales of the South Pacific and, in turn, South Pacific. As early as “Mutiny,” the third story in the book, the problem of racial and cultural relations between indigenous peoples and Americans is a critical issue of a story’s theme and plot. In “Mutiny,” the conflict is between Americans and the inhabitants of a small island, all of whom are descendants of the surviving mutineers of the eighteenth-century English ship H. M. S. Bounty. The Americans need to build a strategic air strip on a site occupied by a row of trees originally planted by the mutineers and revered by the islanders. The conflict is between the immediate strategic needs of the Americans, who must transcend any sympathy for the islanders’ sentiments, and the melancholy attachment of the islanders to the trees, which are the predominant remaining symbols of their heritage. “A Boar’s Tooth,” which is used in the musical, concerns a native ritual attended by several Americans for reasons ranging from curiosity to the hope of acquiring artifacts to sell retail, and the American perspectives are revealing. A chaplain


22Michener, World, 266.
comments, “The appurtenances of the religion are slightly revolting,” to which an entrepreneurial lieutenant responds, “I feel that way myself, sometimes on Sunday in Connecticut.” 23 Two references to race in the story “Those Who Fraternize” are typical of other, sometimes fleeting, examples of the theme in the stories. Referring to a part French, part Javanese woman with whom he had an affair, Bus Adams comments that “she looked like all the beautiful girls you’ve ever known. But darker.” 24 Later in the story, Tony Fry notes, in a more global observation, “We’ll all be out here again. We’ll be fighting China or India or Malaysia. Asia’s never going to let Australia stay white. . . . This is the crossroads of the world from now on.” 25 The stories repeatedly personalize the issue, demonstrating the Americans’ response to the different world in which they find themselves.

On a larger scale, the book is set in a war between two opposing cultures -- American and Japanese, Western and Eastern -- and, while the personal conflicts sometimes reflect the greater one, they also sometimes differ from it. While the soldiers and sailors can easily generalize about the racial and cultural differences of the Japanese enemy, the evil “other,” 26 their daily encounters with the equally “other” peoples of the islands they occupy are more personal and specific, and less easily defined. This heightens the contrast between the specific and the general, the personal and the global. If the war presents a binarism, an “us” versus “them,” the individuals caught up in the conflict also encounter a more complex construct, one that is new to them and to which the clear-cut binarism

23Michener, Tales, 222.

24Ibid., 304.

25Ibid., 326.

26This issue is dealt with in detail in Chapter Seven of this study.
does not apply so easily. A statement by Edward Said made about revisionist historical scholarship is appropriate to this element of the book:

Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that alignments made across borders, types, nations, and essences are rapidly coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity . . .

The identities of the characters in the book, and those employed in the musical, grow and change, and they do so through often wrenching experiences; this process can be unsettling and uncomfortable for the reader and the audience. One of Michener’s accomplishments is that any cultural insensitivity in the book is found within characters expressing disenchantment with their situation or surroundings, and not in the authorial voice, and this accomplishment is duplicated by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Michener wrote in his autobiography that one of the reasons Tales of the South Pacific and other early works were successful was because they came along at a time “when Americans were beginning to look outward at the entire world rather than inward at themselves.” This change in perspective, suggests Michener, began during the war, when Americans encountered peoples and cultures previously unexperienced by them; he explores the ramifications of this changed world-view, especially in the stories that deal with racial tolerance and inter-racial relationships.

The most intimate examinations of racism in the book are in “Fo’ Dolla’” and “Our Heroine,” stories that provide much of the material for the two principal plots of South Pacific. (“Fo’ Dolla’” also deals with issues of class and cultural

\[ ^{27} \text{Edward Said, } \textit{Culture and Imperialism} (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxiv-xxv. Emphasis in the original. } \]

\[ ^{28} \text{Michener, } \textit{World}, 464. The use of the terms “outward” and “inward” anticipates our discussion of David Riesman’s work in Chapter Seven of this study. } \]
conflict, which will be discussed below.) Michener’s Nurse Nellie Forbush, who became the principal female character in the musical, and her confrontation with her own racism, are the focus of “Our Heroine.” While Nellie, a native of Otolousa, Arkansas, is introduced earlier as a secondary character in “An Officer and a Gentleman” (discussed below and in Chapter Four), her discovery of her own prejudice is the main concern of the second story. This discovery occurs in part after she casts her gaze “outward,” to use Michener’s idea. Early in the story, she recalls telling her Arkansas fiancé, “I want to see the world, Charlie. . . . I want to meet other people. I want to see what the world’s like. Then, when the war’s over, I’ll be back.”29 Looking outside herself and her culture, she finds more than she anticipated.

After falling in love with Emile De Becque,30 a middle-aged French planter, and accepting his proposal of marriage, Nellie learns that he has eight illegitimate daughters, each with a different Javanese, Tonkinese, or Polynesian mother. (As we shall see, the musical will make de Becque’s progeny legitimate and fewer, although no less problematic for Nellie.) Perhaps knowing of her discovery, De Becque introduces Nellie to the two daughters still at home, whom she finds enchanting, and tells her of the others. Michener writes of her response as follows:

Emile De Becque, not satisfied with Javanese and Tonkinese women, had also lived with a Polynesian. A nigger! To Nellie’s tutored mind any person living or dead who was not white or yellow was a nigger. And beyond that no words could go! Her entire Arkansas upbringing made it impossible for her to deny the teachings of her youth. Emile De Becque had lived with the nigger. He had nigger children. If she married him, they would be her step-

29Michener, Tales, 118.

30Michener capitalizes the preposition in De Becque; Rodgers and Hammerstein do not.
daughters. ¶She suffered a revulsion which her lover could never understand.\footnote{Michener \textit{Tales}, 138.}

Despite this revulsion, and the “surge of joy” she feels when she learns that the Polynesian woman is deceased, Nellie nonetheless thinks, as she watches the young girls during dinner, “I would be happy if my children were like that,”\footnote{Ibid., 139.} although she remains full of doubt and anxiety. De Becque, in the meantime, does not fully understand her response. As Michener notes, while De Becque knows something of American thoughts about race, “Nellie was correct in assuming that no Frenchman could ever understand why, to an Arkansas girl, a man who had openly lived with a nigger was beyond the pale.”\footnote{Ibid.} The story concludes with Nellie’s revelation that her prejudice impedes her happiness; nevertheless, she accepts De Becque and his daughters, intent on marrying him and spending the rest of her days in the beauty of his island plantation.

The somewhat more complex conflicts of “Fo’ Dolla,” however, do not end so happily. “Fo’ Dolla’” is the story in which Michener finds a perfect use for the name Bali-ha’i. He uses it to represent a mysterious and attractive otherness, a place where the Philadelphia-born and Princeton-educated Joe Cable forgets the prejudice that, away from Bali-ha’i, ultimately destroys his chance for happiness. The island is mysterious in part because it cannot be seen. Michener writes, “From two miles distance no seafarer could have guessed that Bali-ha’i existed. Like most lovely things, one had to seek it out and even to know what one was seeking before it could be found.”\footnote{Ibid., 180.} Its secrecy is why all the unmarried young women from nearby islands are kept there under the supervision of French
nuns. Cable is led to the island by the colorful character Bloody Mary, a Tonkinese so named because of the streams of betel juice that run down the creases at the corners of her mouth.35

Cable first encounters Mary when he is assigned the task of closing down her souvenir selling operation. Before he does so, we learn that Mary, a highly successful entrepreneur disliked by the plantation owners because she pays workers more than they do, is well-liked by the Marines on the island.36 They have, in fact, taught her English, although much of the vocabulary she learns from them is explicitly profane.37 Michener uses this education to point out one of the more overt examples of colonialism mentioned in the novel. After many exchanges between Mary and the Marines, writes Michener, “the old miracle of the subdued races took place again. The yellow woman learned dozens of white words but the white men learned not one yellow word.”38 Known as a no-nonsense business woman, Mary turns uncharacteristically docile when she encounters Cable, and he in turn is irresistibly drawn to her and, later, to Bali-ha’i and its secrets. Michener notes that “Cable’s entire being was drawn to the island.”39 As we shall see, this unusual attraction is memorably made musical in South Pacific.

35Rodgers and Hammerstein never explain the origin of her name. Her physical appearance in stage and screen versions of the musical is always much cleaner than it is described in the novel.

36They are not on Bali-ha’i, but instead are on the island that serves as the main base of operations, the setting for many of the stories. Bali-ha’i, of course, is an island that none of the Marines, and few of the other military, know about.

37In keeping with the more prurient tastes of the times, Michener uses the italicized euphemism soandso, always in italics, for the strongest of the words taught to Mary by the Marines.

38Michener, Tales, 172.

39Ibid., 198.
Mary takes Cable to Bali-ha’i to meet her daughter Liat, with whom he begins a physical relationship and eventually falls in love. Cable’s troubled response to this relationship brings forth issues of colonialism, racism, and classism, as well as his struggle and, ultimately, his failure, to understand and overcome each of these prejudices. Upon his arrival on Bali-ha’i, for instance, Cable’s first sight of the half-clad women causes a mixed reaction. Michener explains Cables’ thoughts as follows:

Cable was truly enraptured. The frieze of women looked like models awaiting the immortalizing brush of Gaugin. Unaware of their forbidding ugliness by American middle class standards, they were equally unaware of their surpassing beauty by the artist’s immortal standards. Cable, being neither exclusively an artist nor an American, had no consistent thoughts as he looked up to the dark faces with their gleaming teeth.  

Throughout the story, Michener sets Cable apart from the other Americans by emphasizing his sensitivity to his general surroundings and to individuals who are part of those surroundings. Cable nonetheless grapples with his responses to these surroundings and individuals. With Liat, in particular, he often tries to explain away his initial perception of her as other.

After first making love with Liat, for instance, one of the thoughts that Cable has, and one that partially relieves his guilt, is that the color of his tanned skin and that of Liat’s are “almost identical.” The next day, on his base island, Cable thinks of Liat and again rationalizes her otherness. Writes Michener:

Were Liat and her unfathomable mother merely descendants from the elder savages [of the island]? No! The idea was preposterous. Tonkinese were in reality Chinese, sort of the way Canadians were Americans, only a little different. And Chinese were the oldest

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40Ibid., 183.

41Ibid., 187.
civilized people on earth. He thought of Liat. She was clean . . . Her teeth were white. Her ankles were delicate, like those of a girl of family in Philadelphia.42

Creating an image of Liat that fits within acceptable images from his own elevated stratum of society helps Cable justify his increasing feelings for her.

Cable’s conflict is demonstrated further by his ceasing to write home after he makes love to Liat,43 and before long he realizes that he is “tied to Bali-ha’i by chains of his own making.”44 Michener further explains this conflict in the following:

Fight against it as he might, Cable had permitted a new world to grow within him. If that world had maintained only a minor importance in his life, all might have been well; but when the hidden world assumed master importance, then all was lost.45

Even later, as if to intensity Cable’s turmoil, Michener notes that Cable “felt involved in a net of two colors. . . . And no matter which way he twisted, he was not free.”46

Eventually, the pull of Philadelphia’s cultural exclusivity wins out, and Cable, when asked by Mary if he will marry Liat, states the impossibility of the relationship lasting any longer. Liat is accepting -- “If I were a French girl, it would be all right wouldn’t it?” she asks47 -- but Mary is enraged, calling on her arsenal of expletives to express her fury. Cable soon is called into action,

42Ibid., 191.

43Michener writes, “He would try several time thereafter [to write to his girl back home], but false words would not come, and true words he dared not write.” Michener, Tales, 192.

44Ibid., 196.

45Ibid., 197.

46Ibid., 207.

47Ibid., 201.
however, and he leaves the island and, with it, Mary and Liat. In the last scene, Mary is hurling invectives after Cable, who is riding off in the back of a truck. When a soldier asks her the price of a shrunken head she carries, however, her attention switches immediately to the potential deal, and Cable disappears.

In the middle of this story, Michener introduces an extended dialogue among the military men that provides a counterpoint to Cable’s sensitivity. The Marines deride Hollywood’s representation of island women, noting that in the movies, the women are usually played by white actresses such as Dorothy Lamour. As the conversation progresses, however, a Marine quotes the mess cook, who had noted that the island women are “‘getting whiter every day.’”48 The Marine then adds, “If I was out here long enough, I can’t tell what I’d do.”49 When another Marine asks Cable if he would “sleep with a native girl,” Cable lies and says no, and the Marine comments that “few self-respecting American men would attempt to knock off a piece of jungle julep.”50 The scene puts Cable’s feelings of guilt in perspective, reminding the reader that the issues of race, and of what was and was not acceptable behavior, were on the minds of many men in this unique setting. Codes of behavior, although challenged, for the most part still win out over the sexual tension of the men.51

Rodgers and Hammerstein found their principal plots and thematic concerns in these two stories and, as we shall see, used them as the foreground of

48 Ibid., 194
49 Ibid., 194.
50Michener, Tales, 194, 195.

51 Michener refers to the “highly tense conditions” surrounding the men as they await combat, noting how “sensible men shoved back into unassailable corners of their souls thoughts that otherwise would have surged through and wracked them” (Michener Tales, 177). Living through this without women was especially difficult, and Michener acknowledges both rape and homosexuality. The first is a critical moment in the story “An Officer and a Gentleman” and the latter is mentioned in the scene being discussed.
South Pacific. Many other stories provided characters who appear in the musical, or who are conflated into composite characters. All these other stories, however, as demonstrated in Appendix A, relate to the themes of “Fo’ Dolla’,” so it is on that story and “Our Heroine” that the authors wisely remain focused. The other stories and their treatments are discussed below, therefore, in terms of how they were or were not adapted.

Initial Choices in the Transition from Book to Musical

How Rodgers and Hammerstein came to Michener’s book is told in two versions, separated by almost twenty years. While both are anecdotal, they provide perspectives on the genesis of the musical.

The first version, which appears in Rodgers’s autobiography, Joshua Logan’s autobiography, and Fordin’s biography of Hammerstein, is the most commonly reported. In this version, Joshua Logan claims to have first thought of the book and more particularly the story “Fo’ Dolla’,” as an adaptable source for a musical. Logan and producer Leland Hayward, according to Fordin, “had made informal producers’ agreement to acquire theatrical rights from its little-known author . . . Since no contract had been signed, Leland ordered the voluble Josh not to blab about it.” Logan was never a retiring sort, however, and when he ran into Rodgers at a cocktail party, he immediately mentioned to the composer that he had a story -- “Fo’ Dolla’” -- that would be perfect for Rodgers and Hammerstein. Rodgers made a note and forgot about it. Only later, when Logan asked his opinion of the story, did Rodgers actually read it. Soon after, Logan also pitched the story to Hammerstein, who read the book and agreed that

52The books are listed in the order they appeared (1975, 1976, and 1977).
53Fordin, 259.
the story had potential. Rodgers and Hammerstein then talked to each other about the story and the book, and they called Logan and Hayward. At this point, Logan realized why Hayward had urged him to remain silent. Fordin writes of this stage of the process as follows:

They called Logan and Hayward. Dick and Oscar said they wanted to write the show but would do so only under the condition that they co-produce with Logan and Hayward and retain 51 percent of the property. Hayward and Logan were not happy about the majority interest factor, but knowing that R & H would do a show only if they had final say, he and his partner agreed. The next step was to locate the author of the book. 54

The author of the book recalls the process quite differently. Michener wrote in 1992 that Tales of the South Pacific was first pitched to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer by Kenneth McKenna, the head of its literary department and a friend of Michener. The studio saw no cinematic possibilities in a plotless collection of stories, however, and passed on the option. McKenna then told his half-brother Jo Mielziner, the noted Broadway set designer, about the book, suggesting its potential as a play. After reading the book, Mielziner agreed with McKenna about its potential and later told Michener that after reading it, he “‘took it to Dick Rodgers and told him it was a natural for him and Oscar and I’d volunteer to do the sets,’” 55 which he did.

Michener then notes that, “In the meantime he [Hammerstein] and Rodgers had allied themselves with two other outstanding talents, Josh Logan, the director, and Leland Hayward, the charismatic producer . . .” 56 This indicates that Rodgers and Hammerstein knew the book before Logan said anything to them about it. Michener then recalls how Hayward cornered him secretly and

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54Ibid., 260.

55Michener, World, 290.

56Ibid.
tried to buy all the rights for the book for five hundred dollars without consulting Rodgers, Hammerstein, or Logan. Michener summarizes this incident as follows:

I have not told this story before, and in later years when Hayward and I became friends we never referred to the fact that he had tried to slip behind his partners’ backs and pick up all the rights to what turned out to be a bonanza.57

We probably cannot know exactly what path the book took from its Hollywood pitch to its rights being owned by Rodgers and Hammerstein -- and, ultimately, it makes little difference to the authors’ creative processes -- but Michener’s version suggests a more direct path from author to composer and lyricist. Either way, once they had the rights to the work, Rodgers and Hammerstein began the process of turning it into a stage-worthy vehicle.

In Los Angeles for the opening of the tour of Annie Get Your Gun, which starred Mary Martin in the role made famous by Ethel Merman, Rodgers and Hammerstein began discussing what to do with Michener’s book.58 While acknowledging their attraction to “Fo’ Dolla,” they also realized that it presented at least two major problems. First, they found that the unhappy plot was reminiscent of Madama Butterfly, and they had no desire to recreate that work. Second, writes Rodgers, they thought it not “substantial or original enough to make a full evening’s entertainment.”59 After this, writes Fordin, Hammerstein “spent several months carefully studying the other stories, marking characters and incidents with the thought of combining several of the tales.”60

57Ibid., 291.

58Rodgers, 258-59.

59Ibid., 259.

60Fordin, 261.
These “markings,” or notes, are in the Hammerstein Collection at the Library of Congress, and they have not been discussed elsewhere. While the comments he made on the pages of the volume have been investigated and commented on by director Trevor Nunn (see fn. 5, above), the separate notes, written in pencil on yellow tablet paper now in serious deterioration, give us insight into the response the librettist / lyricist had to the book. (No such notes from Rodgers are known to exist.) The notes consist of single words, names, or short phrases. A story-by-story discussion of these notes, which show Hammerstein taking initial steps toward adapting parts of the book beyond “Fo’ Dolla,” is a convenient way to present the content of other stories that appealed to him (and Rodgers). These secondary stories will be discussed in the order that they appear in the notes, which is also the order they appear in *Tales of the South Pacific*. In subsequent chapters, we shall see in detail how these notes -- and stories -- were developed or undeveloped.

1. “The South Pacific.” The first page of Michener’s book contains the following three topics or characters that eventually appear in *South Pacific*: (1) the issue of waiting for action in the beauty of the islands; (2) the character of Bloody Mary; and (3) the story of the so-called Remittance Man, who hid on an island and radioed news of Japanese troop movement to the Americans until his discovery and death (a story used, without the character of the Remittance Man, as a plot device for Cable and de Becque’s mission). None of these appear in Hammerstein’s initial notes, however, which begin with “An Officer and a Gentleman,” the fourth story of the collection.

The first three stories nonetheless were integral to Hammerstein’s overall response to the novel, for they partially provide the tone of his book as well as suggest elements for the development of a linear plot. Just as the opening stage

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61 “Notes on Michener’s *Tales of the South Pacific*” Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Box marked “South Pacific.”
directions of Lynn Riggs’s play *Green Grow the Lilacs* inspired Hammerstein’s lyrics for “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin’,” 62 the opening of *Oklahoma!*; the opening pages of *Tales of the South Pacific* contain descriptions that inform the tone of much of Hammerstein’s book. Michener begins with the following passage:

> I wish I could tell you about the South Pacific. The way it actually was. The endless ocean. The infinite specks of coral we call islands. Coconut palms nodding gracefully toward the ocean. Reefs upon which waves broke into spray, and inner lagoons, lovely beyond description. I wish I could tell you about . . . the full moon rising behind the volcanoes, and the waiting. The waiting. The timeless, repetitive waiting. 63

Hammerstein’s script continually refers to the beauty and the waiting, creating a background that affects the characters and the plot. He never strays far from these opening images of Michener’s. Soon after Nellie’s first entrance, for instance, she comments to de Becque, “Gosh, it’s beautiful here. Just look at that yellow sun! You know, I don’t think it’s the end of the world like everyone else thinks.” 64 These comments suggest that Nellie’s characteristic optimism, which after the above dialogue finds voice in the song “A Cockeyed Optimist,” is reinforced by the beauty of the locale. Hammerstein’s stage directions often mention specifics of setting that indicate the constant presence of beauty -- the opening description of de Becque’s plantation, for instance, or the description for the beach setting of act 1, scene 3 (1,3), which calls for Bali Ha’i’s presence in the background. The waiting theme appears most often in the dialogue or lyrics of
Billis and the Seabees. Not long after Billis first appears in 1,3, for example, he mentions that he is “feeling held down again” and that he needs “to take a trip” to the neighboring Bali Ha’i;\textsuperscript{65} and in “There Is Nothing Like a Dame,” after listing the beauties of “sunlight on the sand,” and “moonlight on the sea,” the Marines and Seabees comment that, “We feel restless, / We feel blue, / We feel lonely . . .”\textsuperscript{66}

2. “Coral Sea.” The second story is less influential. Focusing on a battle to prevent a Japanese invasion of New Zealand, the story introduces the vivid character of Lieutenant Grant, a stiff New Zealand flying officer whose mission is to spot and report the Japanese movement towards New Zealand. Because the story is specifically about a battle, and because it does not relate to the romantic elements of the book, it is of little influence.

3. “Mutiny.” While the third story, discussed above, is a gripping tale of cultural conflict and introduces the character Tony Fry, the setting and the large number of secondary characters made it an improbable choice for inclusion in the principal or even secondary plots of the musical.

4. “An Officer and a Gentleman.” The next story seems more suited to Hammerstein’s needs, and, as observed above, it is the first that he noted. “An Officer and a Gentleman” concerns Bill Harbison, a handsome Navy ensign with feelings of superiority to all around him. Married to a Vassar graduate from New Mexico, Harbison volunteers for the Navy and is assigned to a remote island as recreation officer to a small unit. Disgusted by the triviality of his assignment, Harbison spends his time exercising and, when nurses arrive on the island, impressing the women. After dating Dinah Culpert, an older nurse whom Harbison eventually and insultingly refers to as his Grandmom, he turns to Nellie

\textsuperscript{65}\textit{Ibid.}, 287.

\textsuperscript{66}\textit{Ibid.}, 189.
Forbush, a young nurse from Arkansas. Finding Nellie as attractive as he finds her socially inferior, Harbison eventually attempts to rape her; his attempts are thwarted by her sure aim with a coconut. She ultimately confronts him about his feelings for her, and only then does she learn that he is married and that he feels little more than contempt for her.

Hammerstein writes the names Harbison and Nellie Forbush (Harbison by last name, Nellie by first), but he does not mention Dinah Culpert, whose name survives in *South Pacific* as that of one of the nurses, but whose wonderful character does not make it into the final book of the musical. He also notes “song 45,” probably referring to an idea (undeveloped) for a song from page forty-five of the novel. This page consists of a discussion of the island’s beauty and how that beauty could provide a romantic atmosphere for an officer and a nurse. The relationship between environment and romance becomes integral to the musical, as well as to the song “Bali Ha’i,” which is about the romantic lure of the islands.

5. “The Cave.” While this story is lengthy, Hammerstein made only two notes on it. One says “Remittance Man,” who was mentioned above, and the other says “song 66.” The song reference seems to be to a Marine’s song found on page 66; it is sung by a rescued injured pilot on morphine, and it was soon forgotten by Hammerstein. The plot of the story, however, becomes critical to the plot of *South Pacific* when Hammerstein needs a device to bring together de Becque and Cable. Dangerously ensconced behind the Japanese lines, a British man known to the Americans only as the Remittance Man reports on Japanese fleet movements from a hidden cave. His reports come regularly, beginning with

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67 Dinah’s changing role in the musical is discussed in Chapter Five. Hammerstein’s notes were made in pencil on a yellow tablet, and they consist of names, usually only first or last, words, and phrases. The title of the noted story is written first, followed by the comments. The notes do not seem composed; they appear to be informal quick jottings.
the weather and then proceeding to information about the fleet, and he ends his reports with the comment, “Good hunting.”68 Eventually, after providing the Americans with much invaluable information, the Remittance Man is discovered and executed by the Japanese, along with his native assistants.

As we shall see, “The Cave” provides an important element of Hammerstein’s plot. The story also develops an image -- a cave -- that informs South Pacific, particularly in the second act conflict between Cable and de Becque. Michener uses the image of a cave in two ways. First, he places the Remittance Man in a dangerous cave, a place where he hides from the enemy while making his radio reports to the Americans. But the Americans who listen to the Remittance Man’s reports are also in a cave -- a safe cave where the radio receiver is located. Michener contrasts the two caves and then expands the image as follows:

Each man I knew had a cave somewhere, a hidden refuge from the war. For some it was love for wives and kids back home. That was the unassailable retreat. When bad food and Jap shells and the awful tropic diseases attacked, there was the cave of love. There a man found refuge. . . . When battle became too terrible or too lonely or too bitter, men fled into their caves, sweated it out, and came back ready for another day or another battle.69

Michener’s image of a cave becomes Hammerstein’s image of an island. Early in Act One, we learn that as a young man, de Becque killed a man in France and fled to the island that is now his home. Later, he refuses the Americans’ request to join Cable’s mission, stating that all that he cares for is on his island. Later still, after Nellie has refused to marry de Becque and Cable has refused to marry Liat, Cable says to de Becque, “You’ve got the right idea, de Becque -- live on an island. Yes sir, if I get out of this thing alive, I’m not going back there!

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68Michener, Tales, 59.

69 Ibid., 72.
I’m coming here. All I care about is right here.” De Becque responds. “When all you care about is here . . . this is a good place to be. When all you care about is taken away, there is no place . . .” 70 While the story inspired few notes, we nonetheless can see that its influence was important.

6. “The Milk Run.” Hammerstein notes only the name Bus Adams, the narrator of the story. Adams, a “handsome, blond, cocky” pilot “shooting off between missions,” 71 relates the story of how, after being shot down by the Japanese, he is the object of a massive rescue campaign that involves the American Navy and the New Zealand Air Force. The campaign to rescue one pilot eventually costs the American military approximately $600,000, “but,” comments Adams at the end of his tale, “it’s sure worth every cent of the money. If you happen to be that pilot.” 72 This tale appears in the musical, although with somewhat different details; instead of Adams, the musical’s version is about the comic character Luther Billis. Adams, too, is retained in the musical, however.

7. “Alligator.” Concerning this story, Hammerstein reminds himself only to “study this.” Alligator is the code name for the invasion of Kuralei, a Japanese-held island critical to an American victory in the Pacific, and the story describes a large military operation in preparation. Because Hammerstein had no military experience, the story provided him with an insight into how a major operation might be constructed. This, in turn, informed his use of the operation in South Pacific.

8. “Our Heroine.” The next story gets a somewhat more detailed consideration. “Our Heroine,” discussed above, is the second story featuring

70Hammerstein and Logan, South Pacific, 347.
71Michener, Tales, 79.
72Ibid.
Nellie Forbush, and Hammerstein notes its relationship to “An Officer and a Gentleman.” After observing that Harbison “disintegrates” in this story -- he begins to date indiscriminately, drinks to excess, and gets fat -- he also notes that Nellie “lands up” while Harbison “lands down.” He also suggests, “link Nellie-Harbison w/ Nellie-De Becque,” observing that Nellie will marry de Becque (and that she was “not good enough” for Harbison). These notes, following those on “An Officer and a Gentleman,” reveal that the character of Harbison made an impression on Hammerstein; further notes, as well as the sketches, will support that observation.

9. “Dry Rot.” In his only note on “Dry Rot,” Hammerstein suggests combining the characters of Joe (not Joe Cable, but a shoemaker from Columbus, Ohio who is the central character of the story) and “Professor” Hyman Weinstein. Weinstein is the side-kick of Luther Billis, who also impressed Hammerstein, and the “Professor” is retained as a minor, but memorable, character in the musical; Billis, incorporating some traits from another character, also becomes a major character in Hammerstein’s book. The principal story of “Dry Rot” is about how, through correspondence instigated by Luther Billis, the shy Joe meets a young woman stateside and pursues an epistolary romance that ends sadly when the woman is killed in a car accident. This plot is not used by Hammerstein.

10. “Fo’ Dolla’.” The notes for “Fo’ Dolla,’” from the beginning the principal story under consideration for adaptation, consist only of a list of the characters.

11. “Passion.” Hammerstein again notes Harbison’s presence. Harbison is a secondary character in the story, however. As the censor of letters from enlisted men to their spouses and family, he brings a particularly vivid -- to his mind, almost pornographic -- letter to Dr. Paul Benoway, the consulting physician.
Benoway discovers in the letter an expression of married passion that he envies; it is an expression that suggests to him that he is incapable of true passion, and this realization disturbs him. Later, after reading a letter by Harbison, he goes so far as to copy a passage from it into a letter of his own, only to recognize that, as an expression of himself, it reads false. Harbison’s letter reveals Harbison’s passion, a characteristic that gives him a dimension otherwise missing from the stories he appears in. This information might have been useful to Hammerstein in creating a fleshed-out character in his play.

12. “A Boar’s Tooth.” This story provides more details of Luther Billis and reveals Americans’ reactions to the islanders’ religious practices at the Boar’s Tooth Ceremony. Hammerstein notes in one of his longer phrases that “Cable could go on [a] trip with Billis, [Tony] Fry to Boar’s Killing.” Hammerstein indeed sends Cable and Billis on the trip in South Pacific, but only Billis attends the Ceremony (offstage). Cable instead meets Liat, and their love story ensues.

13. “Wine for the Mess at Segi” and 14. “The Airstrip at Konora.” No notes are found for either of these stories. The first concerns a long run for whiskey, and the second, the construction of an airstrip needed for the Alligator operation. Apparently neither tale lent itself to adaptation, and the distant location of the second story further precluded it from use.

15. “Those Who Fraternize.” Michener briefly brings back Harbison in this story, and Hammerstein mentions his name again, indicating his continued interest. He also writes “Harbison lower,” referring to Harbison’s appearance in the story, and draws a box around the phrase. Drunk, disruptive, and eventually violent, Harbison, by now a Lieutenant, arrives at a scene in the story waving a pistol and yelling rude comments. After a skirmish with Bus Adams, he disappears from the narrative, which is mostly concerned with the beautiful grown daughters of Emile De Becque, none of whom are in the musical.

17 “Frisco.” This is without notes; an atmosphere piece in which battle-bound soldiers talk of their various experiences on leave in San Francisco, this short tale is Michener’s last example of the waiting that occupies so much of so many stories in the book. Here, the soldiers entertain each other to prevent themselves from being overcome with fear. The story is especially effective, but seemingly did not fit into Hammerstein’s plans.

18. “The Landing on Kuralei.” Hammerstein again notes “Harbison.” In this story, a recounting of the battle towards which the book has moved, the reader learns of Harbison’s fate. After complaining about his non-combat assignment, he pulls strings to get sent back to the States when he finds out that his group is actually about to face battle. Harbison’s downward trajectory, already noted by Hammerstein, is complete. This recurrence and development of a character throughout the stories suggests that the work is a novel, as Michener maintained, rather than a collection of unconnected stories. It also presented Hammerstein with an example of how a character was developed through appearances in various stories.

19. “The Cemetery at Hoga Point.” While there are no notes for the final story, Hammerstein here learned the tragic fate that Michener had in store for many of the characters. Cable, for instance, dies a hero’s death, haunted until the end of his short life by the affair with Liat.

After studying the book for several months and making these and other notes, Hammerstein decided that the Nellie Forbush - Emile de Becque romance should be the principal plot and that the Cable - Liat - Bloody Mary story should be secondary. Conflating these stories presented a problem, however. Both plots
were serious, and this, as Rodgers later wrote, “was against the accepted rules of musical-play construction. If the main love story is serious, the secondary romance is usually employed to provide comic relief.”73 The earlier musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein that were adapted from other sources adhered to this practice. In *Oklahoma!*, for instance, the principal story of Laurie, Curlie, and the ominous Jud was offset by the comic story of Ado Annie, Will, and Ali Hakim, the “Persian” peddler. *Carousel* exploited a similar comic subplot, as did the film *State Fair*.74

The structural challenge was overcome in the early stages of development. This was accomplished in several ways. First, Rodgers and Hammerstein connected the two principal stories with plot elements drawn from “The Cave,” mentioned above and discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. Second, they used Bloody Mary as a figure not only in the Cable - Liat romance, as she is in “Fo’ Dolla’,” but also as a connection to the comic character Luther Billis. For this they drew on elements of “A Boar’s Tooth” and on additional material later provided by Michener.75 This material made it possible to link Billis with both plots and introduce comic elements into them. Finally, Rodgers and Hammerstein created serious characters who were also believable when caught up in the comic subplots. Ethan Mordden explains this as follows:

> It is becoming a commonplace that *South Pacific* varied the traditional setup of a “deep” main couple balanced by a prankish second couple . . . by having *two* deep couples. Rodgers himself

73Rodgers, 259.

74*Allegro*, written between *State Fair* and *South Pacific*, was *sui generis*, following a structural path previously and subsequently unexplored by the team.

