

performance—celebrate and exult in the theatricality and “infinite variety” of their dreaming ladies (to quote another Shakespeare play: *Antony and Cleopatra*).

In its own gamut of ambitious and professional heroines, the Broadway musicals of the 1940s offer a powerful World War II-era transformation of the Cinderella motif. Rosie the Riveter-themed shows like *Bloomer Girl* and *On the Town* vibrantly celebrated working women, even as musicals like *Lady in the Dark*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, and *Kiss Me, Kate* both invoked and contradicted the postwar “taming” of the Boss Lady. In the next decade of the 1950s, the pendulum would swing even further in the direction of women’s domestication and widespread social conservatism, embracing what Betty Friedan termed, in 1963, the Feminine Mystique (a constellation of mythologies critically satirized and subverted in numerous 1950s musicals). At the same time, the figure of Cinderella will split into a new dialectic of class, sex, and economics: that of the princess and the prostitute.

#### 4. Twentieth-Century Fairy Tales: Princesses, Prostitutes, and the Feminine Mystique in the Broadway Musicals of the 1950s ∞

In April 19, 1956, after four giddy days of “public displays, fireworks, royal salutes, and dancing in the streets,” in a Monte Carlo flooded with over 70,000 photographers, paparazzi, movie stars, and Monegasques, Grace Kelly married Prince Rainier III in the royal wedding extravaganza of the century.<sup>1</sup> Wearing an exquisite lace and taffeta gown with a 25 foot-long train, the Philadelphia-born “screen-star daughter of an American bricklayer-turned-millionaire” glided majestically down the aisle of St. Nicholas Cathedral and accepted both her royal spouse and title: Her Serene Highness Princess Grace of Monaco.<sup>2</sup> For months prior to the wedding, Hollywood and the media had concocted a feverish atmosphere of fairy tale fantasy, with even Kelly’s MGM star vehicles capitalizing on the mania: the Philadelphia Main Line-set musical *High Society* and *The Swan*, in which Kelly played a princess.<sup>3</sup> As *The New York Times* noted a week before the royal wedding: “Graustark was a fictional principality (in Anthony Hope’s *The Prisoner of Zenda*), but there are a few places on earth that have some degree of Graustark about them. Such a grand, improbable, and unusual place is Monaco, where a week from this Wednesday, a Cinderella pageant (with a modern mink-and-Cadillac flourish) is to unfold.”<sup>4</sup>

As the press rhapsodized of Hollywood’s “Gold-Plated Cinderella” (even as many reporters, and George Jean Nathan, cynically referenced Kelly’s rags-to-riches credentials), creators of Broadway musicals, too, found both romantic and satiric inspiration in Monaco’s jet-set Graustark.<sup>5</sup> In the Lindsay-Crouse musical comedy, *Happy Hunting*, which opened in December 1956, Ethel Merman starred as Liz Livingston, a social-climbing Philadelphia matron, who, failing to receive an invitation to the

royal wedding, strives to “out-Kelly the Kellys” by marrying her daughter off to a Spanish Hapsburg prince.<sup>6</sup> In the opening number, a group of Monegasque schoolchildren caroled in front of Jo Mielziner’s picturesque postage stamp-covered show curtain, and marveled at “A fairy tale in a fairyland/A modern Cinderella story”:

O, this fairy tale romance,  
O, the pomp and circumstance,  
On this day of days in this happy little land,  
A fairy tale princess weds a prince,  
At the wedding of the century.<sup>7</sup>

Opening seven months after the royal nuptials, *Happy Hunting* drew criticism for the wilted topicality of its satire. However, another musical opened during the height of the royal wedding hysteria: a show itself acclaimed as “one of the best musicals of the century,” in which a guttersnipe Galatea is presented not only as a duchess, but passed off as a Hungarian princess.<sup>8</sup> Lerner and Loewe’s *My Fair Lady*, based closely on George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, opened in March 1956 and became the most heralded musical in Broadway history. While marveling at the show’s faithfulness to its Shavian source, Brooks Atkinson mused, “. . . the theme itself is irresistible—a kind of erudite Cinderella story.”<sup>9</sup>

*My Fair Lady* drew upon not only the fantastical mystique of Grace Kelly’s royal wedding, but upon the myths of a wildly prosperous and consumerist American decade re-encharmed with the dominant fairy tale of the Jazz Age, with its medley of Sally, Irene, and Marys. Yet, the Broadway Cinderella princesses of the 1950s, much more so than those of the frenetic 1920s, partook of a European flavor echoing the impeccable Continental poise of Grace Kelly. Both Broadway and Hollywood musicals personified the decade’s ideal not only through Julie Andrews’ linguistically refined duchess in *My Fair Lady*, but through Audrey Hepburn’s bookworm turned “style princess” in the Paramount movie musical *Funny Face* (1957),<sup>10</sup> Sandra Church’s white glove-wearing burlesque lady in Broadway’s *Gypsy* (1959), and Mary Martin’s transformation from a postulate nun to the Baroness von Trapp in the original Broadway production of *The Sound of Music* (1959). The first act of the latter musical ended in a splendid cathedral ceremony, with Martin attired in a spectacular wedding gown with a train almost as long as Grace Kelly’s.