75Writes Michener, “I played no role in the adaptation, except for writing, at [Joshua] Logan’s request, some narrative accounts of how the rowdy Luther Billis might operate as a wheeler-dealer, and as an afterthought I suggested that he would probably run a laundry of some kind, and maybe have a shower. . . . I did not then, nor ever in the dozen or so subsequent instances when writing of mine was adapted to the stage or screen, participate in the creative work.” Michener, *World*, 292-93.
pointed this out. But Nellie is a fundamentally comic character who is put through a serious test, and, despite Emile’s operatic grandeur, much of their story is the stuff of musical comedy, charm, and high spirits, from the pensively sunny “A Cockeyed Optimist” to the spoopy “Honey Bun.” What R&H did to tradition was less to vary it than to naturalize it, finding the humor in the deep people and the tragedy in the light.76

While the argument can be made that Rodgers and Hammerstein do not so much “find” the humor in the serious characters as create it, they definitely balance both qualities in most of the characters. This is aided by their expert interweaving of the various plots.

Conclusion

South Pacific is predominantly about two romantic relationships troubled by issues of race and intolerance. These relationships are situated within a wartime setting, and they are linked to comic subplots that provide contrast to their serious themes. The plot of the musical unfolds in a chronological structure, and the resolutions of the various conflicts bring the work to dramatic closure. What makes all this notable is that James A. Michener’s Tales of the South Pacific, a non-linear collection of stories, presented challenges to the creation of this structure. Rodgers and Hammerstein, principally drawn to two of the stories and their related themes, made early choices concerning content and structure, and these choices resulted in a work based on a source without being imitative of it.

The preceding discussion of the source for South Pacific and the initial choices made by its adaptors reveals the first phases of the work whose subsequent evolution is traced in the following chapters.

76Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 116.
CHAPTER 4

FINDING THE FOCUS: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHARACTER IN
ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

The opening scene of *South Pacific* reveals two structural and thematic elements that prove important throughout the rest of the musical. First, although the drama takes place on an island inhabited by hundreds or even thousands of sailors, Marines, Seabees, and nurses, and while the background is a global war being fought in the Pacific, the actual plot is intimate and personal. Second, the scene contains the musical’s first images of contrasting cultures, images that will become larger and less subtle as the central theme of racial intolerance is developed. Emphasizing these elements early in the show provides a focus around which the rest of the show will develop; whatever else occurs, we know that the principal element of the plot is the relationship of Nellie and de Becque. We hear the inner thoughts and emotions of Nellie and de Becque in the scene and in the score -- with and without lyrics -- suggesting the priority that Rodgers and Hammerstein gave to probing the psychology of their characters and to the musico-dramatic expression of those characters. The introduction of the children -- and their return at the end of the scene, when we learn they are de Becque’s children -- foreshadows the racial and cultural conflicts that will drive the plot; it also suggests that the source of that conflict will be personal and domestic. In other words, instead of focusing on the global conflict, the authors focus on

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1For a scene-by-scene breakdown of *South Pacific*, see Appendix B.
intimate stories that reflect issues pertinent to that conflict. Like the book they adapt, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical is only incidentally about the war that provides its setting; instead, it is about two relationships and the challenges imposed on those relationships by racial and ethnic prejudice.

In this chapter, I demonstrate Rodgers and Hammerstein’s process for working and reworking act 1, scene 1, until every musical and dramatic element contributed to the realization of characters whose psychological complexities, further complicated by the challenges of their environment, provide the work’s central conflict. Investigating this process of focusing and refining provides insight into Rodgers and Hammerstein’s priorities for this long musical scene and, subsequently, the entire musical. Principal among these priorities is the uninterrupted development of mature, complex, and conflicted characters. Indeed, we shall see how the scene evolves into a passage revealing subtle psychological development through soliloquies and orchestral subtexts; these and other techniques reveal characters and situations that reverberate throughout the rest of the musical. This accomplishment, more than anything, makes *South Pacific* a seminal work in American musical theater.

Two sets of sketches allow us to examine this process. The first is a series of musical and lyric sketches for Nellie and de Becque that were eventually replaced by “A Cock-Eyed Optimist” and “Twin Soliloquies,” which, at the scene’s climax, are followed by “Some Enchanted Evening.” These sketches display how both music and lyric changes sharpen the characters and reveal their inner thoughts, the latter in an unprecedented way. The second is a twelve-page draft for a scene and song that feature Bill Harbison, a recurring and memorable character in Michener’s book who also figures prominently in Hammerstein’s initial plans for the scene and the musical, but whose role grows smaller and smaller during the creative process. The excision of this scene, and the
subsequent diminishing of Harbison’s character, is an example of how emphases can change in the process of adaptation. In Michener, most of Harbison’s plot interest involving Nellie occurs before she meets de Becque; putting him in the musical after that point gives him no chance of development because it provides no conflict. Harbison has nowhere to go. Hammerstein tried to create a new twist to the character but, as we shall see, that too turned out to be unnecessary and unworkable.

The various paths explored, but ultimately unfollowed, in the construction of this scene indicate a range of creative options and a narrowing of the authors’ focus. Examining these options, and the creative choices made by the team, affords us insight into the selective processes of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and it clarifies the team’s narrowing dramatic emphases in the course of writing *South Pacific*.

**Book, Music and Lyric Sketches For Act 1, Scene 1**

Two sets of stage directions for the opening of act 1, scene 1 of *South Pacific* (1, 1) demonstrate different approaches to opening the show. Both lead into the opening song, “Dites-moi,” which is sung by Ngana, one of two Eurasian children -- her younger brother Jerome is the other -- outside an island plantation home. When the scene begins, we do not know who these children

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2The young boy is an invention of Hammerstein’s. In Michener, de Becque has eight daughters, all of different mothers, four of whom live with him on his plantation and meet Nellie in the course of the story. Hammerstein took the names Jerome and Ngana from the story “The Cave,” in which Jerome and Ngana are a husband and wife working with the Remittance Man. While the score calls for both children to sing, as does the first set of stage directions, the published script calls for only Ngana to sing, and it is she alone who sings on the original cast recording.
are, but a mixed heritage is suggested by their names, found in the program, their Eurasian appearance, and the French lyrics to their folk-like song (marked “À l’antique” in the score).  

Unpublished stage directions for the scene found in the Richard Rodgers collection at the Library of Congress describe the opening pantomime that leads to the song. “They advance timidly towards the house. They stop and whisper and giggle, childishly exaggerating some secret joke.” Jerome peeks in a window, giggles, runs back. They sing. After they sing, “they strike a pose of two lovers in a mock embrace and burst out laughing.” The children are spectators, mimicking the actions of someone inside the house. Their song, whose lyrics declare that life is beautiful because the singer’s love for the sung-to is returned, is both a children’s song and a commentary on what they see going on in the house, and their pose at song’s end suggests more mimicry. They are acting out, in other words, the scene that follows.  

Compare this to the following descriptive stage directions in the published script:

[The children] are, with humorous dignity, dancing an impromptu minuet. A bird call is heard in the tree above. Jerome looks up and imitates the sound. The eyes of both children follow the flight of the bird. Ngana runs over to the pagoda and climbs up on a table and poses on it as if it were a stage. Jerome lifts his hands and solemnly conducts as she sings.

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Here, the children are oblivious to what is going on in the house. Instead of imitating adults whom they see through a window, they are impersonating adults from imagination and with “humorous dignity.”

This description also suggests the mixed heritage of the children by juxtaposing the European song and dance (which, because it is in common time, is not a minuet) with the call of the wild bird. Jerome’s imitation of the bird call indicates his familiarity with the island locale, just as his mastery of the dance steps indicates a European sensibility. Ngana is also drawn to the bird, but when it is out of sight, she returns to a European sensibility, mounting a “stage” and allowing herself to be led by a “conductor;” in this mock concert-hall, her French words are unsurprising. These islanders seem somewhat Westernized, but we still don’t know who they are.

The French language of the opening suggests some kind of colonialism is on display. The second set of stage directions reinforces this by contrasting the well-behaved children who perform a western song with the wild exotic children who imitate birds’ calls and, perhaps with envy, visually follow their flights. The language and the song also suggest that Western culture is dominant, and that the children are well-schooled in its ways. The suggestion of colonialism is again reinforced by the entrance of Henry, a servant, who also appears to be indigenous to the islands; the first moments of South Pacific, in other words, present us with images of the islanders as children or servants. After some playful banter with

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6 The “performance” is on two levels. First, the actors are performing the song for the audience. Second, the children are acting out a performance ritual they may or may not have actually experienced.

7 We find demonstrations of colonialism throughout the script. The subject is more thoroughly investigated in the discussion of Bloody Mary below, in Chapter Six.
the children, Henry herds them into the house. The dialogue is still entirely in French. Only when they are offstage do we hear dialogue, in English, from another part of the stage.8

Opening with the children is a surprise -- the audience does not expect two children singing a faux folk song at the beginning of a play set in the Pacific Theatre of World War II. The intimacy, as well as the striking image of two Eurasian children in a tropical setting singing in French (in an American musical), sets up the story to follow, and it tells us that the story is not about the conflict of battle, but about the conflict of intimate human interests. The war may bring all the characters together, but it is the cultural baggage of racial intolerance the Americans bring with them that is the cause of the conflict in South Pacific.

Later versions of South Pacific begin otherwise. The movie opens in a plane bringing Joe Cable to the island, as if it were going to be a Technicolor Hollywood war adventure; the camera then pans to the island where the sailors are singing “Bloody Mary.” Subsequent stage productions have borrowed from this and opened the show with the soldiers and sailors. This is a subversion of the plot, however, and puts the initial focus where it does not belong. The personal stories should not be overshadowed by the war; the war should appear within, and be reflected by, the personal stories, which are the focus of the piece. Changing the beginning of South Pacific distorts its thematic and plot emphases.

After the quiet and gently playful opening, Rodgers and Hammerstein bring on their leading characters unobtrusively, perhaps trying to subvert the stars’ customary entrance applause by having them talk through the entrance.

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8The introduction of thematic material through the presence of the children was noticed by Everett R. Clinchy, president of The National Conference for Christians and Jews, Inc. In a letter to Hammerstein dated September 11, 1949, Clinchy wrote, “I was especially appreciative of the race relations problem which runs through the play from the first sight of the planter’s children . . .” Everett R. Clinchy, Letter to Oscar Hammerstein II, September 11, 1949. In the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box 21 (Correspondence and Misc. by subject).
The quiet intimacy of the scene is allowed to continue undisturbed. (We should note here that this is the first time Rodgers and Hammerstein, as partners, had written for stars of the stage. Their previous musicals had been cast with relatively unknown actors. Mary Martin and Ezio Pinza were cast in *South Pacific* before it was written.)

We learn in a brief dialogue scene that Nellie supposes de Becque came to the island to escape something, and that she is an optimist about the declining world situation. After extolling the beauty of the scenery, which she says encourages her to think that perhaps the world is not a completely hopeless mess, she sings “A Cock-Eyed Optimist.” The song ends with the lyrics, “But I’m stuck / (Like a dope!) / With a thing called hope, / And I can’t get it out of my heart . . . Not this heart!”

The piano-vocal manuscript for “A Cock-Eyed Optimist” in the Richard Rodgers collection is titled “Not This Heart;” the accompanying lyric sheet has “A Cock-eyed [*sic*] Optimist” typed as the title, but it is scratched out and “Not This Heart” is handwritten in ink. In any case, no matter what the title, it was not the first song for this spot in the play. The Hammerstein Collection contains typed and complete drafts of a song called “Bright Canary Yellow,” an image that must have been particularly vivid to Hammerstein, since it survives in the lyrics of “A Cock-Eyed Optimist.” (Not only does the titular image survive, but the music for this early song survives several transformations, as we shall see.)

In addition to these drafts, a bound fully typed script for an early draft of the show contains a version of “Bright Canary Yellow.” In the Rodgers piano-vocal manuscript for “Bright Canary Yellow,” the lyrics are divided between Nellie and de Becque, as they are in a draft found in the Hammerstein collection. This would

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9Rodgers and Hammerstein, 18-19.

appear to be the first version of the song; in another, and probably later, copy of the script, Nellie sings both sets of lyrics and continues into “A Cock-Eyed Optimist.” Eventually, the solo “Bright Canary Yellow” was excised, and “A Cock-Eyed Optimist” stood alone.

“Bright Canary Yellow” is different from, and inferior to, “A Cock-Eyed Optimist” in one very important way; the former is about the setting and Nellie’s (and, in at least the early version, de Becque’s) response to it. The first verse is, “The sky is a bright canary yellow / And the sea is a robin’s egg blue. / It makes you wish, / When you fall asleep, / You will dream about the view.” The second verse continues in a similar vein, noting that the view makes Nellie wish that reality was “As lovely as it looks.” The words perfectly fit the rather wistful melody, which mostly moves in thirds but also exploits occasional chromatic characteristics, sometimes over diminished harmonies. But the lyrics are a repetition of what Nellie has already spoken -- “Gosh, it’s beautiful here. Just look at that yellow sky.” -- and they tell us nothing about Nellie. Even the repeated and indecisive-sounding thirds in the melody seem wrong for this seemingly straightforward character.

Retaining the opening image, Hammerstein wrote lyrics for “A Cock-Eyed Optimist,” a new song that dispenses with the description and proceeds directly to revealing Nellie’s personality to the audience. She begins with the words, “When the sky is a bright canary yellow / I forget ev’ry cloud I’ve ever seen -- / So they call me a cockeyed optimist, / Immature and incurably green.” The song

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11Oscar Hammerstein II, “Bright Canary Yellow,” in the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box marked “South Pacific.”


13Rodgers and Hammerstein, 15–16.
is integral to letting us know Nellie; the lyrics are straightforward, unadorned, and completely in the vocabulary of the unaffected nurse from Arkansas, and Rodgers’s diatonic and largely conjunct melody for the new song perfectly matches them. In short, no words are wasted, and a subtle musical characterization is offered.

In four more lines of dialogue, we learn that Nellie, unlike de Becque, is not running from anything. She thinks that she doing the opposite -- running to discover the world and noting, in a statement important to later developments, that, “I wanted to meet different kinds of people and find out if I like them better [than people in Little Rock].”14 De Becque offers Nellie some cognac, and as he pours it, Rodgers and Hammerstein create a memorable effect by having the two characters sing alternating soliloquies.

Rodgers and Hammerstein established the stylistic convention of soliloquies for principal characters in each of their earlier shows. Jud’s “Lonely Room” in Oklahoma! is the first example in a Rodgers and Hammerstein show of how powerful a contemplative solo can be. After his humiliation by Curly in the preceding scene and song (“Poor Jud Is Daid”), Jud pours out his venomous sexual desire and frustration in an intense and disturbing soliloquy, eventually making up his mind to pursue Laurey at any cost. It is one of the best moments in the show, in part because it is unexpected. In Carousel, the lengthy (approximately eight minutes) soliloquy for Billy Bigelow is a turning point in the show. Learning that his wife is pregnant, Billy contemplates several scenarios before arriving at the conclusion that he must join his friend in a hold-up in order to get money for his unborn child; this action results in his death. And in Allegro, Joe Taylor’s long-suffering nurse Emily sings “The Gentleman is a Dope,” a

14Hammerstein and Logan, 276.
consideration of her feelings for Taylor, while trying to hail a cab. The use of a soliloquy, in other words, was already a common Rodgers and Hammerstein technique.

“Twin Soliloquies,” as the duo called their alternating soliloquies for two characters, was without precedent, however. The source of the number is in Michener’s story “Our Heroine.” Sitting in a pavilion on de Becque’s plantation, Nellie says to herself, “I shall marry this man. This shall be my life from now on. This hillside shall be my home.”15 Compare this with Nellie’s first lyrics in “Twin Soliloquies”: “Wonder how I’d feel, / Living on a hillside, / Looking on an ocean, / Beautiful and still.”16 Nellie’s matter-of-fact statements become questions in the score, but the focus of those questions is the same as that of the statements in the story -- the hillside, the beauty, the possibility, or even probability, of a life there. Michener’s de Becque then muses, “This is what I have been waiting for. . . . Who ever thought a fresh, smiling girl like this would climb up my hill? It was worth waiting for.”17 This is quite close to Hammerstein’s lyric, “This is what I need, / This is what I’ve longed for, / Someone young and smiling / Climbing up my hill.”18 The two characters continue to sing alternately, each thinking of the obstacles in the way of their relationship but at the same time trying to look past them.

The two-measure introduction to the number suggests the locale that, to Nellie, is exotic but strangely welcoming. After a sustained tonic D-major chord in the lower strings, we hear a descending three-tone motive (C#-B-A) beginning on the upper leading tone. The major-seventh relation between the sustained

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15Michener, Tales, 130.
16Rodgers and Hammerstein, 20.
17Michener, Tales, 130.
18Rodgers and Hammerstein, 20.
tonic and the leading tone of the melodic motive is not unrelated to the initial
gesture of “Bali Ha’i,” which consists of an octave leap and a descending minor
second. In “Twin Soliloquies,” however, the melody is completely diatonic,
suggesting a contrast between American and European diatonicism and the
island environment, which is expressed in terms of chromaticism or dissonance.
(Of course, as the leading tone of the D major scale, the C# is diatonic; it is the
unstable major-seventh relation that gives it a sense of chromatic tension before
the prolonged conjunct descent to the dominant. The third pitch in the opening
gesture of “Bali Ha’i” is a raised subdominant, which creates a tritone with the
tonic chord that accompanies it and, through this chromaticism, creates a sense of
the “exotic” quality of the setting.) The one-measure motive is continuously
repeated throughout the first twenty-two measures of the number, although the
tonal center shifts several times.

In the twenty-third measure, Rodgers matches the change of mood in
Hammerstein’s lyrics. From the contemplative, the lyrics move to the nervous;
Nellie sings, “Wonder why I feel / Jittery and jumpy! / I am like a schoolgirl, /
Waiting for a dance.”19 The key changes to A major at this point, although a root
position tonic sonority is withheld until the final cadence in the penultimate
measure. Instead, the passage begins over a tonic six-four chord, the dominant E
repeated in an eighth-note “murky bass” figure for fourteen measures. The third
measure, in which Nellie confesses her nervousness, exploits the harmony of a
VIIb9 chord under a dotted rhythmic gesture in the melody (“jittery and jumpy”);
the harmony finds its way back to the tonic (although still in second inversion)
through a half-diminished vii chord. The eight-bar pattern is repeated for de
Becque, and the number ends on a perfect authentic cadence.

19Rodgers and Hammerstein, 21.
Originally, “Twin Soliloquies” came to a rather abrupt end, dialogue taking over and moving into de Becque’s solo, “Some Enchanted Evening.” Director Joshua Logan, however, writes that he was not satisfied with the transition and worked with arranger/pianist Trude Rittman during rehearsals to find an alternative transition. Logan notes the following about the problem and its solution:

This [“Twin Soliloquies”] was the moment when for me the show became great. But the song stopped too quickly; the music had to continue to strengthen the passionate, almost sexual, feeling. Trude provided the thrilling continuation later.20

What the German-born Rittman provided was the one truly operatic moment of the score.

In the score, the musical passage is titled “Unspoken Thoughts,” and it provides the subtext for the action. After his final sung thoughts in “Twin Soliloquies,” de Becque, who has been pouring brandy into two glasses, hands one to Nellie. Unaccustomed to the large snifter, Nellie watches de Becque as he lifts the glass to his lips and drinks from it; she does the same. The script describes the remaining action as follows:

As they drink, the music rises to great ecstatic heights. One is made aware that in this simple act of two people who are falling in love, each drinking brandy, there are turbulent thoughts and feelings going on in their hearts and brains.21

This use of the orchestra to express subtext is the invention of Logan and Rittman, of course, and we must be careful not to ascribe to Rodgers the creative role of Wagnerian music-dramatist. Logan describes his personal desire for orchestral subtext as part of his overall concept for the production, calling it “the


21Hammerstein and Logan, 278.
use of music under the dramatic pantomime for changes of thought . . .”

To achieve this, he worked with Rittman, who had arranged dance and incidental music for the earlier Rodgers and Hammerstein shows. Rittman, notes Logan, “would create passages based on Dick’s themes, to illuminate thoughts and feelings.” As he thought out where he wanted these passages to occur, remembers Logan, he realized he was creating an “operatic form” for the musical. “Unspoken Thoughts” stands out as the most successful (and operatic) of Logan and Rittman’s attempts at psychological underscoring -- the “operatic form” of *South Pacific* is largely in Logan’s imagination -- and its power creates one of the most memorable musical moments in the show, a moment inspired by, but not created by, Rodgers. (We should note that in his biography of Hammerstein, Hugh Fordin comments that, “The use of leit-motifs in musical plays -- an innovation by Jerry Kern in *Show Boat* -- was here brought to full development by [orchestrator] Russell Bennett and Trude Rittman.” He makes no mention of Logan’s contribution to this element of the show, which may have grown in relation to the director’s hindsight.) This demonstration of the intimate

\[\text{22 Logan, 283.}\]
\[\text{23 Ibid., 284.}\]
\[\text{24 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{25 Another successful example -- the use of the music to “My Girl Back Home” when we learn of Cable’s death -- lost all its effect when the song was cut from the show. The music remains in the score under this scene, however.}\]
collaborative process involved in the creation of a musical reminds us of Joseph Swain’s observation that, “Musical composition is not by nature a collaborative enterprise, but in the theater it must be . . .”\textsuperscript{27}

“Unspoken Thoughts” consists of three repetitions of the first three measures of the “Twin Soliloquies” melody in an harmonically unstable setting, followed by a six-measure coda; it expresses exactly what the passage’s title suggests and the stage directions describe: complex and wordless thoughts that grow out of the preceding (sung) musical number and then transcend it. The harmony first establishes the tonic; three measures later, the melody is repeated on the same pitches (beginning on A), but the harmony suggests a whole-tone scale beginning on G; three measures later, the harmony moves to a D\# half-diminished seventh chord in first inversion; finally, the harmony moves through the lowered major supertonic with a major seventh (B\textsubscript{b}-D-F-A) to the half-diminished supertonic chord, after which it reaches the tonic and ends with a perfect authentic cadence. The combination of the slow crescendo, the insistent repetition of the melodic motive, and the changing harmonic background reflect both the turbulence and the ecstasy mentioned in the script.

After this dramatic moment, the dialogue continues in subdued tones. De Becque describes life on the island, as if trying to entice Nellie into sharing it; he then comments that, although they just met two weeks earlier, “one must speak and act quickly even . . . if it seems almost foolish to be so quick.”\textsuperscript{28} (This idea anticipates a song for de Becque, eventually cut, later in act 1.\textsuperscript{29} ) Referring to


\textsuperscript{28}Hammerstein and Logan, 278.

\textsuperscript{29}See Chapter Five.
their chance encounter at the Officers’ Club, de Becque sings the famous song “Some Enchanted Evening,” an extended lyrical moment that demonstrates Rodgers’s mastery of form.

The overall form of “Some Enchanted Evening” is standard AABA thirty-two-bar song form, what musicologist Graham Wood refers to as “lyric binary.” Because I use Wood’s classifications of Rodgers’s song forms throughout the rest of this study, I should introduce them at this point. Wood has created a typology of song forms used by Rodgers through *Oklahoma!* The two principal forms are lyric binary form (AABA, with the first two A sections acting as antecedent - consequent) and what Wood calls parallel period form (ABAC or ABAB’, with the A sections acting as antecedent and the B and / or C sections acting as consequents); these classifications are represented by Wood as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(measures)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parallel Period Form</strong></td>
<td>32 bars (A8 + B8&lt;sub&gt;HC&lt;/sub&gt; A8 + C8&lt;sub&gt;PAC&lt;/sub&gt;)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lyric Binary Form</strong></td>
<td>32 bars (A8 + A8 + B8&lt;sub&gt;HC&lt;/sub&gt; A8&lt;sub&gt;PAC&lt;/sub&gt;)&lt;sup&gt;31&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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Many songs have “expanded limbs,” meaning that one or more sections may be longer than usual or that a coda is added (as in “Some Enchanted Evening,” as we shall observe); Wood lists other variants on the two principal forms, and we shall refer to them as we encounter them in *South Pacific*.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid. 136. Wood’s complete discussion of these forms is on pages 74-163 of his dissertation.
While “Some Enchanted Evening” demonstrates lyric binary form, it also demonstrates what Wood calls a “macro chorus,” meaning a larger-than-usual chorus exploiting small-part forms within its larger sections. In other words, while “Some Enchanted Evening” is, overall, an AABA lyric binary form, the first two A sections create a parallel period. This cross-pollination of forms creates an expansive fifty-six bar chorus (plus seven-bar coda). The extended structure is appropriate because it is natural for de Becque; this is a believable way for a middle-aged Frenchman who reads Proust and Anatole France to reveal emotions that he has long waited to express to someone. We learn that de Becque is romantic, passionate, and deeply interested in Nellie. (The semi-advanced state of courtship was foreshadowed in the discarded first set of stage directions for the opening; the children parodied the couple they watched through the window. Without that introduction, however, we are left with a few lines of exposition, just before the song, telling us that Nellie and de Becque met two weeks previously, with de Becque adding that “ . . . it seems almost foolish to be so quick.”32) The expansive character of the music was also well-suited for the glorious bass voice of Ezio Pinza.

The first two A sections of the song demonstrate parallel period form in several ways. First, the initial sixteen-bar section (the first A) is the antecedent phrase and the second sixteen-bar section (the second A) is the consequent; this creates a thirty-two measure parallel period chorus. Second, what Wood terms the “textual / emotional contour”33 of the parallel period chorus is present. This contour is demonstrated as follows:

32Hammerstein and Logan, 278.

33Wood, 116.
“Some Enchanted Evening” demonstrates this plan. The first eight measures -- the first quatrain of the lyric -- expresses the primary idea of the song, which is that “Some enchanted evening / You may see a stranger, / . . . / Across a crowded room.” The second eight measures build on this idea, noting that “you know . . . somewhere you’ll see her again and again.” The third section -- the antecedent phrase of the second A section -- offers a new perspective of the moment (“You may hear her laughing / Across a crowded room”) to the same music as the first eight measures, and the fourth section confirms that the stranger is not going to retain that status for long -- “The sound of her laughter will sing in your dreams.”

This thirty-two bar section is followed by the bridge, or B section, which is only eight measures long. The lyrics contemplate the situation, asking if there is any possible explanation for it. Then the song repeats the A section, generating another parallel period chorus; the lyrics recall the earlier A sections, using the image of “some enchanted evening” and the “crowded room,” but concluding with the urgent advice to “fly to her side, / And make her your own.” The song ends with a repeat (coda) of the bridge material, sung to the words, “Once you have found her / Never let her go!”

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34 Wood, 116.

35 Rodgers and Hammerstein, 23. The remaining quotes from the song are from the score; “Some Enchanted Evening” is on pages 23 - 27. The opening melodic gesture recalls the opening gesture of “With a Song in My Heart,” an earlier Rodgers song. (This relation is also noted by Wood.)
However, reference to the form of “Some Enchanted Evening” as solely Rodgers’s contribution is risky. Since Hammerstein wrote the lyrics before Rodgers composed the music, Hammerstein deserves credit for expanding the form of the song. This is supported by comments that Rodgers made about Hammerstein’s ability with regards to song form. Discussing their method of working apart, with the lyrics written first, Rodgers notes that, “It . . . offered me the opportunity to break away -- even more than I had in the recent past -- from the generally accepted ‘AABA’ thirty-two-bar song construction,” suggesting that Rodgers got clear indications of musical form from the lyrics he received from Hammerstein. Rodgers credits this, at least in part, to Hammerstein’s having “a superb sense of form” even though he was not a musician. “He knew everything about the architecture of a song -- its foundation, structure, embellishments . . .”

In the version of the script that opened on Broadway, “Some Enchanted Evening” is followed by a short speech in which de Becque, after acknowledging the age difference between Nellie and himself, mentions the possibility of having children with Nellie. After referring generally to Nellie as his “true love” in the song, he specifically refers to their future together (and the probability of his dying before their children would be grown). After explaining to Nellie why he killed a man in France during his youth, he asks her to think about his proposal -- although he does not use that word -- and, as she leaves, she agrees.

At this point the children enter, referring to de Becque as “Papa.” We now know something that Nellie does not. Only at the end of the act does she learn that de Becque has children, and that knowledge will create one of the

36 Rodgers, 220.
37 Rodgers, 221.
principal conflicts in the plot. As de Becque and the children together reprise “Dites-moi,” they exit and the scene segues to 1, 2.

Originally, the scene continued differently after “Some Enchanted Evening,” and it continued for a much longer time after Nellie’s exit. This continuation, eventually excised, reveals a fascinating moment in the evolution of South Pacific. A draft in the Hammerstein collection reveals that, at least in the early stages of writing, the scene was much longer than when the show opened. This lengthy draft, which is unmentioned in any of the Rodgers and Hammerstein literature, demonstrates a completely different approach to a major plot element -- Cable’s mission to spy on the activities of the Japanese fleet -- and it features a principal character who, by the time the show opened on Broadway, had become a very minor one. As I shall demonstrate, this addition dilutes the personal focus of the scene as well as the thematic emphasis on racial tension. Finally, the sketch contains the completed lyrics for a song never set to music, one that deals with a social issue eventually excised from the play. We shall consider this early version of the scene in some detail.

Let us recall the character Bill Harbison, who was important in Michener’s book. Introduced in the story “An Officer and a Gentleman,” Harbison is a twenty-three year old social snob from Albuquerque, married to a Vassar graduate and lucratively employed by her wealthy father in an unspecified profession. Unpromoted, he is disappointed in the Navy because, writes Michener, “he was getting nowhere and he had given up a good life in Albuquerque to do so.”38 He condescends to date several nurses, including Nellie, despite being married and contemptuous of their inferior social status. We later learn that, when battle seemed imminent for Harbison, he pulled strings and got transferred back to the United States. In Michener’s book, the officer and gentleman is transformed

38Michener, Tales, 61.
into a cad and a coward, his disappointment in the Navy reflected by increased
drinking and physical deterioration.

As we have seen in the notes Hammerstein made when he first read
Michener’s book, he regularly notes Harbison’s appearances. Perhaps the most
important note for our present discussion indicates Hammerstein’s initial idea to
link Nellie and Harbison with Nellie and de Becque, an idea that he explores a
bit in the draft we are about to examine. His other comments -- noting Harbison’s
deterioration and Nellie’s success with de Becque, or simply mentioning the
character’s appearance in a story -- suggest that he saw the character as one
worth exploring and developing. Hammerstein’s problem with exploiting
Harbison in *South Pacific* is that Harbison’s link with Nellie occurs before her
link to de Becque. Hammerstein couldn’t use Michener’s exposition about
Harbison because it would have meant adding too much preliminary story to the
musical, so he instead creates a bit of social satire, as we shall see.

Hammerstein’s draft for the continuation of 1, 1 begins after “Some
Enchanted Evening.” This is indicated by the stage direction, “Emile and Nellie,
awakened rudely, turn quickly . . . ,” which is similar enough to the stage
direction in the published script -- “Nellie and Emile turn as if awakened from a
dream” -- to suggest that they refer to the same moment in the scene. The cause
for Emile and Nellie’s return to reality is the arrival of Commander Bill Harbison
and Lieutenant Joe Cable.

In the discarded draft, Nellie immediately says hello to Bill as the two men
enter. When de Becque tries to introduce her to Cable, the lieutenant calls her by

39See above, Chapter Three, page 107.

40Oscar Hammerstein II, sketch for Act One, scene one. In the Oscar Hammerstein II
Collection, Library of Congress. Box “CORRES South Pacific (2). 1,1, 11.

41Hammerstein and Logan, 280.
name. Harbison responds, “never taking his eyes off Nellie,” that he wasn’t aware that Nellie and de Becque “knew each other . . . so well.” After some small talk, Nellie begins to exit. Before she is off, Harbison calls after her, asking her to remember him to “that 4F back in Arkansas -- if you ever write to him again.” Nellie responds, “And remember me to your poor wife back in Detroit, will you?” Harbison retorts that he’ll do that, “Unable to keep the sharpness out his voice . . .”

After Nellie and de Becque exit -- he is escorting her to her jeep -- Harbison tells Cable that he had been “making pretty good time” with Nellie until she found out that he was married, after which she “froze” on him. After observing that he thinks Nellie has begun a relationship with de Becque to spite him (Harbison), the subject changes to the top secret mission that Cable is planning. In a page and a half of dialogue, we have learned that Harbison is a cad and that he and Nellie have a past but, seemingly, no future. This is as much a “link” as Hammerstein makes between the two relationships, although one other tense moment between Nellie and Harbison will show up later in act 1, in the first rehearsal script.

Hammerstein now takes the scene, and Harbison, in a direction that is entirely his own creation. Whereas Michener made Harbison distasteful, flawed by condescending snobbery coupled with a lack of character, Hammerstein instead makes him more of a comic character. While Hammerstein clearly indicates Harbison’s edginess with Nellie, the ensuing scene and song are comic -- Cable

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42 Hammerstein, sketch for act 1, scene 1.1, 1.11.

43 Ibid. Note that Hammerstein has moved Harbison’s home from the Southwest -- Albuquerque -- to Detroit, which is in the Midwest.

44 Hammerstein, sketch for Act 1, scene 1.1, 1.12.

45 See Chapter Five.
and de Becque make fun of Harbison even as they goad him on -- and the lyrics are satirical like nothing else in the score. The object of Hammerstein’s satire is not found in Michener, however. Instead of developing Harbison’s bitterness, disappointment, and cowardice, all important elements of his character in *Tales of the South Pacific*, Hammerstein models him after the young corporate executive, or what sociologist William H. Whyte, Jr. later, in his influential book of the same name, called “the organization man.”