As the postwar USA increased its involvement in European affairs—from the economic interventions of the Marshall Plan to its expansion of

international trading markets—Americans sought to import continental glamour and cultural capital. Europe—often in the idealized form of a Ruritanian picture postcard—captured the imagination of Americans during a decade besotted with French and Italian starlets (i.e., Brigitte Bardot and Sophia Loren), ready-to-wear fashion copied from Paris originals, the rise of stylish French New Wave cinema, and the same international jet set that gathered in Monte Carlo for the royal wedding, at which *Time Magazine* reported sightings of the Aga Khan and Aristotle Onassis, as well as “the French Academy’s André Maurois (and) Broadway’s soignée Ilka Chase.”<sup>11</sup>

If the Broadway musical echoed American culture’s fascination with European princesses, so musicals romanticized the prostitute, blending tropes of the whore-with-a-heart-of-gold with the Cinderella story. In *Gigi*—Lerner and Loewe’s 1958 Hollywood musical follow-up to *My Fair Lady*—Leslie Caron’s Belle Époque-era gamine rebelled against her family calling of courtesan, while blossoming into a self-possessed Parisienne loved by the wealthy playboy Gaston Lachaille. Of the original 1951 Broadway play, adapted by Anita Loos from the novella by Colette, Loos remarked: “The word ‘immoral’ is one of Colette’s jokes. For *Gigi* is Cinderella, even though (the story) is told in terms of sex.”<sup>12</sup> Loos’s 1951 Broadway play, in fact, launched the career of Audrey Hepburn, who later brought her Cinderella persona to the role that immortalized her: the backwoods-born call girl Holly Golightly in the 1963 film adaptation of Truman Capote’s 1958 novella *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*. Even Rodgers and Hammerstein—two years before their television blockbuster “Cinderella”—created a musical centered around the transformation of a “tramp” into a “lady”: the 1955 flop *Pipe Dream*, based on John Steinbeck’s *Sweet Thursday*, in which a Monterey madam plays the role of heroine Suzy’s fairy godmother and helps her “sandbag” an unlikely Prince Charming: the marine biologist Doc, for whom Suzy serves “as a catalyst for self-awareness and conjugal fulfillment.”<sup>13</sup>

Traditionally female figures requiring salvation or redemption, respectively, both the princess and the prostitute can be interpreted as stemming from Cold War anxieties about the containment of female sexuality and the threat of “sexual chaos” from women. “As the Cold War took hold of the nation’s consciousness, domestic containment mushroomed into a full-blown ideology. . . . Non-marital sexual behavior in all its forms became a national obsession after the war,” as Elaine Tyler May describes.<sup>14</sup> Princesses reigned in the cultural imagination as glamorous extensions of the icon that Betty Friedan termed the “happy housewife heroine,” contented and

contained within an ideally affluent marriage.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the prostitute strays outside the lines of domesticity; she too must be reoriented toward marriage and motherhood. In 1963, Friedan revealed the plight of the middle-class American housewife in *The Feminine Mystique*, noting, "In the second half of the twentieth century in America, woman's world was confined to her own body and beauty, the charming of man, the bearing of babies, and the physical care and serving of husband, children, and home."<sup>16</sup>

While both the extremity and exclusions of Freidan's arguments have been severely challenged since 1963 (her landmark manifesto failed to address the lives of working-class women and women of color, as well as the many outlets of employment and activism available to American women in the 1950s), the feminine mystique nevertheless formed a powerful and pervasive barrier to women's professional and intellectual ambitions throughout the 1950s, while heavily promoting women's roles as homemakers. The Victorian-bred Cinderella mythology—in terms of "young women dream(ing) of marrying the boss's son"—once again shaped the life goals of many American women, who despite their climbing college enrollment rates, only stayed on to graduate 37 percent of the time. As May notes, "College enabled (white, middle-class) women to achieve upward mobility not through their own occupations but by attaching themselves to well-educated men who had good occupational prospects."<sup>17</sup>