After complaining that Europe’s lack of “organizational know-how” is what dragged the United States into the war, Harbison observes that, “This war is going to be won by the American executive type. . . . I mean the men who run our big industrial firms.” While we never learn what business Harbison is in, we quickly learn that he believes that the young executive is the future hope of the world, not just the war. After a short introduction in which he describes Woodcock Nordlinger (W.N.), his boss and mentor, he goes on to quote W. N. in the first chorus of the song:

“The hope of the world
Is the well-trained, wide-awake,
Bright, young executive of to-day.
The cream of the crop
Is the clean-cut, confident,
Bright, young executive of to-day.
No feather-brained romancer,
Before he’ll give an answer,
The facts and all the figures he’ll survey!

So bet all you can borrow

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47Hammerstein, sketch for act 1, scene 1. 1, 1, 13.

48Ibid.
On the man of to-morrow --
The bright, young executive of today!”⁴⁹

These lyrics for the chorus scan as a 6/8 march, which emphasizes Harbison’s zeal for the furthering of the young executive’s role in wartime and post-war American society.

The chorus is followed by a trio, or patter section, in which Harbison, at the provoking of Cable and de Becque, lists other professions and their shortcomings (farmers are “rubes,” artists are “screwballs,” teachers are “boobs,” etc.), ending with a comment that laborers are all “money-mad.” Joe sings the next chorus, and Hammerstein notes that “Bill [Harbison] is completely carried away and unaware of any satirical intent.”⁵⁰ Cable refers to the young executive lunching on the top floor of the RCA building -- the exclusive Rainbow Room -- and to having inside information on business trends (“His luncheon conversation / Is filled with information: / ‘The Ford Coupe’ he’ll say, ‘is here to stay!’”⁵¹) The number ends with another trio and chorus, at the completion of which Cable and Emile, upstage of Harbison, “start to laugh behind Bill’s back.”⁵²

After the number, Cable explains the mission to Harbison and de Becque; the latter seems familiar with it already. Showing Harbison a map, Cable points to an island behind Japanese lines and asks Harbison how he would like to get reports on movements of the Japanese fleet from that vantage point. Harbison is enthusiastic until he is told that he cannot go on the mission. “Every white man

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⁴⁹Hammerstein, sketch for act 1, scene 1. 1, 1, 15. The complete lyrics for this previously unknown song are found in Appendix C.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.
added to the party would make greater the danger,” comments de Becque.53 While Harbison is suspicious of de Becque, he eagerly offers ideas and asks Cable a critical question: “What are your plans for getting back?”54 Cable reveals that there is no plan for his return, a point we shall return to below.

At this point, de Becque decides that he should accompany Cable on the mission, noting that he thinks the two of them could last longer than Cable alone. “I am nearly as clever in the jungle as the natives,” notes de Becque, “and I am a good shot.”55 Cable tries to argue against this plan, but de Becque insists.

Before he returns to the base, Harbison humorously demonstrates a kind of cultural insensitivity -- or ignorance -- that Michener’s Harbison would not have revealed even if he was guilty of it. In his farewell, he rather boorishly shows his ignorance of French. “Say, which is right,” he asks de Becque about the pronunciation of the title *monsieur*, “m’seer or m’shoor?”56 He then gives de Becque his approval, noting that de Becque is “okay.” With this tag to the scene, Hammerstein expands Harbison’s comic status into that of a buffoonish ugly American. As Cable leaves with Harbison, de Becque asks them both not to mention the top secret mission to Nellie.

After Cable and Harbison leave, the scene ends much as in the later version, but without the return of the children. The stage directions indicate that de Becque sings, “*as in soliloquy*,” three lines of “Some Enchanted Evening,” after which he picks up the demi-tasse from which Nellie had drunk her coffee. “Lipstick,” he comments, just as in the final version. “Three lumps of sugar!

53Hammerstein, sketch for act 1, scene 1. 1, 1, 19.

54Ibid.

55Ibid.

56Ibid.
Three lumps of sugar in a demi-tasse!” As he laughs softly to himself, the scene ends at the point where, in the later version, de Becque’s children enter.

The draft contains several indications of having been written early in the musical’s evolution. First of all, Hammerstein uses the title “Commandant” for an officer in the United States Army. Nearly all accounts of *South Pacific* recall how Hammerstein got stuck during the initial stages of writing because of his lack of familiarity with military terms and behavior. Director Joshua Logan, who had served in World War Two and was familiar with military language and practice, came to visit, and the two men improvised much of the dialogue that became the first draft of the show’s book. (Later sketches, drafts, and revisions were written by Hammerstein and appear in his collection.) The term “commandant” would not have been used in anything written post-Logan. Furthermore, the plan of Cable’s mission is not thought out enough to sound like an actual military maneuver; Hammerstein is decidedly out of his element in the section of the scene where Cable presents the plan, whereas later sketches reveal greater familiarity with military jargon and protocol.

The second indication of the draft’s early creation is de Becque’s decision to go on the mission, which is drawn from Michener’s story “The Cave” (where it involves neither Cable, de Becque, nor Harbison). Eventually, Hammerstein realizes that de Becque’s decision would be much more effective dramatically if it occurs where it offers more psychological insight into the character. As we shall see in Chapter Six, this decision becomes the turning point in de Becque’s character. It is made in a scene of great emotional turmoil -- the turning point of

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57 Hammerstein, sketch for act 1, scene 1. 1, 1, 1, 23. Emphasis added.

58 See Fordin, 263; Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 116. (Mordden notes that, “Chugging through the first scene . . . Hammerstein hit the necessary points . . . Then came the first scene among the sailors, and Hammerstein stopped dead.” As the sketch for 1, 1 demonstrates, he hardly stopped; he simply did not go anywhere new or important with the scene.)
the entire work -- and at one point in the compositional process de Becque’s
decision was followed by the march-like reprise of a song from Act One. De
Becque’s decision in 1-1 to accompany Cable indicates that Hammerstein had not
clearly thought through the direction of his plot or the emotional conflicts of his
characters.

Finally, the shallowness of the characters and the vaguely drawn mission
indicate that the draft was an early idea. Nothing in the Harbison scene comes
close to the important intimate insight into characters and thematic issues that
dominate the earlier part of the scene, and while the musical number is a
somewhat clever parody of a social type (albeit one more common after the war
than during it), it has nothing to do with the plot and is only minimally concerned
with the character of Harbison: he is describing others, “types” who have
nothing to do with what happens in South Pacific. Harbison, especially in the
way that Hammerstein recreates him, has no place in a scene of soliloquies and
psychological insight; his broad comic portrayal works against the scene instead
of adding anything to it.

Other problems exist with the scene apart from its superficial
characterization and its badly timed introduction of plot information (the mission).
After the romantic and intimate musical scene preceding it, the draft provides
Nellie with an anticlimactic and even unflattering exit. Without the second part of
the scene, Nellie tells de Becque that she will think about his proposal. The stage
directions read, “They are silent and motionless for a moment. Then she turns
suddenly and walks off very quickly.” De Becque is left alone briefly, after
which his children enter and the scene ends with a picture of loving domesticity.
Having Nellie stay until Harbison enters destroys the mood of the previous scene.
At first ignoring Harbison, she tosses him a sarcastic comment as she exits,

59Hammerstein and Logan, 280.
provoking Harbison’s critical comments about his previous relationship with her.
As we shall see below, the original characterization of Nellie was not without
blemishes -- her racism, for instance. is more blatantly drawn in several earlier
drafts of the play and seems to have been deliberately toned down by the
creators -- but this caustic and, to the audience, unmotivated banter is
unnecessary and not particularly revealing of any important characteristic in
Nellie.

Harbison’s song deserves closer inspection, not just for what it is lacking,
but for what is there. We have very few examples of Hammerstein lyrics that were
not set to music -- few lyrics, in other words, that we can read without the typical
musical associations and therefore experience solely as lyrics -- and this reveals to
us how much technical information Hammerstein provides in a lyric. The verse
implies the 6/8 meter that the chorus reinforces, the first “when” occurring on an
anacrusis:

(beat) 6 / 1-2 3 4 5 6 / 1-2 3 4-5 6 / 1-2 3 4 5 6 / 1 etc.
6/8 When / I get out of a / un-i-form Will / I be happy a-/ gain etc.

While the verse could also imply 4/4 time, the effect is still that of a march:

(beat) 4 / 1 2 3 + 4 / 1 2 3 4 / 1 2 3 + 4 / 1
4/4 When / I get out of a / un-i-form Will / I be hap-py a-/ gain etc.

(It could also scan in 3/4 time, but the nature of the lyric and the character of the
following chorus suggest that triple time would be less appropriate than a march
meter.) The second quatrain has an added line that introduces W. N. (Harbison’s
boss) as the speaker of the chorus. Reading these lines, Rodgers would have
known immediately what form and possibly what style Hammerstein was thinking
of when he shaped the song; he also has an indication of meter(s).
The chorus, while telling us nothing particular about Harbison or the plot, nonetheless is full of information about Hammerstein’s subject -- the rising young post-war executive. For instance, the juxtaposition of “no feather-brained romancer” with someone who will survey “the facts and all the figures . . .” reflects the scientific (or psuedo-scientific) bias of Whyte’s “organization man.” (In the ensuing patter section, Harbison comments that “. . . nobody counts as much / As the modern executive type / With the organizational touch!”)[60]

Whyte sums up the attraction of this bias towards a scientific basis for understanding and modifying behavior -- what becomes known as social engineering -- as follows: “If man would only apply the discipline of the natural sciences to the study of man, then only a sufficient expenditure of time, money, and thought would separate him from the good society.”[61] What Harbison -- and Hammerstein -- are describing is the prototype of “presidents or vice-presidents plus those men in middle management who have so demonstrably gone ahead of their contemporaries as to indicate that they are likely to keep on going,” as Whyte observes.[62] Contemplating the organization man’s notion that “the group is superior to the individual,”[63] Whyte notes not only that this group is

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60 Hammerstein, sketch for act 1, scene 1, 1, 1, 15. Emphasis added.

61 Whyte, 25.

62 Ibid., 143.

63 Ibid., 47
“the most visible manifestation of their generation’s values,” but that they are “the interchangeables of our society and they accept the role with understanding. They are all . . . in the same boat.”

Hammerstein’s interest in this phenomenon and his inclination to spoof it are unsurprising. Allegro, the musical preceding South Pacific, is about Dr. Joe Taylor, a physician who, after achieving greater success for his social and corporate skills than for his considerable abilities to heal, retreats from the corporate world and starts a family practice in his home town. Joe Taylor is not a “bright young executive,” but his experiences with corporate organizations reveal a similar world, and he rejects it. In the end, Taylor does not conform to a corporate-determined image of success; he is a man who eventually remains true to his core values, which are also the core values of Hammerstein’s America -- personal integrity, a sense of community as well as a strong individual identity, and a desire to help others, among them. These values were challenged in post-war America, and Harbison presented Hammerstein with the opportunity to comment on this situation.

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64Ibid., 64.
65Ibid., 394-95. An important work on this topic came out even before Whyte’s. C. Wright Mills’s White Collar was a scathing indictment of the conformity inflicted on post-war American white collar workers. See C. Wright Mills, White Collar: The American Middle Class (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956). The number of books that came out in 1950-55 critical of this increasingly disturbing trend in corporate America suggest that Hammerstein was expressing an idea very much current at the time he was writing South Pacific but that had not yet been popularly voiced.

66As David Halberstam explains, “This new threat to the human spirit came not from poverty but from affluence, bigness, and corporate indifference from bland jobs through which the corporation subtly and often unconsciously subdued and corrupted the human spirit. As they moved into white-collar jobs, more and more people felt . . . that they had less control over their lives. Here was a world where individuality seemed to be threatened and the price of success might well be ever greater conformity. In The Fifties (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 528-29.
What Harbison did not present was a good reason for his inclusion as a principal character in *South Pacific*, and he was destined to be cut. As Hammerstein’s social criticism becomes more pointed and serious, moreover, the broad caricature of Harbison seems increasingly out of place. While he might have fit in, as he says, with “a bunch of live-wires like the men in our firm,” Harbison does not fit in a musical full of people who express their inner feelings in soliloquies. Because Hammerstein found no convincing “link” between Nellie / Harbison and Nellie / de Becque, and because Harbison presented no opportunity for development without extensive additions to the plot, cutting the scene was an early and logical choice.

Why, then, devote so much attention to it? First, it supplies tangible proof of an issue that has been largely anecdotal in the literature. As mentioned above, the story of Hammerstein’s problems with the book in the early stages of its creation are generally known. What was not known, however, was any of the problematic passages Hammerstein wrote before Logan appeared. This draft gives concrete evidence of the problem(s). Second, we see that, early on, Hammerstein planned to include social criticism in the musical. To be sure, the plots of “Fo’ Dolla” and “Our Heroine” already dealt with racial intolerance, and Hammerstein was prepared to express this issue in his book for *South Pacific*. This draft also demonstrates Hammerstein’s willingness to take on social issues not in Michener, and his focus on the rising young executive -- “a bunch of young men, coming

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67Hammerstein, sketch for act 1, scene 1, 1, 1, 14.
up -- fellows being trained to move into top executive jobs later . . .,” as Harbison says68 -- anticipates social criticism in the 1950s.69

Finally, the draft provides us with a completed lyric by Hammerstein that was unknown before this time. While the depiction of the young executive is not relevant to the plot of South Pacific, it nonetheless is more than adequately executed, and it demonstrates Hammerstein’s facility even in a dramatic situation that is less than motivated.

Conclusion

Few elements are as critical to any musical as its opening. Rodgers and Hammerstein began their collaboration with one of the most discussed openings in the history of the American musical (Oklahoma!), and they followed that with unprecedented opening sequences for Carousel and Allegro. We should not be surprised that they spent much time and care fashioning the opening of their fourth show as well.

Changes made in 1, 1 reveal Rodgers and Hammerstein’s narrowing of focus, including a re-prioritization of materials from their source, Michener’s Tales of the South Pacific. The pruning and reworking of book, lyrics, and score for 1-1, which notably features soliloquies and passages of orchestral subtext, results in a model musical scene that provides a clear preliminary vision of where South Pacific is going. The materials of future conflict are in place by scene’s end, and the personal nature of the narrative is satisfactorily demonstrated. Study of the

68Hammerstein, sketch for Act One, scene one, 1-1-13.

69See David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, The Lonely Crowd (1989; abridged and revised edition, New Haven: Yale Note Bene, 2001). Halberstam notes that this book is about “the inner-directed and outer-directed new Americans, who increasingly seemed to take their signals, their values, and even their ambitions not from their own desires and beliefs but from a received value system around them.” Halberstam, 533.
sketches for the first half of the scene give us insight into how this goal is accomplished.

The excision of the somewhat superficial treatment of Harbison, including the dramatically premature decision of de Becque to accompany Cable on the secret mission, further demonstrates Rodgers and Hammerstein’s narrowing of focus, as well as their concern that all elements of the show relate specifically to character and plot. Cutting this part of the scene, and keeping the focus on Nellie and de Becque (and the potential problem of de Becque’s children), again reminds us that Rodgers and Hammerstein are interested in the depiction of characters whose complex psychological conflicts provide the main plot interest of the musical. Anything that does not contribute to this aspect of the work is dispensible, as we have seen.
CHAPTER 5

EVOLVING MUSICAL CHARACTERIZATION

In the preceding chapter, I demonstrated how Rodgers and Hammerstein explore the psychological states of characters in *South Pacific* through using appropriate song and lyric styles within a scene -- that is, by finding the characters’ musical voices. As the plot of *South Pacific* unfolds, the psychological state of each character changes, necessitating a subsequent change in each character’s musical expression. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s sensitivity to, and execution of, the changing musico-dramatic needs of complex characters is one of their major accomplishments in *South Pacific*. In this chapter, by focusing on Nellie, de Becque, and Cable, we observe how the deployment of varied musical styles reflects and expresses the changing psychological state of each character, as well as changes in the characters’ relationships.

We have already seen some of this technique at work in the first scene. Nellie’s exterior voice in 1, 1, expressed in “Cock-Eyed Optimist,” is different from her interior voice, heard in “Twin Soliloquies.” Further into the act, we see several more sophisticated examples of evolving musical characterization. In particular, Nellie’s musical voice in 1, 7 is a careful stylistic construction. Here, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s exploitation of varied musical styles is deft. They begin with a pastiche of then-popular song styles (“I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-a My Hair”), which reflects Nellie’s straightforward unaffectedness observed in 1, 1. Next, they have Nellie adopt de Becque’s musical voice for a
reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” which indicates her deepening emotional involvement and provides an important stylistic transition of particular musico-dramatic power and subtlety. Finally, they combine elements of the preceding songs in the exuberant waltz that ends the scene (“I’m In Love With a Wonderful Guy”). Such use of disparate yet inter-related musical styles for representing psychological changes in a character is rare in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s work.

We also noted de Becque’s interior and exterior voices in 1, 1, from the motivic soliloquies to the expansive (fifty-two bars, plus a seven-bar coda) and lyrical “Some Enchanted Evening.” Sketches inform us that de Becque’s musical voice in 1, 7 was not easily created, and the eventual use of a reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” a choice made for several reasons discussed below, creates a musical moment as critical for Nellie’s development as for de Becque’s. At the end of the act, moreover, we find de Becque assuming Nellie’s musical voice and creating an interesting interplay of stylistic elements that sets up the act’s dramatic climax, after which de Becque returns to his own musical style to close the act.

Joe Cable presents a third example of how a change in musical voice was necessitated by the changing emotional and psychological state of a character. Cable is initially a character who would not express himself in song at all: he is a rigid, by-the-book Lieutenant by way of Princeton, and his early music consists of a short contemplative reprise of Bloody Mary’s “Bali Ha’i”; but his physical and emotional relationship with Liat, Mary’s teenage daughter, releases his latent lyricism. Cable’s musical style is represented by “Younger Than Springtime,” which serves as Cable’s emotional, physical, and spiritual
The emotional conflict created by his relationship with Liat, and by his growing self-awareness, however, creates the need for another, and contrasting, musical vocabulary in act 2.

These foci offer three examples of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s intricate manipulation of musical styles in the service of musico-dramatic characterization. The success of this technique provides *South Pacific* with a detailed richness of emotional and psychological insight unusual in musicals of the time. Sketches at various stages in the development of this technique reveal the difficulty Rodgers and Hammerstein had in achieving this success and, like the sketches for 1, 1, offer information about how the team developed such subtle and convincing characterizations.¹ We have already seen how Rodgers and Hammerstein established interrelated musical voices for characters; now we see how, due to the increasing emotional and psychological challenges of the plot, the voices of Nellie, de Becque, and Cable must, and do, change.

**Nellie and de Becque’s Changing Musical Voices**

In its final form, as in the sketches, 1, 7 is tripartite. The central pivotal section of the final version is a reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening” for de Becque and Nellie. It is surrounded by two solos for Nellie, the first of which --

¹Nellie and de Becque’s musico-dramatic evolution again shows us how Rodgers and Hammerstein limited the focus of a scene in order to develop the two principal characters with greater clarity. In the early stages of 1, 7, for example, when it was still the fourth scene of the script, several characters important to Michener’s book are featured at length, sometimes suggesting the potential for developing relationships; as Rodgers and Hammerstein develop the scene, however, they diminish these characters’ importance and add to the musical material for Nellie and de Becque, who, especially Nellie, are the focus of the scene. (This recalls the excision of the Bill Harbison material from 1, 1.) The sharpened focus on Nellie and de Becque allows a deeper exploration of those characters, and that in turn intensifies the need for a more specific, and changing, musical voice for each character. The development of the songs in the scene becomes increasingly reflective of this changing need.
“I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-A My Hair” — reveals her somewhat unconvincing eagerness to end the relationship with de Becque. This first solo is representative of what we might call the “Nellie style,” a popular-song-informed musical expression with lyrics rich in American slang that suggests a naive American expressing herself in a stylistic vocabulary familiar to her.

Following Nellie’s first solo is a mid-scene encounter with de Becque and the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” here sung by de Becque and Nellie (although the two do not yet sing at the same time). The inclusion of Nellie in this number is an integral moment in the show as it allows her to sing two key phrases indicating the depth of her feelings for de Becque. This moment, as we see below, is critical to Nellie’s development, as it provides an informative new musical voice for her and signifies her emotional growth.

After this encounter, and the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” Nellie’s second song — “I’m In Love With a Wonderful Guy” — expresses her exuberance and exhibits many characteristics of the “Nellie style,” especially in the unpretentious vernacular lyrics. But the grand waltz setting, with its long phrases and extended structure, examined below, suggests the additional influence of de Becque’s European sensibility.

The careful structure of the scene, with its contrasting songs at either end, reflects Nellie’s changing reactions to her feelings for de Becque and his growing presence in her consciousness. The more troubling aspects of those feelings are apparent only later, at the end of the act, when she learns that Jerome and Ngana are de Becque’s children by a Polynesian woman. While the overall character of 1, 7 is rather lighthearted, Nellie’s initial, and rather glib, decision to end the relationship in the first part of the scene foreshadows her actually doing so later in the act.
Let us step back and go through the entire scene in some detail. At the beginning of the scene, which takes place on the beach at a shower run by Luther Billis, Nellie tells her fellow nurses, in reference to her romance with de Becque, that she is “going to break it off clean before it’s too late,” adding that she really does not know much about him. At that point she launches into “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-A My Hair,” an entertaining number whose playfulness suggests that Nellie is not very serious about terminating the affair.

The song is one of two in the show -- “Honey Bun,” discussed in Chapter Six, is the other -- that purposely imitates American popular songs and represents what we have called the “Nellie style.” “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-A My Hair” actually exploits several song styles, each popular during the war and each with a distinct form. The first section of the song is in lyric binary form (AABA) with extended limbs -- the first two A sections are extended by one measure of orchestral fill, while the bridge and final A section are each eight measures, resulting in a thirty-four bar song. All three A sections feature an opening musical and lyrical phrase that is repeated three times (“I’m gonna wash

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2Hammerstein and Logan, 310.

3The idea of doing a musical number based on an on-stage shampoo was Mary Martin’s. While the details of the gimmick’s conception vary -- director Joshua Logan puts himself in the middle of it, recalling that Martin told him about it first, while Fordin’s version in the Hammerstein biography suggests that Martin first mentioned it to her husband, who subsequently mentioned it to Logan and then directly to Rodgers and Hammerstein -- the idea nonetheless sparked the idea for a memorable musical number that caught the public’s fancy and received much notice in the popular press. It has subsequently been used for advertising purposes. (See Logan 1976, 310, and Fordin 1977 268-69.)
that man right outa my hair;” “I’m gonna wave that man right outa my arms;” and a repeat of the first phrase, respectively) and is followed each time by the phrase “and send him on his way.” 4

The opening phrase swings, the dotted rhythms of the pick-up (“I’m gonna”) and the phrase “outa my hair” creating a tension with the ascending quarter note bass line beneath them; the quarter notes of the melody following the pick up (“wash that man right”) anticipate the second set of dotted rhythms and push the vocal line forward. At the eighth bar, the trumpets and winds play a two-bar syncopated figure that further emphasizes the rhythmic contrast. This tension, combined with the three repetitions of the opening phrase, suggests a big band arrangement from the 1930s or 1940s. The bridge (“Don’t try to patch it up, / Tear it up, tear it up!” etc.5) sounds straighter -- the ascending bass line is replaced by a repeated tonic-dominant pattern (in the dominant key, as is customary in the bridge), although the melody retains the dotted eighth-sixteenth note pattern. The final eight bars, which repeat the lyrics of the opening eight bars, bring back the inference of swing. This is further reinforced in the last eight measures of the chorus by the addition of a string obbligato consisting of dotted eighths and sixteenths.

At the end of the first chorus, Rodgers brings forth another style. Changing the meter to six-eight, the half note of the previous cut time equalling the dotted quarter of the new meter, he suggests a slow blues. The vocal line moves in quarter notes and eighth notes, emphasizing a lowered leading tone on the downbeat of the second measure. The lyrics also suggest a blues, or torch

4Rodgers and Hammerstein, 60-61. I quote the lyrics by section. While this may seem tedious at first, it will allow an easier comparison with the placement of the sketch lyrics, which are referred to in the discussion immediately following. For a comparative graphic display of the lyrics in their final form and in the sketch discussed below, see Appendix D.

5Ibid.
song: “If the man don’t understand you, / If you fly on sep’rate beams, / Waste no time! / Make a change, / Ride that man right off your range, / Rub him outa the roll call / And drum him outa your dreams.”\(^6\) The harmony of this section is a variant of the tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant harmony characteristic of blues, and the twelve-bar structure of the section further indicates blues form, although Rodgers adds a two-bar tag (“oh ho!”) at the end of the blues section before repeating it. The blues reference is evident, if not literal.\(^7\)

After the repeat of the blues section (“If you laugh at diff’rent comics,”\(^8\) etc.), this time without the two-bar tag, Rodgers retains the principal melodic material but switches to a quick two-four meter (“You can’t light a fire when the wood’s all wet!”\(^9\)\). This section is sixteen bars long, and at its end Nellie sings an eight-bar recitative-like passage (“You can’t put back a petal when it falls from a flower, / Or sweeten up a feller when he starts turning sour!”) that is followed by a six-bar transition in six-eight meter (“Oh, no! / Oh, no!”\(^10\)\).

At this point, the orchestra plays a dance section that is again very evocative of a big band arrangement. (The score supports this by giving the instructions “ride it,” a term connected with swing era performance practice.\(^11\))

\(^6\)Rodgers and Hammerstein, 62-63.

\(^7\)The inferred blues style -- the torch song aspect of this section -- would be known to Nellie from popular (and film) music of the time. Being from Arkansas, she might also have heard some rural blues. But Nellie’s “blues vocabulary” is decidedly in the popular music vein.

\(^8\)Rodgers and Hammerstein, 63-64.

\(^9\)Rodgers and Hammerstein, 64.

\(^10\)Rodgers and Hammerstein, 65.

The ninth through twelfth bars of this dance music emphasize a repeated syncopated riff figure that makes the swing feeling unmistakable. The dance continues for twenty-four more bars (thirty-six bars total), at which time Rodgers returns to the six-eight blues style for the return of the voices (“If his eyes get dull and fishy”\textsuperscript{12}). Finally, after Nellie has completed washing and rinsing her hair, she again sings the opening chorus, this time to the more conclusive lyrics, “I went and washed that man right out-a my hair,” and the number reaches a big finish.\textsuperscript{13}

At the end of the number, and while the other nurses exit, Nellie, with a towel still over her head, begins an ad lib reprise while de Becque enters and catches her unaware. A nurse named Dinah, who has stayed behind, does a short comic bit to provide cover while the embarrassed Nellie puts on a wrap. After her business, Dinah exits. This exit marks the beginning of the second section of 1, 7.

The ensuing dialogue comments on Rodgers’s use of then-popular song styles. De Becque asks, “That song . . . is it a new American song?” Nellie responds, “It’s an American type song. We were kind of putting in our own words.” De Becque further comments, “It is strange with your American songs. In all of them one is either desirous to get rid of one’s lover, or one weeps for a man one cannot have.”\textsuperscript{14} This dialogue also emphasizes the diegetic aspect of the number. “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-A My Hair” is not an interior monologue or a soliloquy. It is Nellie’s spontaneous and improvisatory expression of her feelings through the vocabulary of popular song, a vocabulary that, as we learned in the previous scene, is familiar to her. (In 1, 6, seeking advice

\textsuperscript{12}Rodgers and Hammerstein, 67.

\textsuperscript{13}Rodgers and Hammerstein, 60-69.

\textsuperscript{14}Hammerstein and Logan, 313.
from Cable about her growing attachment to de Becque, Nellie asks, “Do you agree with [my] Mother about people having things in common? For instance, if the man likes symphony music and the girl likes Dinah Shore -- and he reads Marcel Proust and she doesn’t read anything . . . Well, what do you think?”

This spontaneous popular song reference also indicates the superficial aspect of Nellie’s feelings at this point of the story. We have already seen and heard in 1, 1 how Rodgers and Hammerstein express complex emotions, and the bouncy, carefree nature of this song is antithetical to that practice.

When De Becque then invites Nellie to dinner the following Friday night, she declines; but when he explains his reason for inviting her -- “I want you to know more about me . . . how I live and think . . .” -- Nellie remembers her promise to Captain Brackett, made in 1, 5, to find out more about de Becque. Begun as an amusing “interrogation” scene -- Hammerstein suggests that “Nellie paces like a cross-examiner” -- the ensuing conversation becomes more serious when Nellie inquires as to why de Becque killed a man in France. (She learns of this in 1, 1, but does not ask de Becque for details until 1, 7.) De Becque responds in a long speech, assuring Nellie that the man was a bully who had been terrorizing the town and that the death had been accidental and in self defense: after the man threatened to kill de Becque for speaking out against him, they fought and, as de Becque describes it, “I knocked him to the ground. And when

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15 Hammerstein and Logan, 308.

16 Hammerstein and Logan, 314.

17 Ibid.
he fell, his head struck a stone and . . .”18 He continues, telling her that he immediately joined the first cargo boat he found and, by chance, wound up on the island where they now stand.19

Following his speech, over underscoring of “Some Enchanted Evening,” de Becque asks Nellie to marry him. He notes the precious nature of the limited time they have together, a reference to the difference in their ages as well as to the war raging around them. Recalling his request in 1, 1, de Becque asks Nellie if she has been thinking about his earlier proposal. She says yes, and begins the reprise with what the score indicates is an introduction, or verse, to “Some Enchanted Evening.” This is the first and only appearance of this music in the score, and its intimate yet uncomplicated diatonic character recalls Nellie’s music from 1, 1; it also provides thoughtful observations concerning de Becque’s proposal, their differences, and his powerful presence in her life. It is as different from “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-A My Hair” as it could be, and we know that Nellie is singing from her emotional center. The introduction leads directly into the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” which is begun by de Becque.

Within the reprise, Nellie first sings the questioning, “Who can explain it? / Who can tell you why?” and then, after de Becque’s continuation of the chorus, the climactic, “Once you have found him / Never let him go,” after which de Becque repeats those two lines to end the song. Earlier, “Some Enchanted Evening” represented de Becque’s lyrical and romantic style but seemed outside

18Hammerstein and Logan, 315.

19We shall return to this speech and earlier versions of it when we discuss the sketches, below; its various versions suggest that Hammerstein was searching for de Becque’s dramatic, as well as his musical, voice. I mention it here because, by sharing this personal information with Nellie, de Becque is encouraging a closeness that leads to the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” the central element of the scene.
Nellie’s emotional range. Having Nellie now join in the chorus of this expansive song indicates that she has grown, and that her feelings now match his. The best way for her to show this is by borrowing de Becque’s style and singing his music. This is the moment in the work when Nellie reveals to us that she is much more than the “hick” from Arkansas she thinks she is; this is the moment in the work when Nellie becomes its emotional core. Yet the brevity and diatonicism of the phrases she sings -- the simplest sections of the songs -- also suggest her straightforward character and guileless approach to her feelings, which, we now see, are as deep as they are simply expressed. In short, Rodgers and Hammerstein found the perfect musical voice for Nellie in relation to de Becque, and her lack of sophistication no longer can be mistaken for a lack of intelligence or sensitivity. By demonstrating Nellie’s musical voice before and after the reprise, the contrasting musical end-pieces that surround it contribute to its effect.

Later, at the end of the first act, and in a reversal of the stylistic transferrance in 1, 7, de Becque assumes Nellie’s musical voice to tease her and to demonstrate a more playful side of his love for her. We see de Becque’s relaxed informality and his increasing comfort with Nellie’s vernacular musical vocabulary. The two of them harmonize on “Cock-Eyed Optimist,” the only time in the score they actually sing together; and de Becque offers an amusing version of “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-a My Hair,” imitating Nellie at the point in the song where he surprised her earlier. This stylistic bonding between the two sets up the dramatic confrontation that ends the act and, when he is left alone, de Becque returns to his own musical voice and again sings the end of “Some Enchanted Evening.” The end of the act would be far less powerful if we had not already experienced the growing stylistic closeness of the two characters. (Nellie, too, returns to de Becque’s musical voice -- “Some Enchanted Evening,” to be exact -- in act 2 after she learns that he has gone on the mission.
and that Cable has died. Speaking to him, although he is not present, she begs him to return so that she can tell him she realizes the error of her thinking; she then sings the final part of the song, stopping before “Once you have found him” to entreat, “Don’t die, Emile.”

After the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” de Becque kisses Nellie and asks if she will come to dinner on Friday. Transfixed, she agrees, as underscoring begins. Her response -- a distant “Uh-huh” -- breaks the serious romantic mood with a gently comic gesture. As de Becque exits, Rodgers and Hammerstein continue the change in mood by having a girl giggle offstage; another offstage nurse comments, “Well, she sure washed him out of her hair!” and the mood shift is complete. The music segues into a brisk waltz vamp in C minor, and the third section of the scene, as well as the third musical number, has begun.

The third section of 1, 7 consists solely of the musical number “I’m in Love With a Wonderful Guy.” This number reminds us of Nellie’s characteristic ebullience and straightforward self-expression, and it is, like the introduction to the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” the perfect musical voice for Nellie at this moment in the plot. If the preceding section of the scene demonstrates that Nellie is not always “cock-eyed,” as she suggested in 1, 1, this number stresses that she is nonetheless an optimist and, at least at this moment, without emotional complication. To demonstrate this aspect of her character, Rodgers and Hammerstein create an irrepressible waltz, one of three important waltzes in the score. (“You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” and “This Nearly Was Mine” are the other two; both are discussed below.) A waltz is the perfect dance type to

20Hammerstein and Logan, 359. Andrea Most suggests that by not finishing the phrase, Nellie indicates “that she [Nellie] understands her new subservient position in the relationship.” (Most, 336) To me, this seems a misreading of the exchange of musical voices that has preceded this moment.
express Nellie’s spontaneous exuberance, and its old-world connotation suggests the influence of de Becque; his musical voice has crept into her style, although she articulates it in her own way.