Yet, the 1950s stirred a blizzard of contradictions about the proper roles for American women: what sociologist Mirra Komarovsky called a "veritable crazy quilt of contradictory practices and beliefs. . . . The old and new moralities exist side by side, dividing the heart against itself."<sup>18</sup> While the percentage of women in the workforce rapidly increased to one-third of the population in 1956, many of these jobs were clerical and marked by an imposing wage gap. From 1951 through 1955, female full-time workers earned 63.9 percent of what male full-time workers earned, while fewer than 6 percent of working women occupied executive jobs throughout the decade.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, harsh quotas in graduation education exacerbated the declining rate of women in the professions: 5 percent of law school admissions, and even lower rates for medical school.<sup>20</sup>

Cultural contradictions accompanied professional ones. The majority of women's magazines (including the "big seven" of *Family Circle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *GoodHousekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Redbook*, and *Woman's Day*) preached women's imperative to be lovely, sexually enticing (within the bounds of marriage), and domestically oriented.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, these magazines included laudatory profiles of politicians like

Senator Margaret Chase Smith and writers like Sylvia Plath, whose 1963 novel *The Bell Jar* (published the same year as *The Feminine Mystique*) delved into the schizophrenia of American culture's attitudes toward female accomplishment as much as into the mental breakdown of protagonist Esther Greenwood, an intern at the fictional *Ladies' Day*. The women's magazines of the 1950s marketed pristine images of the glamour princess (and the real-life princess, in the case of Grace Kelly) and reinforced the divide of female homemaker/male breadwinner, while reminding female readers that it was not sufficient to be "a girl who's merely lovely" (as the stepsisters lament of Cinderella's beauty in Rodgers and Hammerstein's tele-musical). As Stephanie Coontz notes of the era's gender-role identity crisis: "In many cases, rather than providing women with maneuvering room, the mixed messages and contradictory trends in that era actually contributed to their sense of paralysis."<sup>22</sup>

Cultural icons contributed to the contradictions. "Cinderella is all over the place," observed *The Hartford Courant's* John Crosby in 1953, in a review of Samuel Taylor's romantic comedy *Sabrina Fair* (the basis of the 1954 Audrey Hepburn classic *Sabrina*).<sup>23</sup> As much so as in the 1920s, when Cinderella musicals captured rising middle-class prosperity and immigrant assimilation, the Euro-tinted fairy tale princess held multifaceted symbolic resonance to American audiences in the Cold War era (starting at the very beginning of the decade, with Walt Disney's visually enchanting, morally conservative 1950 animated film classic). On one level, Broadway musicals and Hollywood films presented her as a capitalist icon against the threat and spread of Communism: celebrating Cinderella's ultimate identity as female consumer upon her substitution of riches for rags.<sup>24</sup> The Broadway musicals of the 1950s are remarkable not only for their range of Cinderellas, but also for their splendid assortment of balls: Embassy Balls and diplomatic galas (*Call Me Madam*, *My Fair Lady*, and *The Sound of Music*); Hunt Balls (*Happy Hunting*); Check Apron Balls (*New Girl in Town*); Quatre Arts Balls (*Can-Can*); and Manhattan penthouse parties (to which Judy Holliday's character of Ella Peterson wears a scarlet *Traviata* ball gown in *Bells Are Ringing*). As scholar Dina M. Smith has noted of Billy Wilder's Cinderella films starring Hepburn (including *Sabrina* and 1957's *Love in the Afternoon*):

As we watch *Sabrina* evolve from being an awkward, barefoot émigré's daughter to being a foreign-inspired "American" beauty, the US's own recent history finds expression—from Depression, war, and reconversion to "boom," or diplomatically, from provincial isolationist to global world power.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the metamorphic narratives of 1950s Cinderella musicals reflected the era's pervasive "desire for a makeover."<sup>26</sup> In the continental fairy-tale Paris of the 1957 Paramount movie musical *Funny Face*, Dick Avery (Fred Astaire) engineers the transformation of Jo Stockton (Audrey Hepburn) from a "Greenwich Village ugly duckling" to a swan-like fashion mannequin in the pages of *Quality Magazine*. Designer Paul Duval introduces a ravishingly costumed Jo, in a camp-infused fashion musical that at once satirically undermines the era's gender myths of "On How to Be Lovely" and epitomizes the 1950s Cinderella makeover narrative. In words evoking *Sally's* "Butterfly Ballet," Duval unveils Jo: "My friends, you saw enter here a waif, a gamine, a lowly caterpillar. We open the cocoon, but it is not a butterfly that emerges... it is a bird of paradise."<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, Cinderella reappeared in the 1950s Broadway musical as both a reflection and a rebuttal of the feminine mystique: a ladylike ideal that female characters disrupted as much as they embodied. The Cinderella princesses and prostitutes of the 1950s musical often embrace domesticity (i.e., Suzy in *Pipe Dream*, and Maria in *The Sound of Music*). Yet a number of characters—most notably, Rose and Louise in *Gypsy*—outright defy it, and very few Broadway musicals depict the Cinderella character as passive. The Broadway musicals of the 1950s subvert women's sexual and domestic containment, often in their themes and narratives, and always in the dominating power of their female performers. The decade marked "the golden age of female stars and characters," as Stacy Wolf observes.<sup>28</sup> During the 1950s, Gwen Verdon, Judy Holliday, Julie Andrews, Barbara Cook, Chita Rivera, Diahann Carroll, Eartha Kitt, and many others joined Ethel Merman, Mary Martin, and Carol Channing as being the dynamic female stars that dominated the Broadway musical stage.

Of these stars, the graceful, British-born Andrews most closely paralleled Hollywood's Hepburn as the decade's Cinderella ideal, though both actresses equally embodied Galatea in their joint role of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* (Andrews on Broadway in 1956, and Hepburn in the 1964 George Cukor film adaptation). Like *My Fair Lady*—and such earlier musicals as *Princess Tam-Tam*—multiple Broadway and Hollywood musicals in the 1950s blended the Cinderella story with the paradigm of Galatea, as a man falls in love with the woman he has remade in his image. As Stuart Hecht observes, "In the Pygmalion-based show the attraction tends to lie in the young woman's very ignorance, if not innocence... the difference (from Cinderella) being that, unlike in the case with Prince

Charming, the woman's outward appearance is itself a direct creation of the man and hence oddly narcissistic."<sup>29</sup>

No less than Eliza Doolittle, *My Fair Lady* transforms the irascible Henry Higgins (a curmudgeon prince, rather than a charming one). Similarly, the title heroine reforms the roué Gaston Lachaille in *Gigi*, the 1958 cinematic follow-up to *My Fair Lady*. With their respective Cockney and courtesan Cinderellas, *My Fair Lady* and *Gigi* share a strong basis in both Cold War-era Europhilia and the classic Perrault fairy tale. Eliza's and Gigi's metamorphoses into grand ladies carry them, respectively, from the mud of Covent Garden and the margins of the Parisian demimonde to glittering elegance at Ascot and Maxim's. Both musicals, too, draw greatly from the Pygmalion myth, though in *Gigi* the operator of the marionette strings is female: Gigi's *grande cocotte* mentor Aunt Alicia.

Along with the modern-set 1956 musical comedy *Bells Are Ringing*, which follows a "Brooklyn Cinderella" and her "miracle-worker" renovation of a dissipated playwright,<sup>30</sup> the two Lerner and Loewe musicals also qualify as another kind of narrative. This model is less about the rescue of a young woman by Prince Charming than it is about her redemption of a prince frozen in emotional slumber. *My Fair Lady*, *Gigi*, and *Bells Are Ringing*, in fact, draw strongly from the motifs of a 1953 play by Terrence Rattigan, as well as Samuel Taylor's 1953 play *Sabrina Fair, or A Woman of the World*. Both plays represent Sleeping Prince fables.

#### MY FAIR LADY, GIGI, AND BELLS ARE RINGING: THE SLEEPING PRINCE AWAKENS

In *Bells Are Ringing*, the hit 1956 musical comedy by Jule Styne, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green, answering service operator Ella Peterson (Judy Holliday) falls in love sight unseen with one of the many clients for whom she transforms her voice and persona in order to bring them cheer and inspiration. Every day, in the quavering-voiced persona of the gently scolding "Mom," Ella calls "Plaza O-Double Four-Double Three," the penthouse residence of Jeff Moss (Sydney Chaplin), a charming but undisciplined Broadway playwright suffering from writers' block. Musing "It's a Perfect Relationship," Ella wonders of her ideal, "What does he look like/My Sleeping Prince?"<sup>31</sup>

Opening more than seven months after *My Fair Lady*, *Bells Are Ringing* satirically reversed the gender dynamics of Lerner and Loewe's Broadway phenomenon. Over the course of *Bells Are Ringing*, the resourceful

Ella—under a second alter ego of the glamorous “Melisande Scott”—sets about restoring Jeff from creative impotence to fertility: a state that he admits he could not have achieved without her ingenuity. *My Fair Lady* recounts the story of an aristocratic male transforming a working-class female.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, the Sleeping Prince fable functions conversely (and often simultaneously) as the regeneration of the aristocratic male *by* the working-class female, who is often significantly younger than him.