The song is a soliloquy. Left alone on stage, with only the memory of her moments with de Becque and the heckling of the nurses to inspire her, Nellie is given the opportunity to express inner thoughts as profound, if more exuberant, than those soliloquized in 1, 1. This is a critical juncture in the development of Nellie’s character, and the number that Rodgers and Hammerstein create for her, in its final form, is the perfect vehicle for her self-expression.

The introduction, at eighty-four bars, is unusually long, even considering the brisk three-four meter. It is organized in an AA BB C form, with orchestral interludes between the A sections. The chorus, a lyric binary form, also features expanded sections of sixteen bars, as opposed to the customary eight, with the final A section exploiting an extended limb (the repeated phrase “I’m in love”). This macro-form, to use Graham Wood’s term, suggests an expansive character -- Nellie’s feelings at this point, while uncomplicated, are enthusiastically larger-than-life. It also recalls the macro-form of “Some Enchanted Evening,” again suggesting that de Becque’s style has merged into Nellie’s stylistic consciousness. The extended limb, in which the other nurses come onstage and join Nellie in the repetition of “I’m in love” -- “each obviously thinking of her own wonderful guy,” suggests Hammerstein\(^2\) -- provides a convincing finale. The structure of the song can be broken down as follows:

\(^2\)Hammerstein and Logan, 318.
### Introduction / Verse

| 4 bars | -> | 8 bars (1-8) | -> | 8 bars (9-16) | -> | 8 bars (17-24) | -> |
| intro / vamp | A (vocal) | (orchestral) | A (vocal) | [“I expect”] | interlude | [“And they’ll say”] |
| (orchestral) | [“I expect”] | interlude | [“And they’ll say”] |

| 8 bars (25-32) | -> | 16 bars (33-40) | -> | 16 bars (41-48) | -> |
| A (vocal) | B (vocal) | ant/con | B (vocal) | ant/con |
| (orchestral interlude) | [“Fearlessly I’ll face”] | [“Flatly I’ll stand”] |

| 16 bars (49-56) | || |
| C (vocal) | [“I’m not ashamed”] |

#### Chorus

| 16 bars(57-64) | 16 bars(65-72) | 16 bars (73-80) | 20 bars (81-100) |
| A | A | B | A + extended limb |
| [“I’m as corny”] | [“I am in”] | [“I’m as trite”] | [“I’m as corny”] |

Rodgers’s opening melody for the verse is almost relentless. Covering the interval of a minor third, it begins with a pick-up on the tonic C, immediately climbs stepwise to E-flat (which is sung on the downbeat), then drops back to the C, repeating the tonic three times; this motive is sung four successive times, after which the orchestra plays a four-bar interlude and a repeat of the four-bar vamp. The motive and its repetition perfectly capture the defiant nature of Nellie’s lyrics, which are a response to off-stage taunting of her fellow nurses: “I expect everyone / Of my crowd to make fun / Of my proud protestations of faith in romance.”

The harmony switches to the major mode in the B section, when Nellie positively states her stance: “Fearlessly I’ll face them and argue their doubts away, / . . . ‘Love is a grand and a beautiful thing!’” At this point, the melody takes on a more expressive quality, the antecedent phrase climbing

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22 Rodgers and Hammerstein, 78.

23 Rodgers and Hammerstein, 79.
stepwise from the tonic to the submediant, emphasizing the raised dominant on
the downbeat of the fifth measure (of the B section). The consequent phrase ends
on a leading tone sung over a tonic chord, providing an expressive setting for the
word “spring.” In the second B section, beginning with the word “flatly,” the
antecedent phrase is identical, and the consequent phrase ends on the tonic. The
C section, in which Nellie sets up the lyrics of the chorus by admitting that she is
not afraid to express her feelings, ends on a dominant chord that leads directly
into the chorus, which is in C major.

The melody for the chorus is a lovely representation of Nellie’s musical
voice. In the first four measures of the A section, the fifth scale degree is repeated
for three measures (an upper neighbor appears on the penultimate beat of m. 3),
after which a descending tonic triad is outlined. The second four measures imitate
this pattern in the dominant, but the melody descends only a third, rather than a
triad, in the eighth measure. The second eight measures of the A section are built
on an ascending tonic scale and its subsequent descent to the supertonic,
omitting only the fourth scale degree in the descent. The melody is diatonic,
uncomplicated, and gives the impression of artlessness. The second A section is
melodically identical to the first; only the final harmony, which leads to the key of
the B-flat (the key of the first eight bars of the bridge), is different. The melody
also is perfect for the lyric, which speaks in Nellie’s unaffected vernacular.
“Corny,” “normal” “conventional” are vague adjectives made specific by the
phrases that follow them: “corny as Kansas in August, “ “normal as blueberry
pie,” a “conventional dither” and a “conventional star in my eye.”24

The melody of the B section is equally ingenuous. It is three statements of
a simple six-note motive, the first of which ends with a descending minor third (F-
F-F-G-F-D), the second with an ascending minor third (D-D-D-E-flat-D-F), and the

24Rodgers and Hammerstein 1949, 81-82.
third statement of which consists of a repetition of the first. This pattern is repeated beginning on G, ending with an exuberant leap up a major third to a B, the third of the dominant seven chord that anticipates the song’s final A section. The lyrics exploit words such as “trite,” “cliché,” “bright,” and, perhaps the one word that might not be found in the vocabulary of the unsophisticated Nellie, “bromidic.”

The final A section is a repeat of the the first two A sections through the thirteenth measure, at which point Nellie repeats the words “I’m in love” five times, the fifth time closing the phrase with “a wonderful guy.” The extension of the final A section adds to the giddy spontaneity of the number, and when Nellie is finished singing it, the orchestra repeats the first three sections of the song as she dances. After the dance, Nellie sings the final A section, and the other nurses enter to join her. To build towards a climactic finish, Rodgers and Hammerstein have the nurses sing the entire final extended limb three times, each time overlapping the words “a wonderful” with the next set of “I’m in love.” In an encore of the final A section, which immediately follows the number, the final phrase is extended even more, and the phrase “I’m in love” is sung seventeen times before finally ending with “a wonderful guy.” Few, if any, other moments in the musical theater repertory so explicitly capture the thoughtless exuberance of first love, and few numbers are more perfectly suited to the characters who sing them. With the dizzying repetitions of the encore, 1, 7 ends.

The scene did not immediately demonstrate such musico-dramatic finesse, however. An earlier version of the scene included, in place of the eventual reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” a solo for de Becque titled “Now Is The Time.”

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25Rodgers and Hammerstein, 82. While “bromidic” is probably a word that Nellie would not know, it is nonetheless perfect for describing the rest of her word choices and images. The commonplace character of her self-description -- especially “a cliché coming true” -- is bromidic.
While the music for this number survives in the printed score as underscoring in act 2, it appears nowhere in the final version of *South Pacific* as a vocal solo for de Becque. While several authors have noted the presence of the number as a solo for de Becque in Act Two during out-of-town tryouts\(^{26}\) -- the 2002 London revival used it in that spot as well\(^{27}\) -- my own investigation of several previously unexamined sources reveals that the act 2 statement was a reprise, and that “Now Is the Time” was a separate complete number in act 1. Apart from clarifying the history of the number, this discovery is important because the presence of the number in act 1 reveals a misstep in the development of de Becque; its failure reinforces the ultimate choice of “Some Enchanted Evening” for the central point of the scene. Further, several other lyric sketches indicate false starts for a number in the place assumed first by “Now Is the Time” and later by “Some Enchanted Evening.” This evolution indicates the creators’ search for the appropriate voice for de Becque at this point in the scene.

This search is demonstrated by sketches and drafts in the Hammerstein collection, which indicate several stages in the development of 1, 7 and demonstrate how Rodgers and Hammerstein reworked the scene until it became a stylistic metaphor of changes in the characters’ thoughts and feelings. (The sketches for Cable’s first musical scene, discussed below, provide similar insight into an evolving musical characterization.) The first sketch, actually a draft of the entire scene, refers to the scene as 1, 4.\(^{28}\) As we shall see, this first draft is probably

\(^{26}\) The presence of “Now Is the Time” in act 2 is discussed in Chapter Six.


\(^{28}\) Oscar Hammerstein II, Sketch for act 1, scene 4 [*sic*], in the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C., Box marked “South Pacific.”
from the same approximate time as the draft for 1, 1, discussed in the previous chapter. The second sketch, which is from a later stage in the show’s development, is for the central section of 1, 7 and contains “Now Is the Time.”

Hammerstein’s earliest extant draft for the scene reveals, as does the draft for 1, 1 discussed in the preceding chapter, that he began with a broader vision of the scene. Characters emphasized in Michener are also emphasized in the sketch, and the result is an unfocused opening to what later became a compactly written scene. In particular, the idea for a hair-washing number, while present in the sketch, is undeveloped. Until the decision was made for the number to serve as a stylistic indicator for Nellie’s character, in other words, it apparently was based on little more than a staging gimmick.

Originally, Hammerstein opened the scene (1, 4 at this point) with another reference to the now-defunct romance of Nellie and Harbison. In front of a primitive home-made shower bath bearing the legend “Billis Bath Club,” Harbison is drilling the nurses in exercises, and Hammerstein notes that, “He is especially tough on Nellie, as a rejected boyfriend would be.” After the exercises, and a terse exchange with Nellie referring to an earlier scene in which Nellie was interrogated by Captain Brackett about de Becque, Harbison exits with several of the nurses. Nellie comments to Dinah Culbert, identified in the stage directions as Nellie’s best friend, that Harbison is “a stuffed shirt.” Dinah responds that she likes the way his shirt is stuffed, adding, “I’m looking for an officer who isn’t too much of a gentleman.”

In Michener’s story “An Officer and a Gentleman,” Dinah is Harbison’s first emotional victim, although she is aware of his character flaws throughout her experience with him. Michener also establishes her as Nellie’s best friend. This latter role is also emphasized in “Our Heroine,” the story of Nellie’s romance with de Becque, and the three-page dialogue scene that Hammerstein writes for the
two women after Harbison’s exit implies that Hammerstein had initially planned to retain Dinah’s importance to Nellie and to the storyline. The relationship that Hammerstein establishes between the two women is relaxed and intimate but ultimately unnecessary for any pertinent character or plot development. They apply sun-tan lotion to each other as they discuss their relationships with their mothers and Nellie’s mixed feelings about de Becque.

Nellie begins washing her hair, but in this early version the music does not begin as she does so. Instead, the dialogue between Nellie and Dinah continues. Here, while Nellie expresses her doubt -- “Besides, I don’t know the man! Don’t know his history or his present. He could be -- well, anything. Just anything!” -- it is Dinah who suggests that Nellie terminate the relationship. “Know what I think?” she begins. “If there’s any doubt in your mind, call it off -- and call it off today! The longer you wait, the harder it’ll be to do. That’s what I think.” Nellie agrees, at which point Dinah begins a musical number that becomes a duet, not the solo with chorus it is in its final version.

Quoting the advice of the cook from her high school, Dinah begins speaking, and shifts into singing, the following lyrics:

If you ask the man right
And his answer ain’t right,
If he don’t look right
And he don’t love right,
Then somethin’ must be wrong.
And nothin’ can be wronger than a man who’s wrong!

These lines are not in the final lyrics of “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-a My Hair,” but Dinah’s next lyrics are, with slight variation:

29Ibid.

30Ibid.

31Ibid.
If the man don’t understand you,
If you fly on separate beams,
Waste no time
Makin’ a change,
Ride the man right off your range,
Rub him outa the roll call
And drum him outa your dreams!32

These are the lyrics that introduce the blues section of the finished number. Here, however, Hammerstein refers to them as the refrain. (The one revision involves the third and fourth lines -- one thought in the sketch; in the final lyric, two independent thoughts in the final version: “Waste no time! / Make a change, . . .”33)

Dinah continues with the lyrics that are later used in the blues section following the dance section (“If his eyes get dull and fishy . . .”), and Nellie joins her for the third through seventh lines of the septet. After another solo section for Dinah, Nellie sings another solo section retained in the final version. Setting up this section, Hammerstein describes Nellie as “ad libbing a chant that fits the spirit of Dinah’s refrain,” indicating that the spontaneous character of the song was a part of his initial concept for it. Nellie’s ad lib consists of the lyrics for what, in the later version, ends up as the bridge of the first chorus: “Don’t try to patch it up / Tear it up, tear it up!”34 After this, Hammerstein notes that, “Nellie, in the home stretch of her shampoo now ad libs an appropriate extension . . . ,” which is the familiar “I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair . . .”35 The number then continues in its familiar form, the second eight measures stating, “I’m gonna wave that man right outa my arms,” followed by previous lyrics that now, and in the

32Ibid.

33Rodgers and Hammerstein, 63.

34Rodgers and Hammerstein, 61. Also Hammerstein, Sketch for 1, 4.

35Hammerstein, Sketch for 1, 4.
final version, serve as the bridge (“Don’t try to patch it up, / Tear it up, tear it up”). The final eight bars use lyrics not in the final version -- “I’m gonna live that man right outa my life. . .”36 Instead of ending the number with a big finish and following it with a reprise, Hammerstein has Nellie repeat the last eight bars as de Becque enters and catches her singing. As she realizes his presence, her voice dies off and the song fades out.

The musical number in this draft is more expressive of Nellie and Dinah’s friendship than it is of Nellie’s state of mind; unfortunately, this friendship is incidental to the plot, and while the earlier version of the song provides the excuse for an onstage shampoo, it indicates that Nellie’s ideas and feelings at this point are guided by Dinah, thus diverting the emotional focus away from Nellie. The need to redirect that focus seems apparent throughout -- Nellie is not convincing as the parrot of Dinah’s advice. Without a statement by Nellie that acknowledges and explains her feelings, the scene lacks the potential for emotional development and is static.

The draft moves smoothly from the unfinished number to dialogue. Nellie is embarrassed at being caught in her improvisation. Hammerstein describes her actions as follows:

She stands in the temporary protection of the shower box to collect her thoughts and what little dignity she can muster. Then she wraps her robe around her like an opera cloak and strides out boldly, to confront Emile, and carry off the situation as well as she can.37

De Becque asks Nellie for lunch later in the day, and Nellie refuses, quickly adding that she nonetheless would like to talk to him. She then asks if she can accompany him back to his car in order to continue the conversation, and they exit. Having Nellie and de Becque exit in order to have an important piece of

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36Ibid.

37Ibid.
dialogue further suggests that Hammerstein was uncomfortable with where he was taking this scene and the plot in general, especially when the dialogue that transpires during Nellie’s absence, which is about the pros and cons of Nellie breaking off the relationship, is inconsequential to the plot and to the development of Nellie’s -- or anyone else’s -- character.\textsuperscript{38} Placing the dialogue offstage also precludes any focus on Nellie’s changing state of mind; it renders her inexpressive of her feelings. The only place for a character with nothing to say, in other words, is in the wings. As we have surmised, only when Hammerstein realized that Nellie’s evolving emotions were the focus of the scene could he move her to the center of it, and only then could he and Rodgers musically execute their stylistic portrait.

When Nellie appears from offstage, however, her demeanor is not melancholy, which is what the nurses anticipated. Hammerstein indicates that “Nellie walks on slowly, in a trance -- but not a gloomy one. She looks beatifically spell-bound.”\textsuperscript{39} She reveals that she has not terminated the relationship and, after some teasing by the nurses, adds that “I’ve got a feeling I’m all set.”\textsuperscript{40} At this point, she begins the verse to “I’m in Love With a Wonderful Guy.”

The final version of the scene’s middle section is far more successful because Nellie and de Becque remain onstage to have their conversation. Instead of Nellie exiting in one frame of mind -- anxious to break off the relationship -- and returning in another -- convinced that it should continue -- we see her

\textsuperscript{38}In the course of this dialogue, we find the first reference to Nellie’s taste in popular music that is later worked into 1, 6. Dinah says, “It’s like she says -- She might want to play a King Cole record. He likes symphonies. What’ll they do?” (Ibid. Emphasis in original.)

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid.
transformation. This is more satisfying because it allows us to experience the change in Nellie as it happens, and because we understand what motivates it. It also affords us the opportunity of hearing Nellie demonstrate the depth of her emotion in “Some Enchanted Evening.”

Hammerstein’s first version of the lyrics for “I’m in Love With a Wonderful Guy” are quite close to the final version. One important difference is that in the original version the nurses are onstage and participate in the entire number. We know this is how the number was presented when the show began previews, and that it did not go over as well with the audience as its creators had intended. Director Joshua Logan writes the following:

> It was not until the second week in Boston that I guessed what might be wrong with “Wonderful Guy:” it was the presence of the nurses that was killing the number. The song should be a soliloquy, with Mary’s [Nellie’s] intimate feelings revealed. But the lyric was written to be sung to others. Casually, I said to Oscar, “Too bad the song can’t be a soliloquy.” . . . Before the next performance Oscar had adjusted the lyric to eliminate “your” and substitute “theys,” and I restaged the scene with the girls exiting and Mary sitting on a box, down front, hugging the hat Emile had left and singing.

The transformation of “I’m In Love With a Wonderful Guy” into a soliloquy again reveals the creators of South Pacific eventually knowing how, and when, to emphasize the characters’ inner thoughts and feelings. Logan’s instincts were on the mark, and Hammerstein’s speedy transformation of the number into a soliloquy after Logan’s comment indicate that he knew this. These are indeed Nellie’s private utterances -- what Logan referred to as her “intimate feelings” -- and they are in an all-American vocabulary of clichés because that is her language. The images may be trite, but the feelings are not.

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41For a comparative graphic display of both sets of lyrics, see Appendix E.

42Logan, 294-95. Emphasis added. See also Fordin 1977, 280.
We move now to the central section of this scene, the dramatic point where de Becque’s character is developed as a preface to Nellie’s change of heart and change in musical style. In one of the discarded sketches for this section, we find an interesting version of de Becque’s speech explaining why he murdered a man in France, the action that ultimately led him to his island. Because this speech precedes the musical number, and because it reveals Hammerstein making important changes in the definition of de Becque’s character that prove consequential to the eventual musical choices (discussed below), we shall consider it before investigating “Now Is the Time.” Since, by the time this and a similar sketch were written, the scene had become 1, 7, we shall refer to these sketches as 1, 7-A and 1, 7-B. Both versions indicate what the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening” replaced. As noted above, this is an important find because it corrects much of the literature that mentions the song, “Now Is the Time.”

This speech for de Becque, and its changing versions, is an excellent example of Hammerstein’s transformation of the source material; it also demonstrates the modification of character that took place in this process. In Michener’s story “Our Heroine,” de Becque’s narrative of the killing is brief: in de Becque’s home town in France, a bully and a cheat was terrorizing the town; the townspeople thought he should die, and de Becque killed him. The principal difference is that in Michener’s version de Becque killed him with a knife in a purposeful, swift, and violent gesture. Most of de Becque’s story is about his subsequent hiding and his eventual choice of a final destination. In Michener’s version, the police know what happened but look the other way, waiting until de Becque is about to leave France before making a half-hearted effort to apprehend him.

In 1, 7-A, de Becque relates a different version of the story. Here, the man’s threat to de Becque is far more personal. Part of the speech follows:

Suddenly he was powerful. He could do anything . . . Suddenly there was no freedom anymore. I would not join his organization and he threatened to burn my father’s house. I went to the police: . . . they were on his side. One night I came home and our house was gone -- my father’s house and my father’s barn -- burned to the ground. So that night I found this man. We fought, and I killed him -- with my two hands around his throat.44

While de Becque actually kills the man in this version, Hammerstein has added a more personal motivation than any found in Michener. (The house and barn burnings, in fact, harken back to an incident described in Oklahoma!45 ) At the end of this speech, the stage directions indicate that de Becque “sees her looking at him, frightened.” De Becque reassures Nellie, “But I am no longer violent like this, Nellie. Do not be afraid of me.”46 No such reassurance is necessary in the final version, of course, as de Becque’s actions have been divested of any violent intent. As demonstrated above, in the final version, Hammerstein makes the man’s death an accident; after he threatens de Becque, they fight, and the man falls, hits his head on a stone, and dies. A swift premeditated act of violence in the original story has been transformed, first into an understandable act of revenge and finally into an accident.47

44Hammerstein, Sketch for 1, 7. Box marked “South Pacific,” The Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress. (1-7-A)


46Hammerstein, Sketch for 1,7. (1,7-A)

47The final version of the narrative also recalls Oklahoma! In the second act of that show, Jud attacks Curly with a knife; they fight, and in the course of the struggle, Jud falls on his own knife and subsequently dies.
This progressive lessening of the violence in de Becque’s narrative reveals several creative decisions. It demonstrates Hammerstein’s desire to de-emphasize de Becque’s ability to commit such an act, even if motivated by noble intent. It also, importantly, eliminates fear from the feelings that Nellie has for de Becque. At this key moment in the plot, when de Becque is winning Nellie over, and when she is making the transition from doubt to unconditional love for de Becque, the addition of fear to the emotional vista would obscure the scene’s focus. The pacified speech is more appropriate for the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” a highly romantic and gentle musical moment. The earlier version, with its more violent imagery, is a better set up for the long stirring crescendo of “Now Is the Time,” a number meant to induce decision and action.

The speech in 1, 7-A, however, has a large X drawn through it, indicating that it was rewritten before the rest of the scene was; and Nellie’s original response to de Becque’s speech, the reassuring, “I’m not afraid of you,” is also crossed out. Her alternate response, handwritten above the previous line, is, “Emile, our lives have been so different.” 48 She then asks de Becque why he wants to marry her. De Becque answers her question by stating, “I want to marry you because I do not see how I can live without you.” 49 Nellie asks how they can be certain of the future, to which de Becque replies, in what provides the segue into a musical number, “One cannot be sure. All one can do about the future is to hope. My hope comes from the happiness I feel now. I must respect such a feeling.” 50

48Ibid.

49Ibid. Originally, the line read, “I want to marry you because, at this time, I do not see how I can live without you.”

50Ibid.
The musical number that follows is “Now Is the Time,” a second number for de Becque. Whenever this number is mentioned in literature on *South Pacific*, it is mentioned as an act 2 number for de Becque, and, as we shall see in Chapter Six, it was indeed at one time an integral part of 2, 4. It was equally integral to 1, 7, however. The existence in the Hammerstein collection of several sets of lyrics for the song in each scene, as well as sketches and a complete piano-vocal version found in the Rodgers collection, suggest that the song presented challenges from the beginning, and which version occurred at any given stage in the evolution of the work is not always easy to discern. What would seem to be the final version of the lyrics, however -- the music remains unchanged throughout -- are those published in the collection *Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II* and found in the manuscript piano-vocal score in the Rodgers collection; those are also the lyrics found in 1, 7-A. The sketch 1, 7-B contains a variant of the song and will be discussed as well.

“Now is the time,” sings de Becque in 1, 7-A, “the time to live, / No other time is real.” One of the problems with the number is that after de Becque has stated this opening idea, he has nothing else to say. The rest of the lyric simply repeats the same idea. “Yesterday is gone, / Tomorrow is a guess, / Today you can see and feel,” de Becque continues. In addition to their repetitiveness, the lyrics falter through Hammerstein’s unconvincing imagery. For instance, Hammerstein next provides lovely, if largely irrelevant, images of feeling the sea wind and

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51See Logan 1976, 287; Fordin 1977, 279.


53Oscar Hammerstein, Sketch for 1, 7. (1, 7-A)

54Ibid.
smelling “the salt in the spray,” after which de Becque finishes the first chorus with another repetitive lyric, “Now is the time, / The time of your life, / The time of your life is today!” The trio of the song (the only reference to the central section as a trio is in Rodgers’s musical sketch for it ) continues with imagery from nature -- “heav’nly wine from an earth-born vine” and food “from a field made sweet by the sun and the rain in the sky” -- leading eventually to yet another statement of the song’s central idea, “You can conquer the future now!” The final chorus is more specific; in it, de Becque sings to Nellie, “Let your arms get rich on the gold of love / When the gold of love comes your way,” after which he repeats the last three lines of the first chorus.

The music for “Now Is the Time,” as well as the long three-part structure of the lyrics, suggests that the number was intended as another “big moment” for de Becque or, more specifically, Ezio Pinza. The song consists of two lyric binary choruses surrounding a sixteen plus four-bar trio (the four bars are an extended limb). Rodgers tinkers with the lyric binary form. After a four-bar introduction that establishes a flowing six-eight Andante in D major, he provides a standard eight-bar A section. After this, he repeats the accompaniment for another eight-

55Ibid.

56Ibid. In his discussion of South Pacific, Gerald Bordman cites Hammerstein’s occasionally repetitive lyrics as one of the show’s slight weaknesses. Although he was not including “Now Is the Time,” the criticism is especially applicable to this number. See Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theater: A Chronicle. third edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 622.

57A sketch for the trio section of “Now Is the Time” is in the Richard Rodgers Collection, Library of Congress, Box 16, Folder 18 (“Sketches”).

58Oscar Hammerstein II, Sketch for 1, 7. (1, 7-A)

59Richard Rodgers Collection, Library of Congress. Box 16, folder 10. The music for the chorus section is used, in its entirety, in the published score as underscoring and scene change music. See Rodgers and Hammerstein, South Pacific (score), “The Take Off, Scene 5,” 157-58.
bar A section -- the harmony remains intact -- but he alters the melody; nonetheless, the second eight measures function as the second A section. The first sixteen bars are followed by a contrasting eight-bar B section that end on a half-cadence, after which the A section is repeated. Yet again, Rodgers varies the A section, this time changing the melody of the first A section in the third bar to provide an extended ending, thus creating a thirteen-bar final A section. The extended sections recall the large-scale structure of “Some Enchanted Evening,” de Becque’s earlier solo.

The trio, as expected, supplies contrasting material. Its final measures feature a held note for de Becque while the accompaniment descends chromatically, all the while making a crescendo to a fortissimo and a ritard into the second, and final, chorus. This chorus, which is marked Allegro marcato, is now accompanied by march-like eighth notes on beats one, three, four, and six, and not by the flowing figure of the opening chorus. The fortissimo is maintained. The second chorus is fundamentally a repeat of the first chorus through the thirtieth bar, at which point the voice takes the upper octave and doubles the note values, adding six measures to the second chorus and a big finish to the song. While de Becque holds the final note, the orchestra plays a bar-and-a-half of repeated G-sharps -- the augmented subdominant -- that finally move first to the dominant and then to the tonic.

This discussion of “Now Is the Time” suggests several explanations for why the song was the wrong musical voice for de Becque at this moment in the action. To begin with, the song is unnecessary. De Becque says in two lines of dialogue everything the song says; just before the song, he says, “There are so few days in our life, Nellie. The time I have with you is precious to me.”60 “Now Is the Time” dilutes the direct emotional appeal of those lines with its somewhat

60Hammerstein and Logan, 315. Also Hammerstein Sketch for 1, 7. (1, 7-B) These lines are missing from 1, 7-A, but they are in both 1, 7-B and the final version of the script.
bombastic reiteration of them. Second, with the exception of the lines, “Let your arms get rich on the gold of love / When the gold of love comes your way,” the song is not specific to the focus of the scene. Instead, it is a rather generic paean to the notion of carpe diem, even though De Becque is not trying to get Nellie to seize the day. He is trying to convince her to marry him, and his argument demands a more specific emotional appeal to her acknowledged love for him. “Now Is the Time” does not coincide with the emotional subtext of the scene.

The musical character of the song itself is wrong for de Becque at this moment. While it begins with a gentle but moving six-eight rhythm, not unlike a barcarolle, it is slowly transformed into a much quicker march that builds to a fortissimo ending. The march element is far more appropriate for its use in the second act, as we shall see in Chapter Six, but here it completely disrupts the tone of the scene. It is a big number for the sake of a big number. The reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” on the other hand, which eventually, and perfectly, satisfies the musical needs of this moment, ends pianissimo, de Becque singing a high E in a seductive head voice. This suggests that “Now Is the Time” is literally the wrong musical voice for de Becque.

Finally, and perhaps most important, a big solo for de Becque in 1, 7 is wrong because the scene is about Nellie, not de Becque. Rodgers and Hammerstein seem to have realized this when they recreated the musico-dramatic center of the scene. Instead of a solo for de Beque, they give us a duet that begins with Nellie singing the new passage discussed above (“I’ve known you a few short weeks and yet . . .”). The incorporation of Nellie into the song “Some Enchanted Evening” is the perfect choice for this moment, as we also discovered above; a big musical number for de Becque, on the other hand, destroys the focus. The musical voice of this moment must be shared so that the audience can understand the changing dynamics between the two characters as well as the
change in Nellie’s convictions. Nothing in “Now Is the Time” suggests Nellie’s transition from “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-A My Hair” to “I’m In Love With a Wonderful Guy;” the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” with its added introduction, demonstrates that transformation with the clarity of the appropriate musical voice.

Before the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening” replaced “Now Is the Time,” however, one other option was considered. When tryouts began in New Haven on March 7, 1949 -- it stayed there until March 12 -- “Now Is the Time” was in the show. By the time the show opened in Boston on March 15, it was out of the second act but still in the first. At some point early in the Boston tryout, Rodgers and Hammerstein decided that “Now Is the Time” needed to be replaced in act 1 as well. They turned to a song that was originally intended for Allegro, their previous work for the stage. Titled “Will You Marry Me,” it was appropriate in style and in lyrical content. A gentle, sustained melody over a bass pattern moving in half notes, the music suggests a quiet persuasion rather than a call-to-arms. Hammerstein made a few adjustments to the lyrics, but they are scratched out on his sketch and the original lyrics are written in. His sketch for


62Ibid.

63The absence of “Now Is the Time” from act 2 is demonstrated by Hammerstein’s notes on the Boston dress rehearsal (March 15). He writes that, “Dell [conductor Salvatore Dell’Isola] should start the music sooner after Emile sings ‘Nearly Was Mine,’” which is the musical number that replaced “Now Is the Time” in act 2, scene 4. (See Chapter Six.) The presence of the song in act 1 is evidenced by the March 24 sketch for “Will You Marry Me,” discussed in this paragraph. Also see fn 63, below, for Josh Logan’s suggestion that this cut was made during the initial rehearsal process.

64The music for “Will You Marry Me?” can be found in the Richard Rodgers Collection, the Library of Congress, Box 1, folder 16.
the changes is dated March 24, which places it in the second week of the Boston tryout.65 The music for the song is much more appropriate to the mood of the scene. Either the song did not work dramatically or Ezio Pinza, who had already learned one new number (“This Nearly Was Mine”) in the tryout process, couldn’t learn another one fast enough.66 Either way, “Will You Marry Me?” did not go into the show and perhaps was not even rehearsed, and the reprise of “Some Enchanted Evening,” in which all the new material is Nellie’s except for the responses “It’s true” and “I do,” did.67

By the time South Pacific opened on Broadway, 1, 7 was yet another example of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical scene. The problems of finding the right musical voices had been solved, and the scene, with its balanced tripartite form and its refocused emphases, remains one of the great joys of the show. By the time Nellie has finished the joyous “I’m In Love With a Wonderful Guy,” the audience has seen and, perhaps more importantly, heard her emotional transformation in convincing musical and lyrical terms, and de Becque has convincingly retained his status as the object of her deepest feelings. Not a note of their music seems inappropriate.


66Logan notes in regard to the “Now Is the Time” replacement that Pinza “was frightened of [learning] anything new”. He also suggests that “This Nearly Was Mine” replaced the Act Two “Now Is the Time” during the initial rehearsal process. (See Logan 1976, 287.) William Hyland also reports, as did Lehman Engel to me in conversation in 1972, that Pinza did not read music. See William G. Hyland, Richard Rodgers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 182.

67In his book Rodgers and Hammerstein, Ethan Mordden suggests that “Will You Marry Me?” preceded “This Nearly Was Mine” in act 2. This makes no sense dramatically; Nellie is not even onstage when de Becque sings “This Nearly Was Mine.” (See Mordden 1992, 120.)
Lt. Joe Cable is the second male lead in the show, and his two numbers, one in each act, are masterful musical expressions of his changing character. His number in Act One, scene ten (1, 10), however, presented Rodgers and Hammerstein with one of their biggest challenges in finding the right musical voice for a character in a particular situation. Unlike the challenges of 1, 7, the struggle that resulted in the classic song “Younger Than Springtime” has been documented, although the accounts vary from source to source. Not all the missteps have been noted, however, and both the Rodgers and the Hammerstein collections contain material that make this journey a little easier to reconstruct. Only after we understand the struggle for, and attainment of, the right musical style for Cable in act 1 can we appreciate his contrasting musical utterance in Act Two. Indeed, Cable’s altered musical style in act 2 suggests a character change perhaps even greater than Nellie’s altered musical voice in 1, 7.

We learn early in the first act that Joe Cable is from Philadelphia and attended Princeton University. The exchange that offers this second piece of information is with Billis, and it reflects not only Cable’s somewhat patrician background, but his discomfort with it and the response of the enlisted men to it. When Billis asks Cable if he went to college, Cable hesitantly answers, “Er -- yes.” When Billis asks where, Cable is again elusive. “A place in New Jersey.” When Cable finally admits it was Princeton, Billis responds, “Oh. Folks got money, eh Lietenant? (He leers wisely.) Don’t be ashamed of it. We understand.” Cable’s upper class roots become even more problematic as his involvent in the plot develops.

68Hammerstein and Logan, 296.
Arriving on the island to finalize plans for a stealth mission to a nearby island, where he will survey Japanese fleet movement, Cable immediately encounters Bloody Mary. A small-time Tonkinese entrepreneur, who is discussed in detail in Chapters Six and Seven, Mary is smitten with Cable, referring to him as “a damn saxy man.” Her attraction to him seems to take on mystical proportions when she tells him of Bali Ha’i. “Bali Ha’i is your special island, Lootellan. I know! You listen! You hear island call to you. Listen!” At this point, she sings the song “Bali Ha’i,” one of the score’s most memorable songs.

While the island turns out to be a special island for Cable, as we shall see, Mary’s impressing that idea on Cable is as much salesmanship as her selling shrunken heads to sailors. We learn in 1, 10 that Mary has a beautiful young daughter on Bali Ha’i who she wants Cable to marry. When his mission is temporarily postponed, he takes a boat to Bali Ha’i with the opportunistic Billis, who is anxious to witness a tribal ceremony and collect artifacts. When Cable arrives there, he is led to a secluded hut where he is introduced to Liat, who, he learns, is Mary’s daughter. Their mutual attraction is immediate and intense, and, as they speak in hesitating French, Mary exits.

After only a few sentences, Cable takes Liat in his arms, “the music builds in a rapturous upsurge,” and the lights fade as Cable begins to undress Liat. Such blatant eroticism was unprecedented in any musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein, and probably by anyone else. When the lights come up after an

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69Hammerstein and Logan, 294.

70“Bali Ha’i” and its musical exoticism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

71Hammerstein and Logan, 323.
interlude in which native couples cross the stage slowly and “the music mounts ecstatically, then diminishes,” Cable is standing, shirtless, and Liat sits, her hair now loose and hanging down her back.

Until this encounter, all we have seen of Cable is a young, rigid, by-the-book military man focused on his assignment. When the lights come up on him after what is probably his first sexual experience, he is changed. When he hears his ship’s bell calling him for the return trip, he comments, “Aw, let them wait,” and begins the song “Younger Than Springtime.” Any song in this position would have to convey his passion and his innocence, his amazement and his concern for the young woman who has just been his intimate partner. Cable’s musical voice at this moment must demonstrate more than just the voice of the young romantic lead; it needs to soar with his realization that he is capable of this kind of passion, an insight that is new as of this moment. In short, finding the right musical voice for the character at this moment presented the creators with a challenge. It was not a challenge that they immediately met.

Josh Logan reports that the show went into rehearsals without a song for this spot. According to him, the first attempt was a song called “My Friend,” which exists in a sketch found in the Rodgers collection. After stating that no song had been written for Cable, he goes on to state that Hammerstein “was fascinated by Liat’s waiting for Cable’s boat to come around the bend,” and that “My Friend” began with the lyrics, “My friend, my friend, / Is coming around the bend.” Neither of these observations make sense, and we wonder

72Ibid.
73Richard Rodgers Collection, Library of Congress, Box 16, folder 18.
74Logan 1976, 287.
75Ibid.
how much of the scene Logan was actually remembering when he wrote this. Nonetheless, “My Friend” exists, although only the lyrics for an interlude are in either collection. Found in the Rodgers collection, they are, “Funny little thing, / You stand there silently blinking, / Funny little girl -- / I’d like to hear what you’re thinking. / Je t’aime.”76 These lyrics suggest the appropriate context -- a post-coital song for Cable -- and that Logan’s memory of the lyrics is mistaken, although they also suggest that Logan’s memory of their quality was correct. Musically, we have only a melody with some fundamental Roman numeral chords beneath it; this melody is appropriately lyrical and rather charming. We can tell that Rodgers was thinking of an expansive musical number, because he has provided music for a verse and as well as an interlude. Logan’s response to hearing the song was characteristically extreme; he writes, “I was so let down that I blurted out my first feelings. ‘That’s awful! That’s the worst song I ever heard. Good God, that’s terrible!’”77 His disappointment must have been matched by Rodgers and Hammerstein’s, and the song was cut before it was even written out in more than a rough draft.

The next attempt is well-known, although a first draft of its lyrics exists that, to my knowledge, has never been discussed or quoted. Logan writes that Rodgers and Hammerstein came to him the next day with their new attempt. “It was a lilting schottische, the words of which began like this: ‘Suddenly lucky, / Suddenly our arms are lucky / Suddenly lucky, / Suddenly our lips have kissed.’”78 These are the lyrics that are generally cited in the literature, and they were indeed the final lyrics for the “lilting schottische.” Sketches in Rodgers’s

76Richard Rodgers Collection, Library of Congress, Box 16, folder 18.
77Logan 1976, 287.
78Ibid.
and Hammerstein’s collections, however, suggest that the arrival of these lyrics took slightly longer than overnight, since these sketches also contain the earlier set of lyrics, for the same tune, mentioned above. A melody line, written by Rodgers in ink and with the words “Cable to Liat” above it, is in the Hammerstein collection.\textsuperscript{79} In pencil, below the melody, are Hammerstein’s first lyrics for the melody, and they match a typewritten set of lyrics, undated, that are in the same box of his collection as the music. These lyrics, which have never before been quoted, follow:

\begin{quote}
Suddenly lovely, 
Suddenly my life is lovely, 
Suddenly living 
Certainly looks good to me.
Suddenly happy, 
Suddenly my heart is happy -- 
Is it a girl? 
Could be, could be!
Suddenly lovely, 
Suddenly to be together, 
Suddenly sharing 
Ev’rything we hear and see.
Suddenly wib’ring [\textit{sic}] [wond’ring?] 
Suddenly I wonder whether 
Am I in love for forever and for good? 
Am I happy as we could be? 
Could be!\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

In the last two lines, “Am I” is pencilled in; the original typewritten lyric, crossed out, is, “Are we.”\textsuperscript{81} The melody in ink, in Rodgers’s hand, and Hammerstein’s lyrics, in pencil on the same sheet, suggest that this might be a rare case of Rodgers writing the music first and Hammerstein writing lyrics to fit the melody.

\textsuperscript{79}Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, the Library of Congress. Box marked “South Pacific.”

\textsuperscript{80}Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, the Library of Congress, Box marked “South Pacific.”

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid.
(This is reminiscent of a pencil manuscript for “This Nearly Was Mine,” a song for which we know the melody came first and that we shall consider in Chapter Six.)

The final version of this song appears on two typewritten pages for the scene, which, at that point, was 1, 12. Cable sings an introduction unmentioned in the literature, and for which no musical sketches exist, that follows:

We’ve had a break,
A very good break.
Let’s just take
This very good break,
Enjoy it while we may
And be glad it came our way . . .

Cable then sings the lyrics that Logan remembers. The first four lines are the lyrics usually quoted for this version of the song; I have never seen the lyrics quoted in their entirety, however, so I offer them here:

Suddenly lucky,
    Suddenly our arms are lucky.
Suddenly lucky
    Suddenly our lips have kissed,
Suddenly dreamy
    Suddenly our eyes are dreamy
Seeing the world
    In [a?] rosy mist
Suddenly lucky
    Suddenly to be together,
Suddenly owning
    Happiness no gold can buy,
Suddenly grateful
    Little do we worry whether
Some people may be wealthier than we
We are luckier to be
    You and I.82

The lyrics on the two pages of this sketch have a line drawn through them, and Hammerstein has written in the right margin, “All of Younger Than verse.” On the second page, directions for the interlude after the first chorus of “Younger Than Springtime,” the ship’s bell, and Cable’s vocal reprise after the bell are also

82Ibid.
written in pencil. At the top of the first page, in pencil, is written “2-18,” suggesting the date in rehearsals that “Younger Than Springtime” was added to the score. The melody to the discarded “Suddenly Lucky (Lovely),” as is widely known, gained prominence two years later in The King and I, where it had new lyrics that began, “Getting to know you . . .”

What makes the lyric to “Younger Than Springtime” especially appropriate for Cable is the transference of images from Liat to himself. The verse suggests this influence -- “I touch your hand and my arms grow strong” -- and the chorus makes it explicit. The form of the song, which is an example of thirty-two-bar lyric binary structure with a one-bar extension in the final A section, also lends itself to this transference, as I shall demonstrate. The initial A sections are about Liat. “Younger than springtime are you, / Softer than starlight are you,” sings Cable, the “are you[s]” set off from the images by a quarter-note rest. The last image that he uses -- “Angel and lover, heaven and earth are you to me” -- reveals that his experience with Liat has implications more profound than just his physical awakening with her.

The bridge describes the infusion of Liat’s qualities into Cable or, perhaps, the transformation of Cable through Liat, in two succinct lines plus one transitional word. “And when your youth and joy invade my arms / And fill my

83Ibid.

84Accounts of the music coming from a sketch for Allegro differ only in their details, which are of no concern to us here. See Fordin, 279; Rodgers, 260; or Hyland, 180.

85Rodgers and Hammerstein, 93.

86Rodgers and Hammerstein, 94.

87Rodgers and Hammerstein, 94-95.
heart as now they do . . . / Then . . .”

Following this, in the final A section, Cable reveals himself in terms that he has probably never before used; they describe qualities that we certainly have not seen in him, although his response to Bloody Mary’s mystical description of Bali Ha’i suggested their latency. “Younger than springtime am I, / Gayer than laughter am I, / Angel and lover, heaven and earth am I with you.”

The repetition of the combined images (“angel and lover, heaven and earth . . .”) in the last line are particularly inspired. At this point, Cable is able to see in himself and in Liat, and in their experience together, both spiritual and physical qualities that transcend time and place. This is a moment of revelation for him. Later, of course, his inability to reunite these qualities contributes to his downfall; the “heaven” is rent from the “earth,” and Cable is destroyed by his inability, or unwillingness, to reunite them. In short, these lyrics, which have lost much of their amazing freshness and insight after years of performances, contain within in them the seeds of Cable’s tragedy. While, as we have seen, the musical voices of other characters have been found and expressed, nowhere has a character’s musical voice been more perfectly captured than in “Younger Than Springtime.” Its thirty-three bars are virtually a well-made drama unto themselves.

Cable’s primary transformation occurs in act 2. In that act, Mary presses Cable to marry Liat and he refuses. His subsequent understanding of that refusal -- that it was based on a racial intolerance taught by his society -- and his musical expression of that understanding gives voice to the thematic core of the show. (The song also is discussed in Chapter Six.) This musical expression

88 Rodgers and Hammerstein, 95.
89 Rodgers and Hammerstein, 97.
90 Ibid.
necessitates an altered musical characterization. When Cable sings “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught,” his second act solo, he is physically ill, agitated and unfocused -- exactly what he is not when he sings “Younger Than Springtime.” And this agitation and raw emotion are certainly unlike Cable when he first appears in act 1; that Cable, as noted above, has not yet discovered his lyrical nature or known the profound disillusionment that inspires his second musical number.

Considering the importance of this number, both in terms of Cable’s character and show’s principal message, and the controversy it subsequently created, its brevity is surprising. Although it is fifty-two measures long, its brisk tempo moves it by quickly, as if Cable’s new thoughts are fairly tumbling from him in a moment of realization. Indeed, the stage directions suggest that Cable sings the song “as if figuring this whole question out for the first time.”\(^91\) The young lieutenant’s almost shocked insight is summed up by the second quatrain:

\begin{align*}
\text{You’ve got to be taught to be afraid} \\
\text{Of people whose eyes are oddly made,} \\
\text{And people whose skin is a different shade,} \\
\text{You’ve got to be carefully taught.}^{92}
\end{align*}

Formally, the song is an altered lyric binary pattern exhibiting expanded limbs -- the first two A sections are sixteen measures long; the contrasting B section is eight, and the final A section eight plus a four-bar extension. Despite the length of the A sections, however, each is basically made up of one four-note, two-measure motive (a descending minor third, an ascending half step, and an ascending whole step) and a subsequent, and sequentially related, three-note, two-measure motive (a descending minor third followed by an ascending minor

\(^91\)Hammerstein and Logan, 346.

\(^92\)Rodgers and Hammerstein, 145.
third). The three-note motive lacks the passing tone between pitches two and four of the four-note motive. The rest of the song recalls the initial motive, sometimes altered, creating a musical utterance at odds with the graceful flowing lines of “Younger Than Springtime.”

The constant repetition of, or reference to, this simple motive gives the song a sing-song quality reminiscent of children’s songs. This childlike simplicity is reinforced by the completely diatonic melody and simple harmony -- the A section is accompanied solely by tonic and dominant ninth chords until the penultimate measure, at which point a supertonic chord replaces the dominant. This simplicity undergoes a subtle subversion, however. The straightforward triple time is set off by what initially could be heard as a duple pattern in the bass. (Once the melody enters, the pattern is heard less ambiguously as triple.) This contrasting relationship of duple and triple patterns recalls “Happy Talk,” Bloody Mary’s childlike song that is sung several scenes before “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” -- “Happy Talk” generates the emotional conflict in Cable that leads to his later outburst, as we shall see in Chapter Six -- and it reflects Cable’s confusion and uncertain emotional state.

The lyrics to Cable’s second song refer to childhood and the lessons of racial intolerance taught and learned “before you are six or seven or eight.” The suggestion of a children’s song is especially effective and ironic in this bitter context, in which Cable realizes that the lessons of his -- and perhaps his country’s -- childhood were full of bigotry and resulted in an intolerance he only now realizes. Like “Younger Than Springtime,” “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” is a song about discovery, the first sung in an almost childlike, if

93Although each statement of the motive includes a pick-up, I do not include the pick-ups as part of the motive. See Rodgers and Hammerstein, 145.

94Rodgers and Hammerstein, 146.
rapturous, awe, and the second in a bitter rejection of childhood memories. They are, in short, about discoveries from the opposite ends of Cable’s experience, and they are expressed in the opposite extremes of Cable’s musical voice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have observed the development of the stylistic characterization that makes South Pacific such a powerful and successful work for the musical stage. The use of changing song types for various situations and various character types goes all the way back to early works by Jerome Kern; but the use of changing and recognizable song styles as references to the changing emotional and psychological state of characters reaches an unprecedented sophistication in this work. Nellie’s switch from popular song pastiche to the grand gestures of de Becque’s romanticism tells the audience of her emotional depth more than pages of dialogue could, and her return to the clichés of her everyday musical speech to respond to that switch reminds the audience that this is a woman with a strong sense of self. The musical portrait of Nellie in 1, 7 is a remarkable achievement.

Likewise, the musical portrayals of de Becque and Cable are given depth by means of changing musical vocabularies. Both characterizations, like that of Nellie, grow and change throughout the duration of the play, and their principal voices -- their most revealing voices -- are always identifiable through their changing musical styles. While, as we have seen, the road to these successful characterizations was not always straightforward, the result was among the finest musical portraiture in the genre of the American musical theater.
In this chapter, we explore how Rodgers and Hammerstein express the underlying theme of *South Pacific* -- the ironic presence of racial intolerance in Americans fighting a war against racial intolerance -- while at the same time subduing it. We have already seen the team’s effective craftsmanship demonstrated in their shaping of musical scenes and defining of characters. Here, we witness their tempering of the at first overtly confrontational tone into a more moderate and, for the audience, less abrasive presentation of the thematic material. As we noted in Chapter One, however, the changes in tone do not alter the message of the theme, and *South Pacific* remains a powerful indictment of what both men viewed as a flaw, albeit a fixable one, in American society. These changes, like the changes discussed in previous chapters, reveal Rodgers and Hammerstein in complete control of their art, and the result is a work that confronts the serious issue of racial intolerance at a time when that issue was largely absent from the musical theatre and popular art in general.

Two scenes in the show, as well as sketches for those scenes, provide us with an opportunity for exploring specific changes made in the dramatic presentation of racial intolerance. First, the final scene of act 1 (1, 12), in which de
Becque confronts Nellie with the mixed racial heritage of his children, provides an example of how Nellie’s expression of her racism is softened. While the resulting scene remains powerful, earlier versions of it, as we shall see, were even more so. Second, act 2, scene 4 (2, 4), an extended musical scene that is also the turning point of the musical, shows how Rodgers and Hammerstein distill the show’s message while tightening and perfecting the scene that expresses it.

I explore the scenes in the order they appear in the show. The discussion of 1, 12 is shorter because the sketches are fewer and the scene underwent less change. Further, the changes in Nellie’s expression of her racism in 1, 12 anticipate similar changes in 2, 4. The discussion of 2, 4 is more exhaustive because of the extensive changes the scene underwent from conception to tryouts to opening. Indeed, Rodgers and Hammerstein even made an addition to the scene after the show had been running on Broadway. The alterations of 2, 4, in particular, reveal Rodgers and Hammerstein at the top of their form in creating a musical scene that, through the combination of book, music, and lyrics, reveals character and thematic conflict.

Nellie and the Vocabulary of Racism

One of the most telling alterations of South Pacific’s thematic tone occurs at the end of act 1 (1, 12). This alteration also is important because it represents a change in the presentation of Nellie; in the final version of the scene, her language is less offensive and therefore reveals her in a less unflattering light. Only one small bit of dialogue was cut, but its presence in, and subsequent absence from, the script indicates an important softening of character that took place in the creative process. To see its effect, we must briefly revisit the climax of
Act One, which is the moment when Nellie realizes that Jerome and Ngana are de Becque’s children by a Polynesian woman.

Nellie and de Becque are slightly tipsy on champagne after a dinner party. They dance to and sing a snippet of “I’m In Love With a Wonderful Guy,” after which, in a quieter mood, they reprise some of the “Twin Soliloquies” from 1, 1. The mood lightens again, and they harmonize on “Cock-Eyed Optimist,” which is the only time in the score Nellie and de Becque actually sing together. De Becque follows this with a parody of Nellie singing “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-A My Hair” from 1, 7. At this point, the children enter.

“You’re the cutest things I ever saw in my whole life,” Nellie exclaims. De Becque introduces them and then sends them off to bed. They wave and wish Nellie bon soir as they exit. Again alone with de Becque, her first comment is, “Oh, aren’t they adorable! Those big black eyes staring at you out of those sweet little faces? Are they Henry’s?” De Becque states that they are his, and Nellie thinks it is a joke. “Oh, of course, they look exactly like you, don’t they? Where do you hide their mother?” De Becque then tells her that the children’s mother is dead, and she realizes he is telling the truth. He again states that he is their father, and Nellie responds, “And -- their mother . . . was a . . . was . . . a . . .” De Becque finishes the sentence for her with the word Polynesian, and Nellie is stunned. “But you and she . . .” she says. De Becque remains calm, explaining that he wanted Nellie to know and that he has no apologies. Nellie, showing the combined effects of champagne and shock, immediately starts trying to make her exit. She is graceless and in a hurry, and she begs de Becque not to accompany her to her jeep. Mumbling about how she will be too busy to call him, she exits quickly as de Becque twice tells her that he loves her. When she is gone, and the
sound of her jeep fades, he reprises the final four lines of “Some Enchanted Evening” and the curtain falls on act 1.¹

In the first rehearsal script, however, Nellie reveals more of a link to Michener’s Nellie, and to her Southern roots, than she ultimately shows.² The dialogue follows:

Emile
Yes, Nellie. I’m their father.

Nellie
Oh -- And -- she . . . their mother . . . was a . . . was . . . a --

Emile
Polynesian.

Nellie
Colored.

Emile
She was darker than we are, yes. And she was beautiful, Nellie.³

Nellie’s use of the words “colored” is jolting, which is unquestionably the effect Hammerstein wanted. It is already a softening of Michener, however. In “Our Heroine,” Nellie learns of de Becque’s having children before he tells her. At a dinner, Bus Adams, not knowing of Nellie’s romance with de Becque, regales the company with a bawdy story about a grown woman of somewhat loose morals who, by story’s ends, he has identified as de Becque’s daughter. In the

¹Hammerstein and Logan, 326-32.

²A 1951 filmed performance of the original London cast reveals that Mary Martin indeed used a southern accent in her portrayal of Nellie. Her accent is strong in the first act, but it slowly modifies to a more neutral accent as the performance continues.

³Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, the Library of Congress. Box marked “South Pacific scripts.”
course of the story, he reveals that de Becque has three other grown daughters by a different woman, and that four younger daughters, each of a different mother, still live with him. Nellie is stunned. At her next visit to de Becque’s plantation, he introduces her to his four youngest daughters and tells her of his others, remarking that, “I had to tell you first.”

Nellie reminds herself that she had left home to meet new people and have new experiences. Then Michener writes her interior monologue, and it is powerful. Part of it follows:

> Emile De Becque, not satisfied with Javanese and Tonkinese women, had also lived with a Polynesian. A nigger! To Nellie’s untutored mind any person living or dead who was not white or yellow was a nigger. And beyond that no words could go! Her entire Arkansas upbringing made it impossible for her to deny the teachings of her youth. Emile De Becque had lived with a nigger. He had nigger children. If she married him, they would be her step-daughters. ¶She suffered a revulsion which her lover could never understand.

Nellie is convinced that De Becque cannot understand her feelings, and she decides not to marry him. By the end of the story, and with the understanding support of her good friend Dinah, she changes her mind and decides to marry him, as in the musical.

The strength of her prejudice is immense, and the expression of it is jarring in a character so likeable. Her ability to overcome it makes her the real “heroine” of the story’s title -- the term, which has been bestowed upon her by a local Arkansas newspaper although she has done nothing even remotely heroic, is ironic until her change -- and she ends the story triumphant over what she has been taught about her culture.

Hammerstein obviously wanted to retain the power of Nellie’s revulsion. While he had used the word “nigger” in *Show Boat*, that was in 1927. Despite

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5Ibid.

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the fact that the word was used in that show by blatantly racist characters (or as a term that one African-American character used for another, or him- or herself), it has been problematic in all productions of the show since the 1920s. The word “colored” was certainly more respectable but, within the context of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, still a surprise. While it was the appropriate and polite term for African Americans in 1949, the way Nellie uses the word makes her racism unmistakable. It also, for at least that moment, makes Nellie very unsympathetic.

We shall find another moment when Nellie’s racism was originally more explicitly drawn when we discuss 2, 4, below. Here, too, she becomes unsympathetic, and that moment also was softened in the final version, as we shall see. Whatever pressure made Hammerstein change the script -- and considering the number of people who urged Rodgers and Hammerstein to cut “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” even before the show opened, that pressure must have been immense -- 1, 12 is more powerful with the word “colored” and the more blatant presentation of Nellie’s racism. It makes her change in the latter part of act 2 more effective because the audience clearly sees the cultural baggage that she must overcome and the weight of it on her relationship with de Becque; and it reflects attitudes in American society that many people were still trying to ignore in 1949, attitudes about which Hammerstein felt very strongly and that American society eventually would be unable to avoid. Of course, those are also the probable reasons the word was excised from the script.6

6We shall return to these points in Chapter Seven.
Softening the Rhetoric in Act Two, Scene Four

Act 2, scene 4 of South Pacific (2, 4) is the turning point of the musical’s plot. In Aristotelian terms, it is the anagnorisis, the moment of discovery or recognition at which a character, usually the protagonist, has a self-realization concerning some aspect of his or her life. This scene contains, in varying degrees of intensity and detail, four such moments of discovery and self-recognition, and they all coincide to alter the lives of the characters and, subsequently, the course of the plot. Nellie Forbush, Emile de Becque, Joe Cable, and, less dramatically, Luther Billis are each propelled towards a self-awareness that she or he reaches by the scene’s end.

The scene was not always so rich with recognitions. An examination of the musicodramatic evolution of 2, 4 reveals its transformation from a highly polemical dialogue scene, rather perfunctorily followed by a song, to a less polemical and tautly constructed bipartite scene that is the work’s dramatic hinge. Our concern in the rest of this chapter is Rodgers and Hammerstein’s softening of the thematic impact in 2, 4 while transforming the scene into the well-crafted dramatic turning point of the entire work.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, part of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s creative intent was to edify the audience without offending it. We shall see how they succeeded in 2, 4, and how they failed. (Many contemporaneous reviews that were favorable of every other aspect of the show found fault with 2, 4 and especially with “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught,” as we have observed.) This exploration of 2, 4 revisits familiar problems -- the search for musical voice,

7After a character gains this knowledge, of which he or she previously has been ignorant or somehow mistaken, his or her fortunes reverse, and the action of the plot continues on an irreversible and tragic course. In the classical tragedy Oedipus Rex, for instance, the anagnorisis occurs when Oedipus realizes that he long ago and unknowingly murdered his father and married his mother, bringing a plague on his homeland and, by play’s end, further tragedy to himself and others.
for example, and an exploration of the characters’ psychology -- but its primary focus is on the underlying theme of *South Pacific*.

An examination of the sketches for 2, 4 in light of their sociopolitical content further supports the connection between Hammerstein’s work with the Writers’ War Board (WWB) and the thematic content of the scene. Much of what was written during World War Two by the members of the WWB, including Hammerstein, was very similar in content to what Hammerstein would subsequently write for *South Pacific*. The sketches for 2, 4, in which the characters climactically confront issues of racial intolerance, are especially reminiscent of WWB statements, as demonstrated below. Indeed, one of the attractions of the Michener work to Hammerstein must have been its expression of ideas close to those that had been espoused by the WWB. Examination of these sketches suggests that Hammerstein, reflecting the strong tone of the WWB’s wartime concern with what it called the fascism inherent in American racism,\(^8\) began writing a script more overtly critical of America’s racial intolerance than the final version might imply. As noted above, however, he gradually softened the tone of the work, especially 2, 4. These changes in turn affected the musical content of the piece, demonstrating how Rodgers’s music complemented Hammerstein’s thematic ideas and situations.

Our focus here is the development of 2, 4 as turning point, demonstrating, in the process, influences on that development that came from sources other than Michener’s novel. To this end, the following investigation is divided into four sections. First is a summary of the conclusion of act 1 and an examination of the first three scenes in act 2, which includes examination of sketches for those scenes. This is followed by an analysis of the final version of 2, 4, and the

\(^8\)Third Annual Report of the Writers’ War Board (January 1945), 17.
chapter concludes with a consideration of the sketches for that scene and conclusions drawn from that consideration.

As noted above, the first act ends with Nellie’s realization that the two children she has just met belong to de Becque, and that their deceased mother, de Becque’s former wife, was Polynesian. Deeply troubled by the racial mixture of this marriage, Nellie leaves in an emotionally agitated and slightly inebriated state. After her abrupt departure, de Becque holds the cup from which she had been drinking and reprises “Some Enchanted Evening” as the first act curtain falls.

In addition to re-introducing the conflict between Nellie and de Becque that ends the first act, and recapturing the audience’s attention after intermission, the first three scenes of act 2 also introduce conflict, to be explained below, between Bloody Mary, Liat, Cable, and, subsequently, within Cable himself. How to balance these disparate structural requirements at the beginning of an act was a problem the creators had to solve before approaching the climax of scene four. Because the solution to that problem is essential to our understanding of 2, 4 and the challenges of its structure, therefore, we must first establish familiarity with 2, 1, 2, 2, and 2, 3.

The first three scenes of the second act demonstrate a deft balance of comic and dramatic elements that satisfy the requirements suggested above. This is accomplished through fluid scenic transitions between an onstage performance of “The Thanksgiving Follies” and the backstage area during that performance. The comedy of the “onstage” scenes grows less subtle as the “offstage” scenes increase in intensity, providing a contrast that keeps the act from becoming overly melodramatic too early. Scene four, which takes place “offstage” and is the most dramatic scene in the play, segues from an “onstage” performance of “Honey Bun,” the most comedic number in *South Pacific*. 194
The second act begins midway during a performance of “The Thanksgiving Follies,” which is established through a comic dance presentation. An amusing ensemble scene, usually with a musical number, remains the standard beginning for a musical’s second act. Post-intermission, the show must get the audience’s attention at once, and a comedy or production number is an effective way to do this. The opening of the second act of South Pacific, therefore, is traditional. The lights go out on the onstage performance due to a generator failure, however, and when they come up again, the scene has shifted to backstage.

De Becque enters, looking for Nellie and hoping for a resolution to the conflict from act 1. After learning that a still distraught Nellie has applied for a transfer to another island, he leaves flowers intended for Nellie with Billis. Billis subsequently exits to give the flowers to Nellie.

In an earlier version of this scene, de Becque and Nellie encounter each other backstage at this point. While the Follies continues offstage, Nellie and de Becque exchange awkward small talk -- “How have you been feeling?” “How are things with you?” During this exchange, de Becque suggests that Nellie read the card he has sent with the flowers. (De Becque does not give the flowers to Billis, as in the final version of 2.) This is where Rodgers and Hammerstein find another use for “Bright Canary Yellow,” originally in 1.9 Nellie opens the card and reads (sings) the following, to the tune of “Bright Canary Yellow”:

    I wake in the loneliness of sunrise
    When the deep purple heaven turns blue,
    And start to pray,
    As I pray each day
    That I’ll hear some words from you.

Nellie is overcome with emotion and cannot continue, so de Becque finishes

9See above, Chapter Four, page 119-20.
reading (singing) the card as follows:

I lie in the loneliness of evening,
Looking out on a silver-flaked sea,
And ask the moon:
Oh how soon, how soon
Will my love come home to me?^{10}

In the final version of the script, as we shall see below, Nellie gets the flowers in 2, 4 and reads the card without a verbal response.

We now return to the point in 2, 2 at which Billis exited to look for Nellie. Cable appears, anxiously looking for Billis, the one man who can secure a boat for a visit to Bali Ha’i and Liat. Cable has come from the hospital, where he is being treated for malaria, and his behavior suggests that he is still ill (the script informs us that de Becque is “worried by Cable’s strangeness”^{11}).

When Liat and her mother Bloody Mary appear, the focus of the scene turns to what the script calls Bloody Mary’s “one last plea for her daughter’s dream.”^{12} Using promises of financial freedom and unending physical pleasure, she tries to “sell” Cable on an island life with Liat. After making her spoken pitch, she asks the same questions as when peddling grass skirts and shrunken heads: “You like? You buy?”^{13} Despite its intention of further “selling” an idyllic life, however, “Happy Talk,” the song that follows, reveals Mary at her warmest and most maternal. She may be an entrepreneur who knows a good match for her daughter when she sees one, but she is also a caring mother. The song also allows Liat interaction with her mother as well as with Cable, who at

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^{10}The Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress. Box “South Pacific Scripts.” This song eventually found an audience (as “Loneliness of Evening”) in the second television production of Cinderella (1965).

^{11}Ibid., 336.

^{12}Hammerstein and Logan, 337.

^{13}Ibid., 337.
number’s end is “deeply disturbed.” Cable’s response is foreboding, and, as will be demonstrated below, “Happy Talk,” the first song in act 2, is in several ways a counterpoint to his upcoming dramatic number, “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught.”

At this point, I think it is important to analyze “Happy Talk” and an early sketch for it because Hammerstein’s revision of the song’s form accomplishes at least three things. First, it simplifies the song, allowing Mary a musical vocabulary that makes a more direct appeal to Cable. The final form of a folk song, or children’s song, is less sophisticated than the original lyric binary form in the sketch, and it suggests Mary’s depiction of a simple unsophisticated life. Second, it makes Mary’s appeal stronger by frequent repetition of the song’s primary message -- “If you don’t have a dream / How you gonna have a dream come true?” -- in the chorus. This idea of a dream returns in 2, 4, both in Cable’s dialogue and in de Becque’s dramatic solo, “This Nearly Was Mine”; this reference to a dream also recalls Mary’s act 1 solo, “Bali Ha’i,” in which she tells Cable to imagine “Your own special hope, / Your own special dream.” Third, the simpler form allows for a song that is especially playful and therefore in even starker contrast to the drama that directly follows it. The simplicity of Mary’s vision is complicated by Cable’s inability to accept it. In all, the song provides a hinge between the lighter aspects of the act’s opening and the darker elements that are about to burst forth.

“Happy Talk” is a short strophic verse-chorus number, a form not used anywhere else in the show. The brevity of verse and chorus -- each is only

14 Ibid., 339.
15 Rodgers and Hammerstein, 47-48.
sixteen measures long -- is also rare in this and other scores by Rodgers.\textsuperscript{16} The first verse is played by the orchestra, and the voice enters at the chorus, with the following words:

\begin{verbatim}
Happy Talk,
Keep talkin’ happy talk,
Talk about things you like to do.
You gotta have a dream,
If you don’t have a dream,
How you gonna have a dream come true?!\textsuperscript{17}
\end{verbatim}

Two verses and two choruses are followed by an orchestral verse and chorus, during which Liat “performs a gentle, childish dance.”\textsuperscript{18} After the dance, Mary sings another verse at a slower, more reflective tempo, after which she sings a chorus at the original tempo and a twelve bar coda in which she reminds Cable that if he never has a dream, “den you’ll never have a dream come true.”\textsuperscript{19}

If the description of Liat’s dance as “childish” also is meant to imply “childlike,” it is an appropriate word for the entire song. The short verse-chorus form, in which the chorus is a refrain, is characteristic of folk or children’s songs, as is the uncomplicated and completely diatonic melody of the verse. The predominantly diatonic melody of the refrain is syncopated, bright, and playful. The simple structure and straightforward diatonicism of this song is quite a contrast with the extensive chromaticism of “Bali Ha’i,” Bloody Mary’s first song in the show. These qualities instead suggest the earlier children’s song

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{16}See Wood’s discussion of “Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin,’” 239. Wood notes that, “for a musical written in 1943, a strophic verse-chorus song is an anachronistic gesture, and as the opening number it immediately evokes a time at or before the turn of the century.” See also Chapter Two, page 73, of this study.
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Rodgers and Hammerstein, 123-124.
  \item \textsuperscript{18}Hammerstein and Logan, 338.
  \item \textsuperscript{19}Rodgers and Hammerstein, 130.
\end{itemize}
“Dites-moi,” which is also suggestive of a folk song, is only sixteen measures long in all -- it has no verse -- and has only one chromatically altered pitch. The performance by Liat of “what seem to be traditional hand gestures” during Mary’s singing also suggests a child’s folk song accompanied by familiar movements. The combined performances of Mary and Liat, the former singing in uninhibited playfulness and the latter matching the mood with delicate pantomime, demonstrate the closeness of their mother-daughter relationship.