In the lyrics of “It’s a Perfect Relationship,” Comden and Green alluded to Terrence Rattigan’s Edwardian-set 1953 play *The Sleeping Prince*. The romantic comedy followed the unlikely romance between a naive, Yankee chorus girl in London and the “smug and arrogant Grand Duke who needs humanizing.”<sup>33</sup> Visiting London for the coronation of King Edward, the Balkan Regent Charles invites Mary Morgan to the Carpathian embassy for a private “bird and bottle supper.”<sup>34</sup> Produced in London in 1953, and on Broadway in 1956, *The Sleeping Prince* resonates as a Cold War-era romantic allegory of a powerful, but emotionally detached, male tyrant brought back to life through his feelings for the heroine, an “American Cinderella.”<sup>35</sup> The Regent renews his engagement with the world around him, while converting his kingdom to political democracy. The Regent’s false-hearted seduction gambits with Mary eventually transmute into romantic love:

REGENT: You are quite right about my life. It is quite without love.  
I am growing into middle age. . . . and I have never known what it is to love or be loved. It is like the legend of the Sleeping Princess. Only here it is the Prince that sleeps—and waits the kiss of the beautiful young maiden that will bring him back to life.

MARY: You mean you want me to kiss you?

REGENT: You are so literal. It is love that I need. The ennobling love of a pure young woman. . . . her glowing self-sacrifice to my little weaknesses and desires—for love is sacrifice, is it not? Yes. There is the mystic kiss that might bring this sleeping Prince back to life. . . .<sup>36</sup>

Samuel Taylor’s *Sabrina Fair* (1953), too, absorbs the Cinderella story of its ambitious heroine into the form of a Sleeping Prince fable. The play follows Sabrina Fairchild, a chauffeur’s daughter transformed by her years in Paris from a “tree-climbing tomboy into a beautiful dish.”<sup>37</sup> Sabrina returns with refined manners and a ravishing wardrobe to the Long Island estate of the aristocratic Larrabees. There, she attracts the courtship of

both Larrabee brothers: playboy David and businessman Linus, the CEO of Larrabee Industries (who, in the 1954 Billy Wilder film adaptation, specializes in “plastics”). Named by her well-read father after a Miltonian naiad (in *The Masque of Comus*), Sabrina similarly becomes an allegorical figure—representing, at once, Old World glamour and youthful zest for life. Although David is the self-apparent Prince Charming, the heroine transfers her affections to Linus, for it is the corporate capitalist rather than the playboy who most urgently requires the beautiful young maiden’s kiss (“Power needs the leavening of love,” Sabrina says).<sup>38</sup> She explains to Linus the literary significance of her name:

LINUS: And what does it mean?

SABRINA: In one sentence, so that he does not wish to read may run,  
it is the story of a water nymph who saves a virgin from a fate worse than death.

LINUS: Is Sabrina the virgin?

SABRINA: Sabrina is the savior.<sup>39</sup>

More so than in the original source plays by Shaw and Loos, *My Fair Lady* and *Gigi* can be read as musicals in which Eliza and Gigi function as the respective feminine saviors to Higgins’ and Gaston’s emotional virgins.

Both exquisitely designed collaborations with designer Cecil Beaton, the two works were also spectacularly successful. As directed by Moss Hart, *My Fair Lady* became the longest-running Broadway musical to date at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, where it opened on March 15, 1956, for a run of 2,717 performances. “As a musical play, *My Fair Lady* is one of Broadway’s celestial works,” wrote Brooks Atkinson.<sup>40</sup> While slightly less of a cultural phenomenon, *Gigi* (1958), as directed by Vincente Minnelli, won a record-breaking nine Academy Awards, including that of Best Picture. *The Chicago Daily Tribune*’s Claudia Cassidy called the film “delectable,” writing, “*Gigi* had me enchanted by its fleetness, its charm, its discretion (and) its airborne aura of delight.”<sup>41</sup>

Yet, at the same time that they created two of the definitive musicals of the decade, Lerner and Loewe essentially altered the perspectives of their female-oriented source plays (conceived as showcases for Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Audrey Hepburn), converting them into masculine star vehicles. In his adaptations of *My Fair Lady* and *Gigi* (which credits the source novel by Colette, but not his borrowings from Anita Loos), Alan Jay Lerner reoriented the original source plays by Shaw and Loos

toward the talents of respective leading men, Rex Harrison; and Maurice Chevalier and Louis Jourdan.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, Lerner famously transformed Shaw's ending of *My Fair Lady* from Eliza's furious final farewell to Higgins in the original play to her romantic return in the musical (as Higgins queries to a smiling Eliza, "Where the devil are my slippers?").<sup>43</sup> Both musicals can be read as Sleeping Prince narratives centered upon the regeneration of their aristocratic male protagonists by romantic involvement with a younger working-class woman—though only after she is glamorously transmuted and aesthetically upgraded into a lady and a princess.