Rodgers begins this simple song with slightly mixed rhythmic messages, however. The two-measure accompaniment pattern, essentially a rhythmic ostinato, divides two measures of common time, or eight beats, into two sets of three beats and one of two beats, with accents on beats one and four of the first measure and beat three of the second measure. The straightforward verse melody is sung over this syncopated rhythmic accompaniment. The rhythmic conflict between the melody and the accompaniment adds to the overall playful character of the song. These contrasted rhythms are the most complex element of the song.

As indicated in an early Hammerstein sketch for the song, “Happy Talk” did not originally follow this simple structure, but was in standard lyric binary form. Hammerstein originally began the song with a four-line introductory verse, which is followed by the chorus. (The words to the two initial A sections of the chorus begin, respectively, “Talk about the moon . . .” and “Talk about a star . . .,” the same words that the first two verses of the final version begin with.) These are followed by a four-line bridge, the lyrics for which -- “Talk about

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20The song is marked “À l’antique” in the score. Rodgers and Hammerstein, 13
21Hammerstein and Logan, 337.
22See Appendix F for a presentation of Hammerstein’s original form for “Happy Talk.”
23Ibid., 124.
breakfus[’], coffee and toast /“Opposite de one you love de most, / Dinner an’
supper, plen’y to ear, / Gravyand pottos on your meat!”24 -- do not appear in the
final version of the song. The bridge, as is common, is followed by a final A
section, which, as in the previous A sections, uses lyrics later utilized as a verse.
The song is followed by a “Coda,” which uses the lyrics that were later given to
the repeated chorus of the song.

Markings on the sketch for “Happy Talk” indicate Hammerstein’s
alteration of the lyrics to create an alternate form for the song.25 The initial
quatrain, marked “verse” in the sketch, has a line in pencil drawn through each
line of verse; the word “verse” is also scratched out. Following the initial
quatrain, the word “Refrain” is also scratched out in pencil, and the word
“verse” is written in next to it, indicating a formal change. The bridge of the
song, beginning “Talk Happy / Talk about breakfus[’] . . . ,” is entirely crossed
out, thus eliminating a formal element and simplifying the structure. Finally, the
word “Coda” is marked out In addition to the changed formal indications and
eliminated lines of verse, all written in black lead pencil, numbers appear in the
margins in red pencil. Next to the coda / refrain (“Happy Talk, / Keep talkin’
happy talk . . .”) are the numbers 1, 3, and 5, written and circled in red pencil. The
first six lines of this refrain are circled in red. The final three lines, beginning “If
you don’t talk happy,” are grouped with the first six lines in a separate red line
and by it, in the right margin, is the number 7. As the song now exists, the final
three lines are the coda which follows the final chorus. To the left of the three
verses are the numbers 2, 3, and 6. (The 3 is an error. It should be a 4, in order to

24The Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, the Library of Congress, “South Pacific box 2”.

25 Hammerstein’s deliberate alteration of a song form is not surprising. As Richard
Rodgers noted, “Though Oscar was not a musician, he did possess a superb sense of form.
He knew everything about the architecture of a song -- its foundation, structure,
embellishments.” Richard Rodgers, Musical Stages (New York: Random House, 1975),
221.
match the final structure of the song.) The center section in the sketch (“Talk happy / Talk about breakfus[’] . . .”) is replaced by an orchestral verse and chorus that serves as Liat’s dance. This is the final form of the song, as described above.

Following the song, Cable gives Liat a gold watch that he tells her belonged to his grandfather and that served as a good-luck piece for his father during World War I. Mary beams, telling Cable, “When I see you firs’ time, I know you good man for Liat. And she good girl for you. You have special good babies.” Cable is profoundly upset by this, and tells Mary, with great difficulty, that he cannot marry Liat. After a dramatic orchestral statement of the first four measures of the refrain of “Happy Talk,” Mary tells Cable that he has just lost Liat, smashing the lucky watch on the ground and exiting with Liat in tow. Her last words to Cable are the same as those she makes to potential customers who shy away from a purchase: “Stingy bastard.” Cable looks after them and poignantly sings the last four measures of “Younger Than Springtime,” after which the scene changes back to the onstage activities.

The third scene of act 2, which is the end of “The Thanksgiving Follies” and which directly follows Cable’s reprise of “Younger Than Springtime,” provides a comic counterpoint to the dramatic scene that preceded it, as well as to the scene that follows it. This scene climaxes in the performance of the song “Honey Bun” by a cross-dressed Nellie and Billis, the former in an oversized sailor suit and the latter in a grass-skirt and coconut-bra costume. The number ends with the entire company of the “Follies” onstage for a final chorus.

“The Honey Bun” is the second musical number in South Pacific that refers to American popular song. (Nellie earlier tells de Becque that “I’m Gonna Wash

26Ibid., 339.

27Ibid., 339. We have observed Mary, in a comic context, learning this term in act 1, scene 2.
That Man Right Out of My Hair” is “an American type song” to which the nurses were “kind of putting in [their] own words.” 28) “Honey Bun,” likewise is presented as a preexistent and familiar song; it is written to sound like an older tune the performers all might have known already, a comfortable familiarity in a setting “far away from home,” as Nellie will say in scene four. To this end, Rodgers wrote a vaudeville-like tune that somewhat suggests “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” with its prominent use of the raised supertonic in the opening phrase and its syncopated melody. The hearkening back to older and familiar styles for this diegetic song is not surprising, for these styles provide a musical vocabulary appropriate for homesick service people. 29 “Honey Bun” brings the third scene of act 2 to a rousing finish.

As we can see, the problem inherent to the first three scenes of act 2 -- the balance between audience-pleasing humor and the re-introduction of the dramatic elements of the plot that will reach a climax in 2, 4 -- has been satisfactorily resolved through the deft placement of plot elements: the scenes begin and end with comic musical numbers that surround the dramatic content in the middle. “Happy Talk,” the musical number in the central section, is a somewhat gentle introduction to Cable’s conflict, and the reprise of “Younger Than Springtime” at the end of the second scene demonstrates the introspection central to Cable’s later outburst in 2, 4. The preparation of the audience for what follows, then, is structurally and dramatically satisfying.

Before examining the process of transformation, and distillation, that 2, 4 underwent, we should be acquainted with the final form of the scene. The scene begins backstage with Billis entering the women’s dressing room while still in

28 Hammerstein and Logan, 313.

29 They are also representative of the novelty songs that began to appear just after the war. See Charles Hamm, Yesterdays: Popular Song in America (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979; paperback, 1983), 388-389.
drag, only to come “hurtling out, minus his wig. After a few seconds, the wig is thrown out . . .”30 This laugh serves to bridge the preceding scene with the ensuing drama. At this moment, Nellie enters and, thinking that the flowers Billis gave her onstage were from him, begins thanking him. Billis, however, gives her the card from de Becque, which she reads and by which she is “deeply affected.”31 Billis exits, and Cable speaks to Nellie, who shows immediate concern about his being out of the hospital and who is suspicious of his trying to get to Bali Ha’i and Liat. He nods, adding, “I’ve just seen her for the last time, I guess. I love her and yet I just heard myself saying I can’t marry her. What’s the matter with me, Nellie? What kind of guy am I, any way?” Nellie replies, “You’re all right. You’re just far away from home.” She then includes herself, as if explaining her own situation. “We’re both so far away from home.”32

De Becque enters and confronts Nellie about her transfer. Nellie tries to explain her feelings and unknowingly echoes Cable’s previous scene by telling de Becque that she cannot marry him, admitting that it is because of de Becque’s having been married to a woman of color. Her subsequent exchange with de Becque follows:

Nellie
I can’t help it. It isn’t as if I could give you a good reason. There is no reason. This is emotional. This is something that is born in me.

Emile
(Shouting the words in bitter protest.)
It is not. I do not believe this is born in you.

30Hammerstein and Logan, 344.
31Ibid., 345.
32Ibid., 345.
Nellie
Then why do I feel the way I do? All I know is that I can’t help it.
Explain how we feel, Joe --

(Joe gives her no help. She runs up to the door of the dressing
shack.)[^33]

When Nellie is gone, de Becque asks Cable why he (Cable) and Nellie have such
a feeling and why they believe it is born in them. “I do not believe it is born in
you,” he adds. “I do not believe it.” Cable’s response serves as the segue to
what we noted above as the most controversial song in *South Pacific* and in the
career of Rodgers and Hammerstein. “It’s not born in you! It happens after
you’re born . . .”[^34] Cable then sings “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught.”[^35]

After Cable finishes the short song, De Becque, after a line of dialogue,
sings a bridge that was added to *South Pacific* after the show’s Broadway
opening. This unusual act demonstrates that the refinement on 2, 4 continued
even after the show had been running for a while. (Generally, shows are
“frozen,” or kept unchanged, after their openings. Changes are sometimes made
in subsequent productions, but the initial production usually stays as it was upon
opening.) An addition in the Hammerstein collection is marked “4 / 10 / 50
‘SOUTH PACIFIC -- Insert immediately ‘Carefully Taught’ ” and contains de
Becque’s line -- “When I came here I was running away from ugliness . . . It has
cought up with me.” -- followed by lyrics that conclude as follows and that are

[^33]: Ibid., 346.

[^34]: Ibid.

[^35]: “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” is discussed above in Chapter Five. As we shall see below, the choice of triple meter for this song serves to connect it with the song that follows, just as the duple bass pattern serves to contrast the two songs.
now a permanent part of the published score:36

And the one chance for me
Is the life I know best --
To stay here on an island
And to hell with the rest!
I will cling to this island
Like a tree or a stone.
I will cling to this island
And be free . . . and alone.37

While Rodgers alters the melody for de Becque by basing it on fourths, instead of the thirds that Cable’s melody is based on, he maintains the conflicting rhythmic interest in the bass line.

After the song, Cable’s speech reveals the impact of his revelation, as well as the impact of de Becque’s lyrics:

(Speaking, his voice filled with the emotion of discovery and firm in a new determination.) You’ve got the right idea, de Beque -- live on an island. Yes sir, if I get out of this thing alive, I’m not going back there! I’m coming here. All I care about is right here. To hell with the rest.38

After the loss of Liat and his subsequent understanding of the roots of his prejudice, he, too, is ready to forego society and live on an island. This rejection of, or turning against, society is as much the harbinger of his doomed fate as Mary’s smashing his “lucky” watch: in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s works up to this point, the anti-social outsider, or the character who puts selfish interests above group interests, has been treated with varying degrees of harshness. As we

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36The lyrics are absent from the first published edition of the script, as well as the version included in 6 Plays by Rodgers and Hammerstein, published in 1953. Hammerstein received a letter in June of 1950 from an audience member asking for these lyrics. The correspondent mentions that they are not on the recording or in the published script. Hammerstein obliged, writing, “I am glad you like this addition. I think it helps the scene a great deal.”

37Rodgers and Hammerstein, 147-149.

38Hammerstein and Logan, 347.
have seen, Jud Fry, the ominous although not entirely unsympathetic loner in *Oklahoma!*, ends up dead when he threatens the community and the newlyweds who represent its future. In *Carousel*, Billy Bigelow decides to participate in a robbery -- a particularly anti-social act even for this anti-hero -- and subsequently, when caught, commits suicide, selfishly leaving his wife and unborn daughter to fend for themselves. The rest of the play is concerned with the consequences of this act. The situation is subtler in *Allegro* (1947). Here, Jenny, the wife of Joe, the protagonist, is a villain of sorts because of the selfishness that causes her to value her own well-being above that of society. Joe eventually leaves Jenny and returns to the community-based and altruistic values of his youth when he realizes that Jenny’s selfishness has led her to betray him and his ideals.39 Cable’s decision to leave the group -- i.e., American society -- after the war is the kind of anti-social and anti-group act that, in a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical play, rarely occurs without some kind of a strong social reaction.

After Cable’s speech, de Becque reveals that he, too, has had a change of heart. He comments, “When all you care about is here . . . this is a good place to be. When all you care about is taken away from you, there is no place . . . (Walking away from Cable, now talking to himself) I came so close to it . . . so close.”40 De Becque then begins his second solo song in the play, a slow waltz

39Hammerstein, in the second act of *Allegro*, overtly satirizes the political opportunism of those who expect government, or society, to help them out and who then, once on their feet, want government out of the way. At one point, Ned Brinker, Jenny’s father, wishes the government would do something to help him and others like him get back on their feet during the Depression. “That’s what a government is for. . . . That Hoover!” Later, when he is on his feet due to the success of his son-in-law, he complains, “If the government would only let us alone -- That Roosevelt! . . . All I ever see those WPA guys do is lean on their shovels.” Hammerstein, *Allegro*, in 6 Plays by Rodgers and Hammerstein (New York: Random House, 1953), 231, 244.

40Hammerstein and Logan, 347.
and trio titled “This Nearly Was Mine.” This number is as reflective and elegant as “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” is impetuous and edgy, and the two songs successfully complement each other.

Rodgers’s use of contrasting songs in three-four time for both characters is ingenious. As discussed above, Cable, the American, expresses his anger in a quick waltz that is complicated by the conflicting duple rhythm accompanying it. De Becque’s waltz, however, is more straightforward and lyrical, an expression of his Old World sensibility. It is in lyric binary form, each section sixteen measures long. After the first chorus, de Becque sings a contrasting thirty-two bar trio, after which he repeats the entire chorus.

“This Nearly Was Mine,” like Act One’s “Younger Than Springtime,” is unusual among Rodgers and Hammerstein’s songs in that the music was completed before the lyric. Written as a replacement for “Now Is the Time,” it had to be completed quickly to allow Ezio Pinza time to learn it. Rodgers asked Hammerstein for a working title, and Hammerstein suggested “This Nearly Was Mine.” Rodgers wrote the melody and gave a pencil copy of it to Hammerstein; the words “this nearly was mine” are written in ink at the appropriate musical moments. Later, Rodgers observed the following about the lyrics provided for the preexistent melody:

One lyric Oscar never liked was “This Nearly Was Mine.” The reason was the word “paradise.” Oscar hated such cliched words as “paradise” and “divine,” which have been used over and over again by hacks because they are so easy and “poetic.” But though he tried hard, he was unable to come up with anything better for the

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41Joshua Logan writes that “Now Is the Time” had to be replaced quickly because “Pinza was frightened of anything new.” (Logan, 287)

42This anecdote is recalled in Fordin, 279. Logan also recalls it, but suggests that it was perhaps he, and not Hammerstein, who thought of the title. (“Dick asked for a title that he could work on. One of us called out, ‘This nearly was mine.’ ”), 287.

43This sketch is in the Hammerstein collection at the Library of Congress.
lines that required three-note endings. Admittedly, the word did convey exactly the way the character felt; he was close to paradise, whether Oscar liked it or not.44

While the word “paradise,” as Rodgers argues, is appropriate for de Becque’s referral to what he has lost, the lyrics for the song in general are probably the weakest in the show, and those for the trio, which follow, are particularly generic:

So clear and deep are my fancies
Of things I wish were true,
I’ll keep remembering evenings
I wish I’d spent with you.
I’ll keep remembering kisses
From lips I’ll never own
And all the lovely adventures
That we have never known.45

Despite the arguably weak lyrics, however, “This Nearly Was Mine” is, as Ethan Mordden suggests, the musical climax of the show.46 In it, de Becque realizes he is alone on his island -- the final A section begins with the line, “Now . . . now I’m alone,”47 and the stage directions following the song read, “He drops to the bench, a lonely and disconsolate figure.”48 Faced with emotional isolation, he abandons his physical isolation and decides to join the war, which is to say that he decides to join society. Unlike Cable, de Becque is redeemed by his decision in this scene: by stating his intention of helping Cable and subsequently society, de Becque, in the short scene immediately following “This Nearly Was Mine,” insures his own survival. Further, right after he sings that he is alone, de

44Rodgers, 262.

45Rodgers and Hammerstein, 153-154.

46Mordden, Rodgers and Hammerstein, 120.

47Rodgers and Hammerstein 1949, 152.

48Hammerstein and Logan, 348.
Becque sings the line “Still dreaming of Paradise,” as if to suggest that, even in the midst of his loneliness, he still has the ability to imagine the splendor of what he has lost. This line is reminiscent of Bloody Mary’s lyrics in “Happy Talk” that ask, “If you don’t have a dream / How you gonna have a dream come true?” Cable has relinquished his dream -- he ended his brief reprise of “Younger Than Springtime” in the past tense (“Younger than springtime were you . . . to me”) -- but de Becque, even while acknowledging his loss, is “still dreaming of Paradise.” The future of each man is determined in this scene, and it is determined in large part by their acceptance or rejection of a social order beyond the personal.

This rejection of the social order does not imply Cable’s abandonment of his mission or of the greater war effort, however. His earlier line, implying his rejection of the society from which he comes, refers to after the war: “if I get out of this thing alive . . .”49 The nature of Cable’s mission has already been established as virtually suicidal. In act 1, scene 5, Commander Harbison noted that men on this mission might survive for a week. When, in 2, 4, Cable again asks de Becque to accompany him, he implies this danger, suggesting that de Becque reconsider “now that you haven’t got so much to lose.”50 De Becque’s decision to accompany Cable excites the latter -- the stage directions note “his eyes lighting up” when de Becque refers to both of them on the island, and one line later he is described as “delirious.”51 These directions imply Cable’s embracing the danger with an almost reckless abandon, reflecting both his newly heightened state of self-awareness and the fever that still infects his body. We can only guess

49Hammerstein and Logan, 347.
50Ibid.
51Ibid., 349.
whether he would have felt the same way if he had not just given up Liat or not been in better health, or if his approach to the mission would perhaps have remained more cautious, as it is in act 1.

De Becque and Cable rush off to inform Captain Brackett that the mission will take place. After they exit, the following stage directions explain the end of the scene:

Billis rushes on and looks after them. Obviously, he’s been listening. He thinks it over for a moment, “dopes it out.” Then, with sudden decision, he takes one last puff on a cigarette butt, flings it away, and follows after them.52

Billis’s decision, we learn in a subsequent scene, is to steal away on the flight delivering Cable and de Becque and try to get to the source of souvenirs that he can later sell. He is motivated by profit, although his actions actually will contribute to the eventual success of the mission. Before, his ability to get to an island and its material goods was limited by his ability to talk someone else into taking him there; now, he takes charge of the situation himself. He acts independently. Each participant in the mission, therefore, brings an element of self interest to his involvement: de Becque’s personal dreams have been thwarted, so he accepts an outside society’s dream of eliminating its enemy; Cable’s involvement in the mission is all the meaning he has left in his life, having lost the girl he loves as well as his illusions about the social structure of his very existence; and Billis sees an opportunity for independent action leading to financial gain. The decision each man makes in this scene to pursue the mission alters the course of his destiny and, we later learn, the war.

Overall, 2, 4 is an excellent example of a musical scene. It combines dramatic, narrative, and lyrical elements, and presents them in a musically and dramatically balanced sequence. The spoken drama of the scene’s first and last sections frame a tripartite musical sequence, which is a suite-like unit consisting of

52Ibid.
song, linking bridge, and second contrasting song, all exploiting different characteristics of triple time. The increasingly urgent dialogue of the last section is reinforced by underscoring drawn from the preceding songs -- first, from “This Nearly Was Mine” and, when Cable’s persuasion grows more intense, de Becque’s section of “Carefully Taught.” Finally, the entire scene begins and ends with business for Billis that suggests that he, too, has reached a personal turning point through experiencing the events of 2, 4 as an onlooker. The scene, like those discussed above, shows craftsmen working at the peak of their form. How it reached its impressive final form, what was lost or diluted in the process, and why examination of that process is important, will occupy the remainder of this chapter.

As we turn to the sketches for 2, 4, we focus on the evolution of those sketches into the skillfully executed musical scene just examined. These sketches provide detailed information about the approach of Rodgers and Hammerstein to a musical scene, information that, as noted above, sheds light not only on this particular example, but on the creation of other such scenes by Rodgers and Hammerstein and, by force of their influence, on subsequent musicals by others. Moreover, in the specific case of *South Pacific*, the sketches demonstrate how the tone of the scene, and therefore the show, was altered from sketch to final realization. This change of tone, as we shall see, affected the structure of the scene.

Seven sketches for parts of, or all of, 2, 4 exist in the Hammerstein collection. They will be referred to as 2, 4-A through 2, 4-G, and a brief description of each will be useful before closer examination. Sketch 2, 4-A undoubtedly is the earliest sketch, a simply constructed draft for the scene in which confrontational dialogue is followed by a parenthetical indication for a song. Sketch 2, 4-B is an “extra lyric,” the first appearance of the song “My Girl
Back Home.” It is dated January 22. Sketch 2, 4-C contains extra dialogue, later
removed, before the song “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught.” Sketch 2, 4-D,
dated February 22, begins with a section of “You’ve Got To Be Carefully
Taught” that was sung by de Becque and later cut. This sketch ends with the
first and last sections of the song “Now Is The Time,” which also was eventually
cut. Of particular interest is 2, 4-E, which, strictly speaking, is not a sketch, but
part of a finished draft of the musical, several copies of which are found in folders
in the Hammerstein collection. The clean copies of this draft in bound playscripts,
in addition to their contents, indicate that this was the first rehearsal script, and
the version of 2, 4 in this draft is already a workable and fairly polished musical
scene. Sketch 2, 4-F begins with new dialogue to follow “You’ve Got To Be
Carefully Taught.” This dialogue was kept in the final version of the scene. Also
notable in 2, 4-F is the first indication of a song in the spot eventually filled by
“This Nearly Was Mine.” This sketch also ends with “Now Is The Time.” Finally,
sketch 2, 4-G consists of a sung transition for Cable that leads into what was to
be de Becque’s intro to “This Nearly Was Mine.” Other sketches pertinent to
this discussion are two sets of lyrics for the song “Now Is the Time.”

In sketch 2, 4-A, the principal elements of the scene are already present:
the prejudice of Nellie and Cable; the argument whether this prejudice is born in
an individual or is learned; de Becque’s feelings of loss and, subsequently, his
arousal to action; Cable’s enthusiasm over de Becque’s change of heart.53 The
sketch, however, presents these elements in a quite different context, one both
polemical and non-musical, and Hammerstein’s focus in 2, 4-A is somewhat
different than in the final version of the scene, as we shall see. While it is undated,
this sketch contains no reference to any of the songs that eventually became

53From the Oscar Hammerstein II collection in the Library of Congress. In a box marked “CORRES South Pacific (2).”
important structural elements of the scene, instead referring only to one song at
the end of the scene -- “A Man Makes Up His Mind” -- for which no music or
lyric sketches are found. This suggests that the sketch is an early -- probably the
earliest -- incarnation of the scene, as do the absence of Cable’s revelation and
song, and the tone of de Becque’s dialogue with Nellie, which follows.

After Nellie admits that she cannot marry de Becque because of his having
been married to a Polynesian woman, she acknowledges, as she does in the final
version of 2, 4, that her reasoning is emotional, not rational. She argues, her voice
rising, that these feelings are born in her and that she cannot help them. The rest
of their dialogue follows:

    Emile

    I do not believe these feelings are born in you.

    Nellie

    Bred in me, then -- taught to me since I learned to walk. I can’t
help it! There it is! ... I can’t help it!

    Emile

    What are you doing out here, Nellie?

    Nellie

    (Off her balance)

    What?

    Emile

    You and all the others who feel as you? Why are you killing and
being killed by people you seem to agree with? (Nellie looks at him
horrified and terrified by his tone) Why don’t you go home? (His
voice rising) Go home! Go home and tell one another that all men
are created free and equal. Make up a song about it -- and sing
yourselves to sleep!

    (Nellie looks at Cable but finds no comfort in his steady, accusing
eyes. She looks back to Emile, forms his name on her lips, but can’t
say it, then turns and rushes off into the tent.)54

54Ibid.
The first difference between the final version of the scene and this early version is that, in the early version, the revelation that prejudice is learned is Nellie’s, not Cable’s. Her line, “Bred in me then -- taught to me since I learned to walk,” anticipates Cable’s “It’s not born in you! It happens after you’re born . . . ,” which is the introduction to his song. Each version makes the connection between learned prejudice and childhood. Hammerstein subsequently took these observations away from Nellie and, instead, gave her a solo scene later in the act (scene 10) in which she realizes her errant thinking.55 Hammerstein retains Nellie’s acknowledgement that her prejudice is emotional, not rational, however, and her exit in both versions is prompted by Cable’s lack of support.

The second, and more glaring, difference between the sketch and the final version, as well as between the sketch and Michener, is de Becque’s angry speech. In the sketch, de Becque criticizes not just Nellie, but also American society and its prejudices. He attacks the hypocrisy of bigotry in a society that prides itself on freedom and equality, and the harshness of his words and their delivery stuns Nellie. The words alone, no matter how delivered, undoubtedly would have shocked an American audience as well. This speech recalls the de Becque of Hammerstein’s early sketch for 1, 7, discussed in Chapter Five.56 In the final version, this speech has been eliminated, and de Becque’s protest is reduced to two sentences arguing against the idea that prejudice is born in people.

The content of de Becque’s speech in the sketch, as well as the idea stated by Nellie (later by Cable) that perhaps this bias is learned by children, is similar

55 Over underscoring of “I’m In Love With a Wonderful Guy,” Nellie says, “Come back so I can tell you something. I know what counts now. You. All those other things -- the woman you had before -- her color . . . (She laughs bitterly) What piffle! What a pinhead I was! Come back so I can tell you.” (Hammerstein and Logan, 359.)

56 See Chapter Five, pages 167-70.
enough to the content of several items written for the WWB -- items found in the
Hammerstein collection at the Library of Congress -- to warrant closer inspection.
The first passage is from the *Third Annual Report of the Writers’ War Board*
(January 1945), referred to in Chapter Two:

The Board has also continued to concern itself . . . with the rising
tide of prejudice against racial, religious, and other groups here at
home. We believe that our military success must not be jeopardized
by sentimental illusions about our enemies or bigoted notions about
our Allies and fellow-citizens. . . . The Writers’ War Board believes
that the sense of superiority harbored by large sections of the
American people toward smaller groups on the basis of skin color,
religion, or national extraction is closely linked with native
American fascism. These distinctions, which tend to create groups of
second-class citizens, are often perpetuated by well-meaning
persons who do not realize that they weaken the fabric of
democracy.57

De Becque’s line, “Why are you killing and being killed by people you
seem to agree with,” which equates a prejudiced American with the fascist
enemy, recalls an unpublished book review from the WWB also found in the
Hammerstein collection. (This review, on official WWB paper, is a suggested
newspaper editorial; the WWB supplied such editorials for local newspapers
across the country.) Its presence in the collection, and its similarity in tone to de
Becque’s speech, suggests the possibility that the anonymous review was written
by Hammerstein. At the very least, its presence in his papers argues for his
familiarity with it. This review not only equates prejudiced Americans with the
enemy. It also suggests Nellie’s, and later Cable’s, lines about the influence of
adult prejudice on the young. Note the similar emphases in the sketch and the
following passage from the review:

. . . [Prejudice is] the most virulent enemy that has appeared on the
home front. It is impossible to read this book without realizing that
any citizen who either speaks or acts out of prejudice against fellow

57 *Third Annual Report of the Writers’ War Board.* 3, 17. The Oscar Hammerstein II
collection at the Library of Congress, Box 21 (Correspondence & Misc. by subject).
citizens belonging to minority groups is warring with the United States as truly as are Goebbels, Goering, and Hitler. It has been our observation that the minds of young people are not apt to be poisoned by prejudice unless the poison has been prepared by adults.58

These passages from the WWB literature, like the “Ol’ Man Author” skit discussed in Chapter Two,59 are from a time when Hammerstein’s work for the stage was not specifically concerned with such issues. Hammerstein’s first two post-war theater works, however -- *South Pacific* and *The King and I* (1951) -- are specifically about problematic relations between cultures and races. The wartime concerns, in other words, seem to have lasted beyond the war, and they are vividly expressed in his two subsequent theatrical works. Furthermore, when the WWB reorganized as the Writers’ Board for World Government in 1949, Hammerstein became involved with, and wrote for, the World Federalism movement. In these published articles, which he wrote when his work for the stage became increasingly expressive of his concerns with racial tolerance, Hammerstein’s mention of racial issues is infrequent.60 After *The King and I*, however, Hammerstein’s concern with matters of racial understanding and tolerance did not appear in his works for the stage with the same intensity, although *Flower Drum Song* (1958) deals with related issues of Chinese immigrants’ assimilation into American society.

In contrast to the extended polemics of 2, 4-A, the exchange between Nellie and de Becque in the final version of 2, 4 can be reduced to four briefly

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58 Review of *Probing Our Prejudices* by Hortense Powdermaker. The Oscar Hammerstein II collection at the Library of Congress, Box 21 (Correspondence & Misc. by subject). Emphasis added.

59 See Chapter Two, pp. 65-66.

60 The issue of World Federalism interested Hammerstein until the end of his life, however. He published an article in *One World--Or None!*, the official publication of the United World Federalists, Inc. as late as August 1960, the month of his death.
stated points: Nellie’s admission of the prejudice that prevents her from marrying de Becque; her belief that this feeling was born in her; her plea that she cannot help it; and de Becque’s denial of this. De Becque makes no recriminatory comments about her beliefs apart from doubting that they were inborn, and he does not place her beliefs into any larger cultural context. Nellie’s prejudice is left within the confines of the personal. The addition of Cable’s song of discovery, however, moves prejudice into a broader context: he realizes that society in general is to blame for prejudice. Cable’s reaction to that realization, which causes him to reject the society that taught him his prejudice, explains his actions and subsequent fate, discussed above. The removal of de Becque’s criticism of society, and his added romantic song, give him a less discordant role in the scene and contrast him with Cable; his status as a romantic hero remains intact.

After Nellie’s exit, sketch 2, 4-A continues with de Becque and Cable. Cable suggests that de Becque has no right to criticize the principles of Nellie or other Americans since he, de Becque, is unwilling to fight for anything. Cable refers to an earlier comment by de Becque about living on his own private island, at which point de Becque quickly notes that things have changed in a week’s time. De Becque then mentions going with Cable on the mission, and from this point on the scene builds in intensity as the two men talk more excitedly about the mission. Cable is afforded no insight and undergoes no transformation in this version of the scene, and he is provided with no song. De Becque’s decision to accompany Cable is abrupt and unconvincing: almost immediately after accusing the Americans of hypocrisy, he agrees to participation in a suicide mission in support of their cause. Cable is left without an important dimension that was added later, with the addition of his song, and de Becque lacks the introspective moment that, when added, propels him into action. In fact, no reference to anything musical occurs until the very end of the scene. After agreeing to go with
Cable, de Becque observes that “It is good to be a useful man again!” This is followed by the directions, “(From here, cue to song:) WHEN A MAN MAKES UP HIS MIND Emile and Cable.”\footnote{From the Oscar Hammerstein II collection in the Library of Congress. In a box marked “CORRES South Pacific (2).”} The development of this musical afterthought into the extended musical scene we encountered above is the most important change in the structure and thematic tone of 2, 4, and it is the primary concern of the remainder of this chapter.

While much of 2, 4-A is retained in the scene’s final version, the song indicated at the end of this sketch was never written. The spot was filled instead by the reprise of “Now Is the Time.” The reprise of this song provides an irony that a new song would have lacked. In the first act, as we recall from Chapter Four, de Becque sang “Now Is the Time” to convince Nellie to marry him. The song was an argument for Nellie to stay with de Becque on his island, far from the worries of the world. In the second act, rejected by Nellie, de Becque, in turn, rejects his previous idea of living in isolation: “I am back facing the world as it is -- and ready to do something about it. . . . We will not sit back and wait for the future to take care of us,” he asserts to Cable before beginning the song.

The reprise of a number to indicate an often ironic change in character or situation is hardly unique to South Pacific; in Oklahoma!, for instance, “People Will Say We’re In Love” becomes “Let People Say We’re In Love,” indicating a change in Laurie and Curley’s acceptance of their feelings. What makes the reprise of “Now Is the Time” notable is that all mention of its existence refers to it not as a reprise of a first-act song, but only as a song in the second act.\footnote{See Fordin, 279; Logan, 287; Citron, 199.} As we saw in Chapter Four, however, much evidence exists suggesting that the song was first heard in act 1.
The reprise of “Now Is The Time,” as well as “When a Man Makes Up His Mind,” the title it replaced at the end of 2, 4, each suggests a problem that was solved only in the final version of the scene: once two characters have made an irreversible decision concerning their fate, what is the point of a musical number in which they sing about that decision? Wouldn’t they just act on it? These questions seem to have become an issue only after the musical was in rehearsal, for no mention of another number in the scene appears until sketch 2, 4-F, which contains a substantial rewritten version of the last part of the scene and the shortened reprise of “Now Is the Time,” mentioned above. The rewrite introduces Cable’s idea of not returning home after the war, and the new dialogue was kept in the final version of the scene. De Becque responds with a speech in which he warns Cable not to fool himself, that life cannot be hidden from. Life will find him, he tells Cable, and when it does, he will embrace it anew, “facing life as it is and all that’s wrong with it.”