Subtitled "A Romance in Five Acts," Shaw's *Pygmalion* famously drew in its original 1913 production from the playwright's infatuation with his female star. Despite titling his play after the mythic male sculptor, Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* for the great late-Victorian actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Shaw specifically tailored the part of Eliza Doolittle for Campbell (at the actress's non-ingénue age of 45). In a legendary series of letters—written between Shaw and Campbell before and during *Pygmalion*'s run at Aldwych Theatre—the great stylist of dramatic and critical prose exulted his "Beatrice Stella" in rhapsodic lyric poetry. "For you I wear my head nearest the skies," Shaw wrote in one letter to the actress.<sup>44</sup> In events paralleling Eliza's defiance of Higgins, to marry the cash-poor but blue-blooded Freddy Eynsford-Hill, Mrs. Patrick Campbell eloped with the British officer George Cornwallis-West, inciting Shaw's epistolary invective as an "infamous, vile, heartless, frivolous woman."<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, and despite ensuing drama revolving around the publication of the letters (in Campbell's 1922 memoirs), Shaw and Campbell remained mutually respectful friends and correspondents, with Shaw only reaffirming Eliza Doolittle's independence in *Pygmalion*. In one letter advising Mrs. Campbell on how to play a scene with Herbert Beerbohm Tree (as Higgins), Shaw wrote: "Imagine that he is the author, and be scornful."<sup>46</sup>

Forty-three years later, Lerner and Loewe based *My Fair Lady* on not only Shaw's play, but also on the acclaimed 1938 British film produced by Gabriel Pascal, starring Wendy Hiller as Eliza and Leslie Howard as Higgins. The Pascal film first revised the ending to an overtly romantic one, despite Shaw's "Epilogue" to *Pygmalion* (in which Eliza follows up on her plan to marry Freddy, while eventually running a successful flower shop). The playwright admonished the filmmakers:

I cannot conceive a less happy ending to the story of *Pygmalion* than a love affair between the middle-aged, middle-class professor, a confirmed old

bachelor with a mother-fixation, and a flower girl of 18. Nothing of the kind was emphasized in my scenario, where I emphasized the escape of Eliza from the tyranny of Higgins by a quite natural love affair with Freddy.<sup>47</sup>

Alan Jay Lerner wrote in his own preface to the published script of *My Fair Lady*, "I have omitted (Shaw's) sequel because in it Shaw explains how Eliza ends not with Higgins but with Freddy—and Shaw and Heaven forgive me!—I am not certain he is right."<sup>48</sup>

Lerner not only altered *Pygmalion*'s ending along the lines of the 1938 film, but reconceived it as a star vehicle for the actor playing Higgins. In his memoir, *The Street Where I Live*, Lerner described writing *My Fair Lady* from a complex set of masculine identifications: with the spurned George Bernard Shaw; with Lerner's own ceaseless torrent of marital frustrations; and with the romantic troubles of his friend Rex Harrison. The latter was then tempestuously torn between his current wife Lilli Palmer and his movie star mistress, Kay Kendall. Lerner recounted:

Although *Pygmalion* had been written for Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Eliza Doolittle had always been considered a star vehicle for a great actress, to me Higgins was far more interesting and more complex, for whom empathy came easily for me. There was no doubt in my mind that Higgins was Shaw, and Shaw, as far as women were concerned, was a man of overwhelming shyness. . . . So the first person we began to look for was not an Eliza Doolittle, but a Henry Higgins. And the first person I thought of was Rex Harrison.<sup>49</sup>