This introspection is a new addition to the scene, a heretofore unexplored dimension of de Becque brought forth by his resigned acceptance of Nellie’s rejection. Instead of immediately moving into action, as in earlier sketches, he is pensive and reflective. This sketch is the first version in which the scene, like de Becque, turns its focus inward. Instead of thrusting his characters forward into action, Hammerstein takes a moment to explore the emotions that motivate the action. This exploration anticipates the reflective song that eventually appears in the scene, and it softens the impact of the scene’s earlier confrontational elements. A song is first mentioned at this point that 2, 4-F, although no specifications are given.

De Becque’s resignation in turn gives Cable a motivation for mentioning

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63The continued shortening of “Now Is the Time” argues further against its having been created for this scene. While a song fragment is perfectly acceptable for a reprise, it is highly unusual as the only appearance of a song.
the mission, and, following the spot for the new song, Cable asks de Becque if he would reconsider going on the mission. Cable’s dialogue after the song also is retained in the final version of the script. While 2, 4-F still uses one partial chorus of “Now Is the Time” to end the scene, the added dialogue, and the indication of an added song at an earlier moment for de Becque, emphasize the uselessness of the reprise to the plot and to the development of both characters. At this point of the scene’s evolution, its elimination seems almost imminent.

Sketch 2, 4-G was written after the new song, “This Nearly Was Mine,” was written. Hammerstein’s lyric sheet, as well as 2, 4-G, inform us that the song went through some formal adjustments before reaching its final structure, however, and these adjustments improve the overall effect of the developing musical scene. In the lyric sheet that accompanies Rodgers’s manuscript copy of the song, for instance, the song begins with a verse consisting of what later became the trio of the waltz (“So clear and deep were my fancies . . .”). This is followed by the refrain (“One dream in my heart . . .”). The lyrics for the verse introduce the refrain, as is customary, but they address an absent Nellie: “I’ll keep remembering evenings / I wish I’d spent with you,” which makes no dramatic sense, since the song grows out of dialogue with Cable. To solve this problem, in 2, 4-G Hammerstein added three lines of dialogue and a new introduction to the song. After de Becque ends his speech by implying that one must face what is wrong with life, Cable responds that there is plenty wrong with it. De Becque then comments, “One doubts if it is worth fighting to save. And yet --”. Cable responds bitterly to this and then sings, “The world’s a lousy dish, / You may quote me if you wish.” De Becque responds by singing, “But in this same world I was very glad to be, / When the soft eyes of beauty nearly smiled on me.”

64Richard Rodgers Collection, Library of Congress, Box 16, folder 13. Also in the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box marked “CORRES South Pacific."
this point, 2, 4-G indicates that de Becque begins “a refrain.” Given the nature of his introductory lyrics, we can assume that refrain belonged to “This Nearly Was Mine.” Music for this introduction is in the Rodgers collection with the rest of “This Nearly Was Mine.” The introduction was eliminated in the final version, of course, and a short transitional speech for de Becque was written that led directly into the refrain of the song, the “verse” becoming a trio that allowed for a repeat of the refrain, a repeat that assured a second act solo of substance for the leading man.

Sketch 2, 4-B is dated January 22 and is marked “extra lyric.” This lyric is for “My Girl Back Home,” a song for Cable in the early part of 2, 4 that was later cut, and includes a short speech for Cable following the song.65 “My Girl Back Home” is also in the first rehearsal script, and it is in that later context that we shall examine it (it is the same as the version in 2, 4-B, including the speech). In that early version, 2, 4 begins with Nellie and Cable. Nellie, who has cared for Cable in the hospital during his illness, discovers him lying prone on a bench outside the women’s dressing tent. She scolds him for being away from the hospital and, as she starts to take his pulse, notices that his watch is missing. He shows her the pieces and tells her it was smashed by “a lady who wanted to be my mother-in-law.”66 Nellie asks him what is bothering him, telling him that, while in the delirium of his fever, he had been talking to a girl. She asks if it had been his “girl back home.” Cable repeats that line “with reminiscent and ironic amusement,”67 and sings “My Girl Back Home,” a short (thirty-two measures) and somewhat wistful song with two choruses.

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65 The song was reinstated in the 1958 film version. The short speech was not.

66 The Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress, Box marked “South Pacific Scripts.”

67 Ibid.
Instead of writing two sixteen-measure choruses for their thirty-two measure song, Rodgers and Hammerstein create two related choruses of twenty-two and fourteen measures, respectively. The first four measures of each chorus are virtually the same -- the second is somewhat embellished -- but the second continues in short, two-measure phrases, reflecting Hammerstein’s stage directions (“He rises and paces the stage contemplatively.” 68). Likewise, while the lyrics for the first chorus are nostalgic -- Cable recalls his blue-eyed girl and his inevitable partnership in the family law firm -- those for the second begin, “How far away!” and note the distance of Philadelphia “from coconut palms / And banyan trees / And coral sands / And Tonkinese!” 69

After the song, he confides to Nellie that the “girl” he had been talking about was Tonkinese, not the girl back home, and Nellie reacts with shock. Cable confronts her about her shock, noting that, “The way you look now is just the way my mother would look.” 70 He then becomes angrier, asking Nellie, “What’s the difference if her hair is blonde and curly or black and straight? If I want her to be my wife, why can’t I have her?” Nellie’s response is nervous and hesitant. “You can! It’s just that -- people -- I mean -- they say it never works. Don’t they?” Cable’s response is bitter. “They do,” he comments. “And then everybody does their damndest to prove it. A hell of a chance Liat and I would have in one of those little gray stone and timber houses on the Main Line. ‘Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Cable entertained, last Tuesday, with a housewarming. Nobody came!’” 71

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
Nellie’s response reveals her discomfort when confronted with her own prejudice and preconceived ideas. The “they say it never works” line is not an original thought -- Nellie is repeating what she has learned. But she also is repeating this to convince herself and to prepare for her confrontation with de Becque, which immediately follows. The loss of this scene and the loss of Nellie’s disapproval of Cable removes an aspect of Nellie’s prejudice and somewhat simplifies her character. In the final version, instead of seeing Nellie as generally prejudiced -- that is, as a bigot -- we see only one instance of prejudice, which is focused on the man she loves. In other words, in the final version of *South Pacific*, Nellie’s racism is far less blatant, and she is more sympathetic.

“My Girl Back Home,” a gentle, lyrical song, works well within the scene and sets up Cable’s conflict with the views he brings with him from his background. It remains in the final score as evocative underscoring, played when we learn of Cable’s death on the mission. Its removal from the show was said to result from the length of the show; perhaps it was also, at least in part, because of the representation of Nellie in the scene that surrounded it. To have a doomed character confront his own racism and blame it on his society was one thing. To have a heroine repeatedly express racial bigotry, as we have seen Nellie do in the sketches, even though she eventually realizes the error of her beliefs and is redeemed through her unconditional love, was simply too much for an audience in 1949. Nellie’s prejudice, therefore, was left in the domain of the general, and it remained for Cable to make it specific.

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72 In the 2002 London production, directed by Trevor Nunn, “My Girl Back Home” was reinstated, as was some of the ensuing scene.
Conclusion

Even in its final incarnation, its edges blunted and its heroine less blatantly tainted with the prejudices of her culture, 2, 4 is a powerful indictment of racial intolerance, and “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” remains a jolt for audiences unfamiliar with the musical. Nonetheless, it is considerably less aggressive in the delivery of its socio-political message than it was in its earlier versions. In the end, the message is still made, but the addition of romantic and reflective elements to the didactic intent enrich the scene. In the evolution of 2-4, which documents the growing presence of those elements, we see another demonstration of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s mastery of the musical scene, as well as of another path taken to that mastery.

As we complete our examination of the sketches for South Pacific, let us return to Philip Gossett, whose comments on Beethoven sketch studies informed the first chapter of this study. In writing about his investigation of sketches for a symphony movement, Gossett observes that, “By revealing the chain of compositional decisions . . . they [sketches] help us to penetrate the substance of that movement.” 73 We likewise have seen repeatedly that examination of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s creative processes for South Pacific informs our understanding of the final work. While South Pacific, as it is known, remains a masterwork of the genre, knowing its journey to that status also allows us to view it as a product of its authors’ self-critical thinking, as I noted in Chapter One. This

73 Gossett, 280.

74 The importance of Trevor Nunn’s rewritten and reconceived version has yet to be determined. Its mixed critical reception and failure to get an American production, however, suggests that it will not supplant the more familiar 1949 version. And while Nunn used “Now Is the Time” in 2, 4 of his 2002 London production, the Rodgers and Hammerstein Organization disallowed its subsequent use by Molly Smith in her 2003 Arena Stage production in Washington D. C., deciding, according to The Washington Post columnist Nelson Pressley, “that it hadn’t worked in London.” (Pressley, 3).
perspective, in turn, emphasizes its role in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s expanding thematic and structural concerns with the genre of the commercial musical play.

How these concerns reflect and reveal the cultural context of *South Pacific*, as well as its reception, is the focus of the following chapter.
Although many people enjoyed a sense of well-being in the postwar United States, increasingly turbulent social and cultural conditions began to cloud their vistas. The thematic emphases of *South Pacific* reflect some of these challenges, and the goal of this chapter is to situate the musico-dramatic evolution of the work within the context of those social and cultural changes and discover how it was affected by them. This further demonstrates, and at least in part explains, the softening of social criticism in *South Pacific* that we already have noted. We already did some of this with the investigation of the evolution of 1-1, especially Harbison’s song, which included references to the socio-economic context of “the bright young executive.”¹ In this chapter, the process of contextualization is deeper.

This process has two principal foci. First, I explore the changing postwar climate of race relations in the United States that finds expression in *South Pacific*. Second, I examine the changing role of women in American society from the war to the postwar era and its reflection in the character Nellie Forbush. Focusing on these two issues provides an excellent means of examining the social and cultural contexts of *South Pacific*, its creation, and its reception.

Because the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, by 1949, had become an important part of the American landscape, a landscape up until that point

¹See above, Chapter Four.
dominated by the war, and because this was their first work written after the war, *South Pacific* assumes a unique and interesting place in their creative output. We shall see how its musico-dramatic evolution reflects its creators’ interpretation, and representation, of a challenging period of American history.

**Race**

The year that *South Pacific* opened also witnessed a number of unrelated events that were of profound consequence to the postwar United States. In *The Crucial Decade: America, 1945-1955*, his consideration of the immediate postwar years, Eric F. Goldman describes 1949 as a year that marked an American “turning point.”² In that year, China was taken over by a Communist regime; the Soviet Union gained an atomic bomb; and the Alger Hiss case raised discomforting questions about communists within the United States government, encouraging a heightened Cold War and opening the door to McCarthyism. Of perhaps even greater day-to-day importance, however, was the increasing criticism of institutionalized racial inequality, which recalled the NAACP’s 1947 petition to the United Nations declaring, among other things, that, “It is not Russia that threatens the United States as much as Mississippi.”³

This inequality was ironic, given that the United States fought on two fronts to overcome regimes based at least in part on beliefs of racial superiority. As Wendell Wilkie noted during the war, “Our very proclamations of what we are fighting for have rendered our inequities self-evident. When we talk about freedom and opportunity for all nations the mocking paradoxes in our own


society become so clear they can no longer be ignored.”4 This irony was not lost on many others in the United States.

As the anti-communist fervor grew more strident, however, expressions of any sentiment that challenged the status quo, racial or otherwise, had to be spoken in carefully chosen words; difficulties awaited those who spoke without caution. For instance, comments by Paul Robeson, such as those in his 1949 Paris speech at the Congress of World Partisans for Peace, in which he reportedly suggested that the racial policies of the United States were “similar to that of Hitler and Goebels,”5 were enough to get his passport eventually declared invalid, thus preventing him from leaving the country. A few years later, teacher and author Jonathan Kozol was fired from the Boston public school system for teaching the Langston Hughes poem, “Ballad of the Landlord,” a bitter criticism of the imprisonment of an African American for challenging an unfair system.6 In other words, while the movement for racial equality was present in 1949, its voice was often hushed by the Cold War agenda. Mary Dudziak summarizes this situation as follows:

. . . the Cold War would frame and thereby limit the nation’s civil rights commitment. . . . By silencing certain voices and by promoting a particular vision of racial justice, the Cold War led to a narrowing of acceptable civil rights discourse. The narrow boundaries of Cold War-era civil rights politics kept discussions of broad-based social change . . . off the agenda. . . . The narrow terms


5Quoted in Dudziak, 62.

of Cold War civil rights discourse and the nature of the federal government’s commitment help explain the limits of social change during this period.7

The civil rights discourse mostly was framed in terms of blacks and whites, an observation that is pertinent to South Pacific. The “black / white paradigm,” notes Dudziak, “renders other racial groups invisible.”8 Their focus on a racial binarism other than black / white enabled Rodgers and Hammerstein to make general points about racial intolerance without directly involving the most inflammatory intolerance -- that between white Americans and African Americans. The conflicts between an American and an unseen Polynesian (Nellie and de Becque’s first wife), or an American and the Tonkinese daughter of an exotic Other (Cable and Liat, daughter of Bloody Mary), are removed from the principal black / white conflicts in the United States and, therefore, more acceptable to a mainstream audience.

The story’s avoidance of the black / white conflict also necessitates some of the word choices Rodgers and especially Hammerstein made in expressing Nellie’s racism. We have noted elsewhere that, in the Michener novel, Nellie referred to anyone “who was not white or yellow” as a nigger.9 This word, of course, was unacceptable to a middle-class American audience; while the word may have been used in private conversation, it was not uttered in respectable society, and Hammerstein could not have used it.10 He initially did use the word “colored,” however, at the end of the first act.11 But in 1949, this word carried

7 Dudziak, 13.
8 Ibid., 14.
9Michener, Tales, 138. Also see above, Chapter Six.
10Hammerstein’s use of the word in Show Boat is still controversial.
11See Chapter Four, above.
the connotation of “Negro,” and it still was too powerful for Nellie to use. In the end, Hammerstein decided to leave Nellie’s anxiety over race more generally expressed.

Rodgers and Hammerstein were not oblivious to the possibility of being criticized for their thematic choices, and they were not blind to a growing public suspicion towards social criticism. They were also confident that their social commentary was critical to the work. Rodgers, in his autobiography, was somewhat glib about the inclusion of “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” in the show; noting that “the song was never written as a ‘message’ song, though it has, I know, provided ministers of many faiths with a topic for a sermon.” He adds, “It was included in South Pacific for the simple reason that Oscar and I felt it was needed in a particular spot . . . It was perfectly in keeping with the character [Cable] and situation that, once having lost his heart, he would express his feelings about the superficiality of racial barriers. End of sermon.”12 But during the out-of-town tryouts, Rodgers and Hammerstein were approached by what Fordin refers to as “a group of ‘experienced theatrical people’” suggesting removal of the song. About this incident, James A. Michener elsewhere remarks that, “The authors replied stubbornly that this number represented why they had wanted to do this play, and that even if it meant failure of the production, it was going to stay in.”13

Rodgers and Hammerstein’s commitment to “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught” notwithstanding, the song was singled out unfavorably by several New York critics. Wolcott Gibbs referred to “something called ‘You’ve Got to Be

12Rodgers, Musical Stages, 261-62.

13Quoted in Fordin, 271. Rodgers, however, was quite confident of the show’s eventual success. After pre-booking the St. Regis Roof for an opening night gala, he ordered “a couple of hundred copies of the Times to give to the guests” even before he knew for sure what the review would say. (Rodgers, Musical Stages, 263).
Taught,’ a poem in praise of tolerance that somehow I found just a little embarrassing,” and John Mason Brown noted that he was “somewhat distressed by the dragged-in didacticism of such a plea for tolerance as ‘You’ve Got to Be Taught’ . . .” The controversy continued. On Sunday, March 1, 1953, during the national tour of the musical, an article in the New York Herald Tribune, reported that “Two Georgia legislators, who denounced the musical South Pacific as propaganda, vowed to introduce bills to outlaw movies, plays and musicals having ‘an underlying philosophy inspired by Moscow.’ . . . Rep. Jones said their charge of propaganda referred particularly to the song ‘You’ve Got to Be Taught’ which, he says, urged justification of interracial marriage.”

Both men were outspoken opponents of the often hysterical anti-Communism that gripped the country soon after World War II: Rodgers’s protests of the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947 resulted in a file on him being opened by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Hammerstein was critical of the government’s censure of Paul Robeson and later, in the early 1950s, went on record saying, “You do not protect rights by abrogating them.” But both men also knew that, in the political and social climate of the late 1940s, their critical points could not be made with a heavy hand. So the softening of the


16A clipping of this article is found in the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, the Library of Congress. In the box marked “Box 21 (Correspondence & Misc. by subject). Later in the article, Hammerstein is quoted as saying that he didn’t think the legislators were “representing the people of Georgia very well.”

17Secrest, 310. The FBI never found anything on Rodgers to put in the file.

18Fordin, 312.
show’s underlying message and the subsequent removal of material directly confrontational of the status quo, material such as de Becque’s speech in 2, 4, for instance, was a compromise that still allowed for socially relevant, and critical, thematic content. In light of the criticism this thematic content generated despite their efforts to soften it, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s commitment to their themes was brave, and the story’s lack of confrontation between blacks and whites provided a setting in which they could make powerful, if less specific, social commentary about racial and ethnic intolerance.

While *South Pacific* speaks out strongly against the intolerance of individual Americans, however, it affords no criticism of the colonial relations of the United States as a wartime power and the Islanders with whom it comes in contact. Indeed, the musical presents island characters in various degrees of ethnic and cultural “otherness.” In Chapter Four, we noted that the opening moments of the musical demonstrate the colonial presence of Europeans or Americans -- the Polynesian children singing a French song, their enacting a Western concert ritual, and the introduction of a French-speaking Polynesian manservant. The children, who are only half Polynesian, eventually inspire Nellie, through her affection for them, to overcome her prejudice.

The colonialist elements of the work also are demonstrated by two other non-white characters, Bloody Mary and her daughter Liat. They are referred to as Tonkinese, probably combined with some Polynesian blood (we never learn of Liat’s father). Bloody Mary, although capable of rage, as we see when Cable says he cannot marry Liat, is more often presented as playful and childlike. When we meet her, she is amusing the sailors with her use of American slang and, more

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19 Andrea Most has written about this in detail, although her criticism of *South Pacific* reads in part like a disappointment in its lack of contemporary racial sensitivity, rather than an appreciation of its success in raising the issue at all in a 1949 commercial musical. Still, Most’s discussion of the representation of difference in *South Pacific* -- and the problems of that representation -- is a valuable and well-considered addition to the literature. See Most, 307-37.
particularly, profanity. She giggles and is coy, but she also demonstrates that she has learned the Americans’ capitalist ways when she out-deals the wheeler-dealer Luther Billis. Further, Mary is treated like a misbehaving child by the island commander, whose angry demands that she cease and desist her retail operations are stern but paternal. While she is a nuisance to the island command, however, she is a novelty and a plaything to the sailors and Seabees who, in the song “Bloody Mary,” refer to her amusingly as “the girl they love.”

While she is attracted to Cable when she meets him, she also sees him as a potential marriage partner for her young daughter. The “Oriental” woman, at first a comic figure, becomes manipulative. To convince Cable that she knows something of his fate, or that she might have a hand in it, she becomes the mysterious -- almost mystical -- “other,” as she sings the song “Bali Ha’i,” an evocation of exoticism. Rodgers’s use of chromaticism in this song -- tritones and passages exploiting movement by half step in the melody, diminished chords and chromatic countermelodies in the accompaniment -- recalls Hollywood’s popular musical expression of the South Pacific and its peoples in the 1930s and 1940s. This use of chromaticism also embodies desire -- Mary’s for Cable; her need to entice Cable to the exotic island and, subsequently, to her still virgin but sexually alluring daughter; Cable’s desire for something outside his world of experience, with which, we have learned, he is less than comfortable. Rodgers and Hammerstein, in other words, are not able to avoid contemporaneously accepted racial and ethnic stereotyping in spite of their overall theme of tolerance.

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20 In an article about a current (2003) production of the musical at Washington D.C.’s Arena Stage, Bruce Weber observes that “the relationship between Lieutenant Cable and Liat, which begins as a sexual encounter arranged by Bloody Mary, feels strikingly inappropriate . . . [Director Molly] Smith has not only not retreated from portraying this relationship as it is written, but with seeming stridency has cast Liz Paw in the role of Liat, an actress who looks so young as to be discomfortingly underage. ‘Younger Than Springtime’ for sure.” Bruce Weber, “Enchanted Across a Crowded (and Compact) Room,” *New York Times*, Thursday, January 16, 2003, Section B, p. 5.
The use of chromaticism to depict otherness and exotic sexuality is not unprecedented. Susan McClary’s insightful comments on Carmen, the character in Bizet’s opéra comique of the same name, offer assessments also appropriate to this discussion. In what could be a description of Bloody Mary and “Bali Ha’i,” McClary writes of a particularly chromatic vocal line that it “reveals her [Carmen] as a ‘master’ of seductive rhetoric. She knows how to hook and manipulate desire. In her musical discourse she is slippery, unpredictable, maddening: hers is the music we remember from the opera.”

Bloody Mary’s first song also provides a memorable motive for South Pacific: it is the first music we hear in the overture, and it is repeated at key moments that indicate Cable’s awakening sexuality or refer to the inviting island Bali Ha’i.

As mentioned above, Bloody Mary later demonstrates another common representation of the Asian woman -- a childlike creature with an unsophisticated world view, singing simple songs and providing respite from the anxieties of the “real” (Western) world. In Chapter Six, we saw how Mary tries to “sell” Cable on the idea on marrying Liat through a song that resembles a children’s song (“Happy Talk”). Unsophisticated and immensely charming, the song characterizes Mary as a woman with a simple world view based solely on the pursuit of pleasure and dreams. This childlike creature sings in diatonic melodies, unlike the seductive chromaticism of her act 1 number. Her daughter also participates in this game-like song, pantomiming the words in what Hammerstein refers to as “a gentle, childish dance.”

The musical representation of Mary was a key element in the evolution of South Pacific. An often-heard presence in the score, it embodies much of what

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22Hammerstein and Logan, 338.
Rodgers was seeking in the musical representation of the setting and the character of Bloody Mary. It is worth repeating what he wrote of its composition, which follows:

. . . for months Oscar and I had been talking about a song for Bloody Mary which would evoke the exotic, mystical powers of a South Seas island. I knew that the melody would have to possess an Oriental, langorous quality, that it would have to be suitable for a contralto voice, and even that the title was going to be “Bali Ha’i.”

“Exotic,” “mystical,” “Oriental,” and “langorous” all suggest a stereotype common in 1949, and they suggest how Mary and her music are used throughout the work.

*South Pacific* also demonstrates how depictions of the Japanese enemy in the media during the war, like the representations of the islanders, had a particularly racial cast. John W. Dower argues that the Allies thought of the Japanese enemy in blatantly racist terms. He observes the following:

The racist code words and imagery that accompanied the war in Asia were often exceedingly graphic and contemptuous. The Western Allies, for example, persisted in their notion of the “subhuman” nature of the Japanese, routinely turning to images of apes and vermin to convey this. With more tempered disdain, they portrayed the Japanese as inherently inferior men and women who had to be understood in terms of primitivism, childishness, and collective mental and emotional deficiency.

Dower further notes that, while the German enemy is most often referred to as “Nazi” or “Nazi Germany,” thus perhaps implying that not all Germans are Nazis, references to the Japanese enemy were more inclusive. Words like “Jap” or, even

23Rodgers, 262.

more telling, “the Japs” and “Nips,” refer collectively to the whole of Japanese people, as if the Japanese are homogeneous.25

The word “Jap” is used either as noun or adjective throughout the second act of South Pacific, always in a scene pertaining to Cable and de Becque’s mission. Its presence adds an irony to the show’s theme of intolerance, an irony that clearly reflects Wendell Wilkie’s observation quoted above. Was Hammerstein aware of this irony? Or was he simply making use of popular wartime vocabulary that was still in use? Whether intended or not, these pejorative, and ironic, uses of a racial epithet in the work are jarring.

Restricted by the political climate of the times, Rodgers and Hammerstein found the most appropriate way to express their convictions in a gripping story. The softening of the means did not weaken the end result, however, and South Pacific still is remembered as a challenge to the status quo of racial intolerance, despite the presence of problematic stereotypes that betray the time of its creation. Perhaps that softening of the thematic content encouraged the work’s immense commercial success, in which case the message reached many people the authors thought needed to hear it..

Nellie, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and the Postwar American Woman

Nellie Forbush’s musico-dramatic evolution has been one of our principal foci in the preceding chapters. The softening of her racism and the sharpening of her musical expression indicate that Rodgers and Hammerstein took great care

25This is a theme of Dower’s well-documented book, a fascinating investigation of this special aspect of the war in the Pacific.
with her creation, and the result, as we have seen, is a character more complex than she first seems, both to the audience and to herself. But Nellie is at least two other things, and they are important.

First, as Meryle Secrest observes, Nellie indicates a turning point in the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Secrest writes about this as follows:

South Pacific marks a great dividing line in the Rodgers and Hammerstein oeuvre between heroes and heroines who are more or less evenly matched in age and stories about powerful older men and the younger women who are attracted to them.26

Second, this also often suggests, in works by Rodgers and Hammerstein written after 1949, that the woman must come to the man’s world to reach fulfillment.27

The earliest Rodgers and Hammerstein heroine, Laurey in Oklahoma!, is a land-owner who, in the second act, executes her power to hire and fire employees. In order to marry her, Curly, the hero, realizes he must give up his life as a cowboy and adapt to the new world of agriculture; in other words, he must come to her world -- he does not carry her away to his. In Carousel, Julie, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s second heroine, is a working-class woman with limited means but practical plans, all of which are altered by Billy Bigelow, who is also from the working class. Julie exhibits more strength of character than Billy and, surviving after his death, raises their daughter; her love for him never flickers. In Allegro, admittedly often an atypical example of anything in the Rodgers and Hammerstein oeuvre, the eventual heroine is Emily, the woman who helps the hero, Joe, rediscover his original goals and values, and who accompanies him when he leaves his wife Jenny and her self-serving social climbing and reutrns to his roots. Emily is the character with focus and a sense of reality, and she helps Joe regain his footing on his chosen path. All three of these women fall in love

26Secrest, 294.


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with men their own age, have a strong sense of self from the beginning of the play (Laurey’s indecision is a cat-and-mouse game she plays with Curly before inevitably winding up with him), and begin new lives with their men.

Nellie, on the other hand, is in her early twenties and de Becque is middle aged. She is from an unsophisticated middle-class southern American background, and he is an educated and erudite Frenchman in the South Pacific. He has a family which she must accept if she is to have a life with him, far from her home and the source of her prejudices. In other words, Nellie must join de Becque’s world, and give up her own, in order to find happiness. While Laurey and Curly find happiness in the promise of their starting together in her world, and while Julie survives with her daughter in the unhappy world she created with her husband, Nellie ends up in a domestic paradise with a husband, a servant and and two children who speak a language she does not understand. Two observations make this particularly resonant.

First, several subsequent Rodgers and Hammerstein shows follow a similar pattern. In *The King and I*, Anna shares with Nellie the experience of being in a foreign environment. But she, too, becomes involved with, and probably falls in love with, an older and more powerful man who already has a family. Likewise Maria in *The Sound of Music*. Nellie is older sister to them both. Second, Nellie reflects a larger cultural trend, the background for which necessitates a brief digression.

In her work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), author and feminist pioneer Betty Friedan describes a change in women’s magazines around 1949. Whereas, in the 1930s and 1940s, these periodicals had inspired women to move into the

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28The relationship between Anna and the King is never one of overt romance. The closest it comes to romance is the “Shall We Dance?” number in the second act, which is followed by an unresolved conflict over the King’s desire, and inability, to punish the slave Tuptim. See Mordden, *Rodgers and Hammerstein*, 127-47.
professional world, they began to suggest in 1949 that women were little more than appendages to professional husbands, and that they should find satisfaction in that subservient domestic role. These magazines painted increasingly unrealistic portraits of cheerful suburban female consumers with no identities outside the home and, as Friedan observes, women found living up to this ideal -- the “mystique” of her title -- stressful and, in the end, impossible.29

For instance, Friedan reports that, just ten years before South Pacific, the heroines of stories in women’s magazines were the counterpart of American heroes. She describes this as follows:

. . . they were New Women, creating with a gay determined spirit a new identity for women -- a life of their own. There was an aura about them of becoming, of moving into a future that was going to be different from the past. The majority of heroines in the four major women’s magazines . . . were career women . . . who loved and were loved by men. And the . . . strength of character they showed in their work . . . [was] part of their charm. There was a definite aura that their individuality was something to be admired . . . that men were drawn to them as much for their spirit and character as for their looks.30

The last example of this “New Woman” Friedan finds is in a story called “Sarah and the Seaplane” that appeared in the February, 1949 Ladies’ Home Journal. In this story, Sarah decides to learn to fly, and the story’s climax is her solo flight. Friedan quotes the following from the story:

. . . she had to adjust herself to being alone, entirely alone in the familiar cabin. Then she drew a deep breath and suddenly a wonderful sense of competence made her sit erect and smiling. She was alone! She was answerable to herself alone, and she was sufficient. ¶“I can do it!” she told herself aloud.31


30Friedan, 338.

31In Friedan, 41.
“And then,” writes Friedan, “suddenly the image blurs. The New Woman, soaring free, hesitates in midflight, shivers in all that blue sunlight and rushes back to the cozy walls of home.” Friedan goes on to note that the same year Sarah took her solo flight, “the Ladies’ Home Journal printed the prototype of the innumerable paens to ‘Occupation Housewife’ that started to appear in the women’s magazines, paens that resounded throughout the fifties.” They resounded throughout popular entertainment, too. The rags-to-riches heroines who made it to the top through their own devices, such as those personified by Joan Crawford, or the ambitious independent women such as those played by Katherine Hepburn in the 1930s and 1940s, gave way to television’s domestic blueprints of I Love Lucy and Father Knows Best. These suggested that the woman’s domain was the home, and that she would find only frustration and lack of fulfillment outside that domain. Friedan summarizes this condition as follows:

Fulfillment as a woman had only one definition for American women after 1949 -- the housewife-mother. As swiftly as in a dream, the image of the American woman as a changing, growing individual in a changing world was shattered. Her solo flight to find her own identity was forgotten in the rush for the security of togetherness. Her limitless world shrunk . . .

Nellie Forbush stands at the cusp of this change. A young woman who grew up in the 1930s (Michener gives her age as twenty-two, and his book takes place in 1942), she combines her calling as a nurse, her career, with a desire to leave her environment and discover the world. Before leaving Arkansas for the war, she tells her fiancé, “‘I want to see the world, Charlie, . . . I want to meet

32Ibid.
33Ibid.
34Friedan, 44.
35Michener, Tales, 62.
other people. I want to see what the world’s like. Then, when the war’s over, I’ll come back.’ Neither she nor Charlie believed that she would.”\footnote{Ibid., 118-19.} While her career as a nurse is an “acceptable” career for a woman -- teaching was another -- she nonetheless has a career, and she places her personal curiosity and growth before marriage and the home. This, combined with her buoyant spirits, characterizes her as a “New Woman,” to use Friedan’s term.

Once away from home, however, Nellie becomes more and more like the post-1949 woman whose representation Friedan writes about. She falls in love with an older man, overcomes her personal prejudices to accept him and his environment on their terms, and takes charge of his family and his home when he leaves for a dangerous mission outside the home (his “work”). Nellie, at the end of the musical, is at home with the children, awaiting the return of the master of the house. At this point, she is also presented as somewhat helpless; she cannot quite identify all the ships and planes (\textquotedblright“The big ones are battleships and the little ones are destroyers -- or cruisers -- I never can tell the difference. . . . And what on earth are those?”\footnote{Hammerstein and Logan, 364.}) and she cannot speak French with the children beyond a few fractured words. Evidently “Knucklehead Nellie,” her nickname revealed in act 1, is not too far beneath the newly-enlightened surface. The final stage directions are also telling. After de Becque returns, announcing himself by joining in the singing of “Dites-Moi,” the script reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
The music continues. The children drink their soup. Nellie comes back to consciousness enough to realize that Emile must be hungry. She leans over and hands him the large bowl of soup with an air of “nothing’s-too-good-for-the-boss!”\footnote{Ibid., 366. Emphasis added.}
\end{quote}
Feminist and lesbian scholar Stacy Wolf writes about this ending. After characterizing Nellie (and Mary Martin, who played her) as tomboyish and somewhat androgynous -- Nellie has short cropped hair and, when not in her military uniform of skirt and blouse, is often in shorts or, in the “Honey Bun” number, a man’s sailor suit -- Wolf describes the final scene as follows:

The end of the play, like the later Sound of Music, privileges the nuclear family over heterosexual romance. Nellie bonds with and cares for the children even before she knows that Emile, who has risked his life spying, is alive. Like Maria in The Sound of Music, Nellie Forbush becomes the playful child-mother, learning from the children more than teaching them. . . . This [final] moment cuts two ways, though. While emphasizing a conservative image of femininity in the natural (step)mother, it also undermines the importance of . . . love and romance.

This reading recalls Friedan’s image of women in post-1949 magazine stories. Instead of a free and growing individual pursuing her own way in the world, as she was before meeting de Becque, Nellie has become an extension of de Becque’s existence. Younger and less experienced than de Becque, she is not unlike a child bride whose future growth and experience is directed by her mentor - husband. She may still be in love with her wonderful guy, but that is secondary to her role as step-mother and support system. As Friedan notes of the post-1949 female characters in magazine stories and, by extension, post-1949 women in general, Nellie’s world has “shrunk,” not expanded, as she had earlier hoped. In other words, once Nellie’s racism, the most complex and interesting element of her character, is “fixed,” she is free to move into de Becque’s sphere of existence and lose herself in it.