Initially hesitant to star in a musical (a reluctance partially overcome by Lerner and Loewe's array of virtuosic patter songs for Higgins), the non-singer Harrison signed on to *My Fair Lady*, while Julie Andrews—a rising star after her debut in *The Boyfriend* (1954)—followed his casting as Eliza. As a *Time Magazine* profile of the British leading man noted, on his performance of "A Hymn to Him": "Actor Harrison gives that number all the conviction he's got. In fact, the strongly masculine tone of the show—typical of Shaw and atypical of musicals—was one reason he agreed to star in it."<sup>50</sup> In the process of adapting *Pygmalion* into *My Fair Lady*, Lerner even interpolated lines from Shaw's letters to Mrs. Patrick Campbell, mixing them in with Higgins' dialogue and solidifying the identifications between Higgins, Shaw, Lerner, and Harrison. "If the Higgins oxygen burns up her little lungs, let her seek some stuffiness that suits her. She's an owl sickened by a few days of my sunshine!" huffs Higgins of Eliza, quoting a Shaw letter, after Eliza has walked out on him.<sup>51</sup>

In *Pygmalion*, Shaw had conceived Henry Higgins as both an eccentric egotist and an irredeemable misogynist. Linguistically and sartorially, the professor transforms Eliza into a lady, even as Eliza, after the ball, actualizes herself as an independent woman. “You certainly are a lively pair of babies, playing with your live doll,” tartly observes Henry’s mother to both Pickering and Higgins.<sup>52</sup> Shaw also describes the latter, in stage directions, as “rather like a very impetuous baby.”<sup>53</sup> In a passage of dialogue that inspired Lerner and Loewe to write, “I’m An Ordinary Man,” Higgins explains his logic to Pickering, with whom Higgins maintains a tight homosocial bond only rivaled by his attachment to his mother:

I find that the moment I let a woman make friends with me she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself become friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything. . . . So here I am, a confirmed old bachelor, and likely to remain so.<sup>54</sup>

By contrast, *My Fair Lady* does not permit Higgins to remain a confirmed old bachelor, but rather to undergo an emotional rehabilitation. His interactions with Eliza orient him to heterosexual romance, as well as to the prospect of domesticity. In *My Fair Lady*, Higgins progresses from self-deluded isolation (“I’m An Ordinary Man”), to the boasting of his masculine superiority (“A Hymn to Him”), to the vexed then grateful recognition that Eliza’s presence is as essential to him as “breathing out, and breathing in.” “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face” positions Higgins as an awakened Sleeping Prince and salvaged virgin, no less than the Regent Charles and Linus Larrabee in *Sabrina Fair*. When Higgins’ fair lady returns, gently mocking her earlier “guttersnipe” self (“I washed my hands and face before I came, I did”), Henry’s response is one of boundless relief. Lerner describes Higgins in the musical’s final stage directions: “If he could but let himself, his face would radiate unmistakable relief and joy. If he could but let himself, he would run to her. Instead, he leans back with a contented sigh pushing his hat forward till it almost covers his face”—before facetiously demanding the fetching of his slippers (an action that Eliza intuitively “understands”).<sup>55</sup>

*Gigi*, too, translates its source play as a Sleeping Prince narrative of male regeneration, in a process of adaptation that echoes *My Fair Lady*. Though filmed in vivid Eastmancolor as a production of the MGM “Freed Unit,” *Gigi* received treatment “more as a theatrical event than a motion picture,” according to Lerner.<sup>56</sup> As *Gigi*, the team cast Leslie Caron—a petulant ex-ballerina in the gamine mold, as well as MGM’s answer to Paramount’s

Audrey Hepburn.<sup>57</sup> While rhapsodic over *Gigi*’s scintillating wit, lyricism, and Belle Époque splendor, multiple critics noted *Gigi*’s close resemblance to *My Fair Lady*. *The Washington Post*’s Richard L. Coe compared the two musicals in depth, noting:

It is a striking fact but fundamentally immaterial that one can find here exact mirrors of *My Fair Lady*. For “The Rain in Spain,” there’s another trio, “The Night They Invented Champagne,” and the Chevalier-Jourdan “It’s a Bore” recalls one by Henry Higgins and Col. Pickering in the stage musical. There’s Jourdan’s soliloquy “Gigi,” another way of saying, “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face.” Further, it’s undeniable that *My Fair Lady*’s designer Beaton is working close to the graceful Edwardian era, that Jourdan sometimes does use the “talk” style of Rex Harrison (though his singing voice, clearly, is superior and more trained) and that this, too, is a twist on the Cinderella theme.<sup>58</sup>

As Coe’s description indicates, the majority of the non-ensemble numbers in *Gigi* belong to its male stars. For Louis Jourdan, Lerner enhanced the role of the blasé Gaston Lachaille, while for Maurice Chevalier, Lerner expanded the part of Gaston’s libertine father Honoré (who functions as “narrator, or raisonneur” in the film and introduces “Paris, the period, the atmosphere, and Gigi” in the opening number, “Thank Heaven for Little Girls”).<sup>59</sup> While both Shaw and Lerner characterized Henry Higgins as originally indifferent to women, Lerner’s philandering Gaston is merely sated with them: with the vanities and infidelities that he attributes to a cheating mistress in “She Is Not Thinking of Me.” As Lerner recalled in *The Street Where I Live*, the screenwriter-lyricist agreed to write *Gigi* for producer Arthur Freed on the condition of reuniting with Beaton, as well as creating a new part for the living legend Chevalier.<sup>60</sup> The latter embodied the pleasure-chasing boulevardier, as well as the amoral sensibility of May–September liaison celebrated by Colette in *Gigi*, as well as the *Chéri* and *Claudine* stories.