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40Wolf, 60.

41Friedan, 44.
Because Nellie is a product of her time and social background, her racism is understandable, as is her desire to see and experience new things. Her transformation into the child-mother that Wolf describes, however, is more revealing of the time in which the musical was created. The war has ended, and working women are expected to leave the work force and return to their place in the home. Nellie’s home is ready-made, and her dual role as mother and young wife suggests her fulfillment in 1949 - early 1950s terms more than the terms of the war-time United States.

Conclusion

The postwar era in which South Pacific is situated was a time of complex social changes, many of which are reflected by the work’s musico-dramatic evolution. The growing demand for racial tolerance throughout the postwar Civil Rights movement, for example, was seen by many as a dangerous, even un-American, challenge to the status quo; but the thematic urgency of South Pacific, even after its softening, confronts that attitude. While Nellie and Cable are safely kept from ever returning to the United States and having to act on their newly discovered ideologies -- Cable dies and Nellie stays in paradise -- their insights about racial prejudice are models of the insights that Rodgers and Hammerstein encouraged in their audiences. While Hammerstein’s call for increased racial understanding was less strident than the warnings that he and the Writers’ War Board produced during the war, it was a call that was heard, and often commented on, by many.

The depiction of Nellie, perhaps, is more problematic because it reflects a postwar perception of women that limits their possibilities. Hammerstein wrote often, and with passion, about and against racial intolerance, for instance, but he
never spoke out against the stereotyped and sexist depiction of women; in fact, after *The King and I*, his roles for women increasingly, and uncritically, reflect the sexism of the postwar era.\(^\text{42}\) And while the Broadway musical, as Stacy Wolf observes, “is the one performance form that features women as neither passive objects of desire nor subjects of vilification,”\(^\text{43}\) the portrayal of Nellie nonetheless presents her as a woman whose world is defined by the man she loves, and her future reflects that of the 1950s woman. Nellie’s new racial attitudes may be enlightened, in other words, but she is not necessarily liberated from the sexism of her, and Hammerstein’s, time.

\(^{42}\)See Goldstein, 1-8.

\(^{43}\)Wolf, 16-17.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Any concluding remarks about a study of American musicals in general, or of one in particular are well-served by Graham Wood’s closing observations in his study of Rodgers’s songs, which follow, in part:

A traditional view of musicals is that they are works of pure fantasy: colorful entertainments that allow us an escape, however brief, from the cares of the real world by transporting us to distant lands and distant times. I would contend, however, that the musical theater repertoire consists of important cultural artifacts and can provide valuable insights into how Americans have viewed their own history and have sought to represent themselves culturally.¹

We have observed that *South Pacific* provides just such an insight into American culture, and that, through their telling of wartime stories, Rodgers and Hammerstein reveal many social and political aspects of postwar American society and culture. While their principal goal was to create a successful work for the commercial American stage -- a goal that they attained to an unprecedented degree -- they also created a lasting cultural icon that remains meaningful to American audiences. That they struggled with the creation of this work is unsurprising, given its longevity and continued effectiveness.

The musico-dramatic evolution of *South Pacific* demonstrates Rodgers and Hammerstein’s efforts to create a believable and well-made musical play that contains a powerful thematic message. The sketches and drafts we have explored

¹Wood, 244.
reveal this process, as well as how the presentation of the show’s message changed from conception to opening. Our investigation has shown the slow process of perfecting ideas, characters, and plots drawn from a source material into a successful work for the musical stage, and it has demonstrated Rodgers and Hammerstein’s ability to treat difficult thematic issues with a sure dramaturgical hand. Avoiding the propagandizing of which they were nonetheless accused, the team created a work that offered important and difficult messages at a time in American history when they were needed. The initial commercial success of the work, and its continued popularity and thematic importance, support its reputation as one of the finest works ever created for the American musical stage, and this exploration of its evolution allows us to realize just how it reached that state.

In spite of its problematic representation of otherness and its use of then-common stereotypes that are more disturbing to some members of contemporary audiences than they were to audiences in 1949, *South Pacific* demonstrates a world view that is hopeful and, as Nellie describes herself, optimistic, a view that is itself emblematic of the postwar American *Zeitgeist*. This optimism is not “cock-eyed,” however; it is not blithely ignorant of the work that remains to be undertaken in pursuit of the racial tolerance that Rodgers and Hammerstein see as a reachable goal of American society. We have seen that, in both plots of the musical that deal with this issue, new-found tolerance is not taken back to the United States; Cable dies and Nellie remains with de Becque. Rodgers and Hammerstein demonstrate Americans’ ability to overcome their intolerance, but they leave it to the audience to put this ability to work in American society.

Hammerstein continued to work towards the goal of racial tolerance long after *South Pacific* opened. Two chapters for a proposed book with James Michener and Pearl S. Buck are found in his papers at the Library of Congress;
they are dated 1958, almost ten years after the opening of *South Pacific*. The first chapter is titled “Progress” and deals with the sterotypical representation of race in popular culture, the kind of stereotyped representation that we have seen him guilty of in his own work. The continued evolution of his own cultural sensitivity is apparent in this work. In one passage, Hammerstein notes the decline of harmful stereotypes, commenting that “their decline has been hastened by a very conscious movement on the part of groups of Americans who awakened to the evil and did all they could to discourage the continuation of these damaging stereotypes.”2 The second chapter is an epistolary argument titled “Dear Believer in White Supremacy” in which Hammerstein argues the following:

> The question of race equality or inequality, of integration or segregation has caused great disunity in the United States, and great misunderstanding of us abroad. It is also a burning question in many countries outside the United States. It is high time that we approached this question with reason rather than passion.3

These passages indicate Hammerstein’s continued commitment to racial tolerance. While we may argue that his work through *The Sound of Music* presents other problems of representation, especially of women, we must acknowledge his continued striving for racial understanding and the growth of tolerance, both for himself and for the society he lived in.

Rodgers and Hammerstein remain legendary in the development of the American musical theater, and any attempt to trivialize their work speaks more of those who would do so than of the work itself. As we have seen, the creative processes were long and arduous, full of false starts and missteps. The result of this hard work, however, is a musical whose evolution reveals the road to structural excellence and thematic coherence. While *South Pacific* was not the

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2Oscar Hammerstein II, “Progress,” typescript with pencil corrections. Box 21, the Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Library of Congress.

first work to deal with problematic social issues, it is one of the few that continues to be relevant to American audiences. The better we understand *South Pacific* and its musico-dramatic evolution, the better we understand a genre that reflects our culture and its challenges. It has been my goal in this study to contribute to that understanding.
APPENDIX A

THE STRUCTURE OF TALES OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

10. “Fo’ Dolla”


APPENDIX B

SCENE BREAKDOWN FOR SOUTH PACIFIC

The action takes place on two islands in the South Pacific during World War II.

**Act 1, scene 1**

**Characters:** Ngana, Jerome, Henry, Nellie, Emile de Becque

**Setting:** a terrace on de Becque’s plantation

**Synopsis:** Ngana and Jerome, two Eurasian children, sing and dance a folk-like song and are chased off by Henry, a servant. De Becque, a suave French plantation owner, and Nellie, an American nurse, enter. We learn that Nellie is from Arkansas and is an incurable optimist. De Becque tells Nellie that he left France and came to the South Pacific because he killed a man. A strong attraction is apparent between Nellie and de Becque, as are their distinctly different cultural backgrounds. De Becque expresses his interest in a future with Nellie and she leaves. The children return and we learn that de Becque is their father.

**Song(s):** “Dites-moi”; “A Cock-Eyed Optimist”; “Twin Soliloquies”; “Some Enchanted Evening”

**Act 1, scene 2**

**Characters:** Seabees, sailors, Marines, Bloody Mary

**Setting:** an unidentified setting on the island; immediately following 1, 1
Synopsis: The Seabees, sailors, and Marines sing lustily of Bloody Mary, a Tonkinense woman who tries to sell souvenir items to the men. They teach her some vulgarities, which she enjoys immensely.

Song(s): “Bloody Mary”

Act 1, scene 3

Characters: above, plus Luther Billis, Lt. Cable, Cpt. Brackett, Cmndr. Harbison

Setting: another place on the island; Billis’s laundry and Mary’s stand are visible; a short time after 1, 2

Synopsis: We meet Luther Billis. He is a Seabee and entrepreneur who runs a laundry and tries to compete with Mary in the souvenir trade. She tricks him into buying an expensive ceremonial bracelet made from a boar’s tooth, which he knows comes from the restricted island Bali Ha’i. Billis expresses his desire to get to Bali Ha’i and see the Boar’s Tooth Ceremony, as well as the indigenous women who are secluded there. The men sing of their desire for women. Nellie and the nurses enter jogging during the song, and Nellie gets her laundry from Billis, who is uncharacteristically shy around her. The nurses leave, and the men finish the song. Lt. Joe Cable, a handsome young man from Philadelphia by way of Princeton, enters, and Mary is fascinated by him. She tells him that Bali Ha’i is his special island, one where he can realize his dreams, and she tries to persuade him to come there with her. Billis sees in this an opportunity for an officer who can get a boat for a trip to Bali’ Ha’i. Captain Brackett and Commander Harbison enter for the purpose of tearing down Mary’s stand. We learn that Cable has been sent to head a
dangerous intelligence mission that would provide information about enemy activity in the area. The scene ends with Cable contemplating Bali Ha’i.

**Song(s):** “There is Nothin’ Like a Dame”; “Bali Ha’i”

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**Act 1, scene 4**

**Characters:** Billis, Cable, Stewpot, sailors

**Setting:** a company street on the island; immediately following 1, 3

**Synopsis:** Billis informs Cable that he has signed out a boat in Cable’s name for a trip to Bali Ha’i. Cable tells him to cancel it.

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**Act 1, scene 5**

**Characters:** Brackett, Harbison, Cable, Nellie

**Setting:** inside the Island Commander’s (Brackett’s) office; a short time after 1, 4

**Synopsis:** Because de Becque is familiar with the surrounding islands, the military is considering him to accompany Cable on the mission. In order to learn more about him, Brackett and Harbison interview Nellie, who reveals that she does not know much about him, including his having two children. They ask her to gather some information on him, but do not tell her about the children. When Nellie and Cable leave, Brackett and Harbison discuss the mission, which involves surveillance from positions on a small island. Harbison surmises the spies might last a week before being caught.

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**Act 1, scene 6**

**Characters:** Nellie, Cable
Setting: the company street from scene four; immediately following 1, 5

Synopsis: Nellie and Cable discuss, in generalities, the difficulties in a relationship between an older man and a younger woman. He suggests that she give it some thought.

Act 1, scene 7

Characters: Billis, Nellie, de Becque, nurses

Setting: the beach, including Billis’s makeshift pay shower; immediately following 1, 6

Synopsis: Again revealing his soft spot for Nellie, Billis gets the shower ready for her, including extra hot water for her weekly shampoo. While she washes her hair, Nellie lightheartedly sings of terminating her relationship with de Becque. At the end of her song, de Becque enters. She at first refuses his invitation to a party, even after he tells her that he is giving it so that she can meet his friends. Then, as suggested by Cpt. Brackett, she begins interrogating de Becque about his past, learning of his belief in democratic ideals and why he killed the man in France. De Becque again confesses his longing for Nellie and she realizes, after initially stating their differences, that she feels the same way. She agrees to attend the party, and de Becque leaves, after which Nellie exuberantly sings of her love for de Becque.

Song(s): “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-a My Hair”; reprise: “Some Enchanted Evening”; “I’m in Love With a Wonderful Guy”
Act 1, scene 8

Characters: Brackett, de Becque, Cable

Setting: Brackett’s office; shortly after 1, 7

Synopsis: After listening to Brackett explain the mission, de Becque refuses to join it. Cable confronts him with the idea that the only reason he is saying no is that he is in love with Nellie. De Becque does not deny it, adding that his life with Nellie is the most important thing in the world to him. The three men are surprised by his decision. Cable asks if he should leave the island and return to his outfit, but Brackett suggests that he take a few days off. At Brackett’s suggestion of a fishing trip, Cable thinks of Bali Ha’i and heads out to secure a boat for the trip.

Act 1, scene 9

Characters: young French women, Cable, Billis, Bloody Mary

Setting: Bali Ha’i; not long after 1, 8

Synopsis: After Mary arranges for Billis to be taken to the Boar’s Tooth Ceremony, she leads Cable off in another direction, promising him a good time.

Song(s): reprise: “Bali Ha’i”

Act 1, scene 10

Characters: Cable, Bloody Mary, Liat

Setting: the interior of Bloody Mary’s hut; immediately after 1, 9

Synopsis: Mary introduces Cable to Liat, a beautiful young woman, and then leaves the two of them alone. After a brief scene that reveals Cable’s tenderness towards Liat, they embrace and the lights fade.
After a musical interlude, the lights come up again, revealing both in a state of semi-undress, their lovemaking implicit. As his boat’s bell rings in the distance, announcing its imminent departure, Cable sings of the joy he has found with Liat. Hesitantly, he leaves.

**Song(s):** “Younger Than Springime”

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**Act 1, scene 11**

**Characters:** Billis, Bloody Mary, Cable

**Setting:** another part of Bali Ha’i; immediately after 1, 10

**Synopsis:** Nervously awaiting the overdue Cable, Billis apologizes to Mary for his inappropriate behavior during the Boar’s Tooth Ceremony. Cable enters, still in a state of bliss. After he and Billis go off to the boat, Mary confidently announces to islanders that Cable is going to be her son-in-law.

**Song(s):** reprise: “Bali Ha’i”

---

**Act 1, scene 12**

**Characters:** Nellie, de Becque, Ngana, Jerome, Henry

**Setting:** a terrace of Emile’s home; several days later

**Synopsis:** After de Becque’s party, Nellie is slightly tipsy and enjoying herself. Her comfort with and affection for de Becque are clear, and the two of them playfully sing and dance with each other. Ngana and Jerome, accompanied by Henry, enter to say goodnight. Nellie thinks they are Henry’s children, but de Becque tells her they are his. She at first doesn’t believe this because of their obvious Eurasian appearance, but de Becque tells her that their mother was Polynesian. Nellie is taken aback and made extremely
uncomfortable by this, and she quickly begins making excuses for a quick exit. Refusing de Becque’s offer to drive her back to the barracks, Nellie nervously thanks him and says goodnight, obviously distressed by what she has learned. As she leaves, de Becque again expresses his love for her. She says that she loves him too, but makes a hasty exit. Left alone, de Becque stares after her.

**Song(s):** reprise: “I’m in Love With a Wonderful Guy”; “This is How It Feels”; reprise: “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Out-a My Hair”; Finale Act One (“Some Enchanted Evening”)

---

**Act 2, scene 1**

**Characters:** Nellie, various sailors and nurses

**Setting:** onstage during a performance of “The Thanksgiving Follies”; two weeks after act 1

**Synopsis:** The scene consists largely of an amateur performance of which Nellie is the MC. After announcing the participants in a dance number that opens the scene, she introduces the next act. Before it can begin, however, there is a blackout due to a generator failure. Over confused voices, the scene changes.

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**Act 2, scene 2**

**Characters:** Billis, de Becque, Cable, Bloody Mary, Liat

**Setting:** backstage; immediately after 1, 1

**Synopsis:** As Billis and his assistants deal with the power failure, de Becque enters with flowers for Nellie. Billis asks de Becque not to see Nellie, telling him that she has been very upset and has applied for a transfer to a different island. When de Becque insists that he
must see her, Billis asks that he wait until after the performance. De Becque agrees. Cable enters, still feverish with a malaria infection and desperately looking for Billis. Cable tells de Becque that he needs a boat to get to Bali Ha’i. As he almost deliriously describes the trip to de Becque, Mary and Liat enter, and Cable momentarily thinks he is delusional. Mary announces that Cable must marry Liat or she will be given to an older, and rich, French plantation owner who desires her. De Becque informs Mary that Cable is ill and then expresses his concern to Cable. Cable responds bitterly, accusing de Becque of not caring about anyone but himself. Insulted, de Becque exits. Mary tries to convince Cable that a life with Liat would be idyllic and free from cares. After Cable gives Liat an heirloom watch -- his good luck piece -- Mary assumes that he has agreed. When Cable tells Mary that he cannot marry Liat, Mary grabs the watch and smashes it on the ground. She then drags off the helpless Liat and, as the voice of Nellie can be heard announcing the next act in the “Follies,” Cable looks off after Mary and Liat.

**Song(s):** “Happy Talk”; reprise: “Younger Than Springtime”

### Act 2, scene 3

**Characters:** Brackett, Harbison, Nellie, Billis, sailors and nurses

**Setting:** onstage of the “Follies;” immediately following 2, 2

**Synopsis:** After some brief comments about how poorly the American fleet has been doing in the war, Brackett introduces Harbison, who announces the finale of the “Follies.” Nellie, dressed as a sailor, sings a song about her “Honey-Bun,” who turns out to be Billis in
comic drag. The scene concludes with a chorus of sailors and nurses -- all participants in the “Follies” -- reprising the chorus.

Song(s): “Honey-Bun”

**Act 2, scene 4**

**Characters:** Billis, Nellie, Cable, de Becque

**Setting:** backstage, as in 2, 2; immediately following 2, 3

**Synopsis:** Billis gives Nellie the flowers from de Becque and an accompanying card that disturbs her. Cable sees her upset and lightheartedly offers sympathy, but Nellie scolds him for not being in the hospital. He tells her about Liat and of his inability to marry her, and he asks Nellie what’s wrong with him that would make him unable to marry a woman he loves. She quietly tells him that it’s all right, that they are both just far from home. De Becque enters and confronts Nellie about her request for a transfer. She explains that it means she can’t marry him, and, after being pushed further by de Becque, she admits that she can’t marry him because his first wife was Polynesian. He does not understand this, and Nellie counters with the argument that she was born with these feelings of prejudice. De Becque angrily argues that no one is born with such feelings, and when Nellie turns to Cable for support, she gets none. Nellie leaves, and de Becque angrily asks Cable what makes Nellie believe that her prejudice was born in her. Cable replies that it isn’t born in anyone, that such prejudice is taught to people when they are young. He then remarks to de Becque that now he understands de Becque’s lack of involvement, and that when the war is over, he will not return to the United States but,
instead, will remain on the island. De Becque, however, comments that now that he has lost what mattered most to him, he is no longer so unwilling to commit to an action greater than his own self-interest. He then agrees to go with Cable on the mission, and both men rush off to inform Brackett of their decision.

Song(s): “You’ve Got to be Carefully Taught”; “This Nearly Was Mine”

Act 2, scene 5

Characters: several Naval Aircraft mechanics
Setting: a landing strip on the island; a day or two after 1, 4
Synopsis: in a brief crossover scene, the mechanics watch the take off of the plane carrying Cable and de Becque

Act 2, scene 6

Characters: Brackett, Harbison, Billis, Lt. Bus Adams, radio operator
Setting: the communications office (radio room); a day or two after 1, 5
Synopsis: Brackett and Harbison are grilling Billis and Adams about an incident that occurred as Adams was delivering Cable and de Becque to a submarine, which was, in turn, to deliver them to their mission. The plane, piloted by Adams, was hit by enemy fire. Billis, who had hidden on board in order to get to the island where he thought he might obtain souvenirs to sell, fell out, and Adams circled once to drop a raft to him. As Adams flew on to deliver Cable and de Becque, Billis was protected from enemy fire by New Zealanders in P-40s and American Navy planes. Adams assures the irate Brackett that Billis’s action served as a diversionary tactic and insured the undetected delivery of Cable and de Becque to their
mission. De Becque and Cable are then heard on the radio, announcing that they are in place and giving the first report on the movement of the Japanese fleet.

**Act 2, scene 7**

**Characters:** officers, pilots, voice of de Becque  
**Setting:** elsewhere on the island, by a radio; another day  
**Synopsis:** Officers hear another report from de Becque and declare the Frenchman and Cable heroes

**Act 2, scene 8**

**Characters:** Brackett, Harbison, Nellie, radio operator  
**Setting:** the radio shack; days later  
**Synopsis:** Nellie comes to the radio shack and, although she knows it is against procedure, asks if de Becque is on the mission that everyone on the island is talking about. Just as Brackett tells her yes, de Becque’s voice is heard. He sadly tells of Cable’s death from wounds received three days earlier, and then relates that the Japanese are pulling out from the area in great confusion after having been repeatedly surprised by American planes. The mission has been successful. Nellie wonders if de Becque will return, and she is reassured by Brackett.

**Act 2, scene 9**

**Characters:** Nellie, a nurse, a lieutenant, three other nurses  
**Setting:** outside the radio shack; immediately following 2, 8  
**Synopsis:** As Nellie crosses out of the radio shack, stunned by the news...
of Cable’s death and the possibility of de Becque’s, a nurse and lieutenant ask her if she is going to a dance that evening. When she doesn’t answer, three other nurses tease her by singing, “She’s in love with a wonderful guy.”

**Song(s):** reprise: fragment of “I’m in Love With a Wonderful Guy”

### Act 2, scene 10

**Characters:** Nellie, Bloody Mary, Liat

**Setting:** the beach; immediately following 2, 9

**Synopsis:** Nellie, looking out over the ocean, speaks to de Becque, imploring him to return so she can tell him how foolish she has been. She begs him not to die so that she can tell him that their being together is all that matters. Mary and Liat enter, asking where they can find Lt. Cable. When Nellie asks who they are, Mary tells her that Liat will marry no one else but Cable and that they must find him. Nellie, overcome with emotion, embraces Liat.

**Song(s):** reprise: “Some Enchanted Evening”

### Act 2, scene 11

**Characters:** Billis, Brackett, Harbison, Seabees, nurses, marines

**Setting:** the company street; days later

**Synopsis:** Over the sounds of truck conveys, a crowd of soldiers and sailors organize to embark on a mission. Harbison notes that the tide of the war in the Pacific has changed due to the mission of Cable and de Becque. Billis, to his chagrin, learns that he has been assigned to a ship commanded by Brackett and Harbison.
**Act 2, scene 12**

**Characters:** Nellie, Jerome, Ngana. de Becque

**Setting:** de Becque’s terrace; not long after 2, 11

**Synopsis:** Nellie, Ngana, and Jerome are watching the planes leave the island while eating lunch. The children get Nellie to sing with them and, when she stumbles on the words of the song they sing, de Becque, who has quietly appeared, begins singing them. As they finish the song, the children continue their lunch as if everything is back to normal, and de Becque and Nellie stare gratefully and lovingly into each other’s eyes.

**Song(s):** reprise: “Dites-moi”
APPENDIX C

“THE BRIGHT YOUNG EXECUTIVE OF TODAY”

Bill [Harbison]
When I get out of a uniform,
Will I be happy again,
Working under the watchful eye
Of good old W.N.!

Joe
(Speaking)
Who dat?

Bill
(Faintly annoyed and flattened by the interruption)
That’s my boss, Woodcock Nordlinger. We call him W.N.

Joe
Oh.

Bill
Where was I?

Joe
Under his watchful eye.

Bill
Oh, yes.
(He resumes singing)
His hearty voice and his piercing look
I still can hear and see,
The day that he gave me extravagant praise
And followed it up with a nominal raise,
And said these unforgettable words to me:
“The hope of the world
Is the well-trained, wide awake,
Bright, young executive of to-day,
The cream of the crop
Is the clean-cut, confident,
Bright, young executive of to-day.
No feather-brained romancer,
Before he’ll give an answer,
The facts and all the figures he’ll survey!

(Emile enters. Joe exchanges a look with him, joins him and they listen to Bill together.)

So bet all you can borrow
On the man of tomorrow --
The bright, young executive of to-day!”

Joe
(Explaining to Emile)
We have other important men.

Bill
But nobody counts as much
As the modern executive type
With the organizational touch!

Emile
Of course you have the artist --

Joe
(To Bill)
How do you rate the artist?

Bill
A screwball and a bohemian.
He’s an unreliable type.

Joe
Well, what about the writer?

Emile
How do you rate the writer?

Bill
He goes for walks in the country,
Plays with dogs and smokes a pipe.
Joe
The farmer?

Bill
Just a rube.

Emile
The actor?

Bill
He’s a cad.

Joe
The teacher?

Bill
He’s a boob.

Joe
The laborer?

Bill
Money-mad.

Emile
Money-mad?

Bill
Money-mad!

Emile
(To Joe)
The laborer, too?

Bill
(Broadminded)
I admit we need all kinds of men --

Joe
(Jumping with the eagerness of a substitute half-back)
But not one tenth as much
As the peppy executive type
With the organizational touch!
  (Joe now sings the refrain as earnestly as Bill and Bill is completely carried away and unaware of any satirical intent)
The hope of the world

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Is the heads-up, on-your-toes,
Bright young executive of to-day.
You meet him at lunch
In the high-flown Rainbow Room,
Along on the roof of the R.C.A.!
His luncheon conversation
Is filled with information:
“The Ford Coupe” he’ll say, “is here to stay!”

Bill
(Carried away)
I’ll say!

Joe
(Very, very vigorously!)
Click your heels and salute, you’re
With the man of the future --
The bright, young executive of to-day!
(Emile comes to an involuntary salute!)

Bill
(Transported)
He’s solid and he’s sound,
With both feet on the ground --

Emile
He’s not the type to stand around
With one foot off the ground!
(He stands on one foot)

Joe
It’s never hard to tell
The man who’s rung the bell --
He wears a white carnation
In his tailor-made lapel!

Bill
He doesn’t go off half-cocked!
His eye is on the ball!

Joe
And now and then, like mortal men,
He doesn’t go off at all!
(Before Bill has time to analyze this one, Joe
has barged into the refrain con spirito, as
before)
But --
The hope of the world
Is the drive-hard,

    Emile
    Crack-the-whip,

    Joe and Emile
    Bright, young executive of today!

    Bill
They all wait to hear
What the sane and sensible,
Bright, young executive has to say!

    Joe
He’ll tell you that inflation
Will never hurt the nation,
Unless, of course, it comes and then it may!

    Emile
Hooray!

    Joe, Bill and Emile
Click your heels and salute, you’re
With the man of the future --

    Joe
The clear-eyed, clean-limbed,

    Bill
Hard-headed,

    Emile
(Proud to have suddenly thought of the word:)
Spark-plug!
(They all take a deep breath and let out:)

    Emile, Joe and Bill
The bright, young executive of to-day!
APPENDIX D

COMPARISON OF FINAL VERSION AND SKETCH OF “I’M GONNA WASH THAT MAN RIGHT OUTA MY HAIR”

Final Version

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you ask a man right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And his answer ain’t right,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If he don’t look right,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And he don’t love right,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then somethin’ must be wrong,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And nothin’ can be wronger than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/a man who’s wrong.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refrain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And send him on his way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refrain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the man don’t understand you,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you fly on separate beams,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste no time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makin’ a change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ride the man right off your range,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rub him outa the roll call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And drum him outa your dreams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| I’m gonna wave that man right outa my arms, |
| I’m gonna wave that man right outa my arms, |
| I’m gonna wave that man right outa my arms, |
| And send him on his way.                   |

| If his eyes get dull and fishy,           |
| When you look for glints and /gleams,     |
| Waste no time                            |
| Makin’ a change                          |
| Ride the man right off your range,        |
| Rub him outa the roll call               |
| And drum him outa your dreams!           |

| If he never buys you flowers             |
| Or a box of chocolate creams,            |
| If he laughs at different comics         |
| And he roots for different teams,        |
| Waste no time                            |
| Makin’ a switch,                         |
Leave him in a ditch  
(Don’t matter which ditch)  
Rub him outa the roll call  
And drum him outa your dreams.

Don’t try to patch it up,  
Tear it up, tear it up!  
Wash him out, dry him out,  
Push him out, fly him out,  
Cancel him and let him go!  
Yea, sister!

I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair,  
I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair,  
I’m gonna wash that man right outa my hair,  
And send him on his way!

(Blues:)  
If the man don’t understand you,  
If you fly on separate beams,  
Waste no time!  
Make a change,  
Ride that man right off your range,  
Rub him outa the roll call  
And drum him outa your dreams!  
Oh-ho!  
If you laught at different comics,

If you root for different teams,  
Waste no time,  
Weep no more,  
Show him what the door is for!  
Rub him outa the roll call  
And drum him outa your dreams.

You can’t light a fire when the wood’s all wet,  
You can’t make a butterful strong,  
You can’t fix an egg when it ain’t quite good,  
And you can’t fix a man when he’s wrong!

You can’t put back a petal when it falls from a flower,  
Or sweeten up a feller when he starts turning sour--  
Oh no, oh, no!
(Dance break)

If his eyes get dull and fishy
When you look for glints and gleams,
Waste no time,
Make a switch,
Drop him in the nearest ditch!
Rub him outa the roll call
And drum him outa your dreams!
Oh-ho! Oh-ho!

I went and washed that man right
/out my hair
I went and washed that man right
/outa my hair,
I went and washed that man right
/outa my hair,
And sent him on his way.

She went and washed that man right
/outa her hair,
She went and washed that man right
/outa her hair
She went and washed that man right
/outa her hair,
And sent him on his way.

I’m gonna live that man right
/outa my life,
I’m gonna live that man right
/outa my life,
I’m gonna live that man right
/outa my life,
And send him on his way.

I’m gonna live that man right
/outa my life,
I’m gonna live that man right
/outa my life,
And send him on his way.
And send him on his way.
APPENDIX E

COMPARISON OF LYRICS FOR “I’M IN LOVE WITH A WONDERFUL GUY”

Final Version

(Verse)
I expect every one
Of my crowd to make fun
Of my proud protestations of faith
/in romance
And they’ll say I’m naive
As a babe to believe
Any fable I dear from a person in
/pants!
Fearlessly I’ll face them and argue
/their doubts away,
Loudly I’ll sing about flowers and
/spring!
Flatly I’ll stand on my little flat feet
/and say,
“Love is a grand and a beautiful
/thing
I’m not ashamed to reveal
/the world-famous feeling I feel.

(Chorus)
I’m as corny as Kansas in August,
I’m as normal as blueberry pie.
No more a smart
Little girl with no heart,
I have found me a wonderful guy.

I am in a conventional dither

With a conventional star in my eye
And, you will note,

Sketch

(Verse)
I expect every one
Of my crowd to make fun
Of my proud protestations of faith
/in romance
And you’ll say I’m naive
As a babe to believe
Any fable I hear from a person in
/pants!
Time was when I shared your
/satirical attitude,
Thinking that love could be kept
/in its place,
Till all of a sudden that lyrical
/platitude
Bounced up and hit me -- smack
/in the face!
That’s how I turned out to be
The happy young woman you
/see.

(Chorus)
I’m as corny as Kansas in August,
I’m as normal as blueberry pie,
I’m no longer a smart
Little girl with no heart --
I have found me a wonderful
/guy!
There’s an old fashioned spring
/in my footprint,
A conventional star in my eye
And a lump in my throat
There’s a lump in my throat
When I speak of that wonderful guy.

I’m as trite and as gay
As a daisy in May
(A cliché coming true!)
I’m bromidic and bright
As a moon-happy night
Pouring light on the dew.

I’m as corny as Kansas in August,
High as a flag on the fourth of July!
If you’ll excuse

An expression I use,
I’m in love
I’m in love
I’m in love
I’m in love
I’m in love with a wonderful guy!

(Dance. Nellie and nurses sing last seven lines with extended ending.)

As I breathlessly float
To a date with that wonderful guy.

I’m as trite and as gay
As a daisy in May,
I’m another cliché coming true.
I’m bromidic and bright
As a moon-happy night
Or the dawn’s early light on the dew!

I’m as corny as Kansas in August
Or a flag on the fourth of July.
I’m in love -- you’ll excuse the expression --
I’m in love with a wonderful guy!

(Dinah and nurses:)  
She’s as normal as school in September
Or an unattached leaf in November
Or a snowflake that falls in December
Or an ostrich’s tail on a fan.
She’s as sweet and as dumb as a bumpkin.
Any girl who is that kind of chump, kin
Get as plump as a Halloween pumpkin,
Sitting home every night with a man.

(Nellie:)  
Sitting home will be all right with me--
If my home’s on a hill by the sea . . .
(She goes into a second refrain:)  
I’m as corny as Kansas in August,
I’m as normal as blueberry pie . . .

(The girls join her in a vocal arrangement, finishing out the refrain. . . .)
APPENDIX F

ORIGINAL FORM FOR “HAPPY TALK”

Verse: Fella, when you’re talkin’ to your best girl
What’sa gooda talkin’ sad?
What’sa gooda talkin’ ‘bout what ain’t good?
Talk about what ain’t bad?

Refrain: Talk about a moon
Floatin’ in de sky,
Lookin’ lak a lily on a lake;
Talk about a bird
Learnin’ how to fly,
Makin’ all de music he can make.

Talk happy
Talk about a star
Lookin’ like a toy,
Peakin’ through de branches of a tree;
Talk about a girl
Talk about a boy
Countin’ all de ripples on de sea.

Talk happy
Talk about breakfus, coffee an’ toast
Opposite de one you love de most,
Dinner an’ supper, plen’y to eat,
Gravy an’ potatoes on your meat!

Talk about a boy
Sayin’ to de girl:
“Golly, baby! I’m a lucky cuss!”
Talk about de girl
Sayin’ to de boy:
“You an’ me is lucky to be us!”

Coda: Happy Talk,
Keep talkin’ happy talk,
Talk about things you’d like to do.
You gotta have a dream,
If you don’t have a dream
How you gonna have a dream come true?
    If you don’t talk happy
    An’ you never have a dream,
    Den you’ll never have a dream come true!
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