Yet, just as Shaw wrote *Pygmalion* as a vehicle for Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Anita Loos and Colette (who worked closely with Loos on the translation and adaptation of her 1944 novella) conceived the original 1951 Broadway play *Gigi* as a star vehicle for Audrey Hepburn. As opulently mounted by producer Gilbert Miller, the play resonated as “a kind of Gallic Cinderella in reverse, (about) a girl who, in a manner of speaking, prefers a pumpkin coach to the glass slipper of the not unreasonably confused Prince Charming, who is prepared to deal on Aunt Alicia’s canny courtesan terms in a munificence of carats, only to find himself offering a wedding band,” as Claudia Cassidy described.<sup>61</sup> As a play, *Gigi* drew upon the inspired

casting of the Belgian-born Hepburn, whose plays and films drew upon a biography marked with fairy tale-like transformations and reversals. As Loos noted of her *Gigi* star:

About Audrey Hepburn there is and always has been an aura of romance. . . . In her short 25 years she has experienced life in more of its aspects than many of us have been able to trump up in our romantic daydreams or even to suffer in our nightmares.<sup>62</sup>

Descended from an aristocratic background on the side of her mother, Hepburn rose from wartime deprivation in the Netherlands (where she had also been involved with the Dutch Resistance) to work as a chorus girl and movie extra, and to a serendipitous ascent aided by Colette herself.<sup>63</sup> For Hepburn, the French woman of letters (and the sole female member of the Académie Goncourt) served as a real-life fairy godmother, discovering Hepburn at the Palace Hotel in Monte Carlo where the latter was playing an extra in the British-produced film *Laughter in Paradise* (1951). Convinced that Hepburn could channel both youth and sophistication, the author shared her discovery with Loos: “Colette was reasonably certain she had stumbled upon the star for her story, although the girl had never spoken a word on the stage.”<sup>64</sup>

Hepburn’s debut as *Gigi* earned the actress rave reviews in a less well-received play that nevertheless echoed the feminine focus and feminist themes of the Colette novella. Both Loos’s play and the movie musical focus on the same essential story: the blossoming of a teenage girl toward the ultimate role of wife, rather than courtesan, in a noted family of *grande horizontales*. *Gigi*’s female Pygmalion Aunt Alicia (Cathleen Nesbitt, the same actress who originated *My Fair Lady*’s Mrs. Higgins) strives meticulously to train her niece in the arts of ladylike grace.<sup>65</sup> She shows *Gigi* how to drink wine, how to eat such delicacies as the *ortolan*, and how to please a man (“a woman who learns a man’s preference in everything is always well-armed against him”).<sup>66</sup> Aunt Alicia also teaches the girl how to detect the best diamonds and emeralds (“Wait until the first-class jewels come along, *Gigi*. . . hold firmly to your ideals”).<sup>67</sup> (See Figure 4.1.)

More so than the MGM movie musical, the original Colette novella and Loos’ play concern themselves with the mores of the demimonde: the glamour and artifice, freedom and sacrifice, of the courtesan’s life, as well as the inner lives and relationships of the women who live outside polite society, but who may culminate their careers with matrimony. As Aunt Alicia confides to *Gigi*, “marriage isn’t forbidden to us. But instead



Figure 4.1 “Wait until the first-class jewels, *Gigi*. . . hold firmly to your ideals.” Audrey Hepburn, as *Gigi*, and Cathleen Nesbitt, as Aunt Alicia, in Anita Loos’s 1951 play *Gigi*. Courtesy of Photofest.

of getting married at once, it sometimes happens that we get married at last.”<sup>68</sup> Both Colette’s and Loos’ works play satirically at the irony of a courtesan caste more self-consciously refined than the bourgeoisie, while *Gigi* also iterates the central leitmotif of Loos’s work: the celebration of rowdy female misbehavior. “Who wants to be a lady?” laughs *Gigi* to her “Tonton” Gaston.<sup>69</sup> The latter falls in love with *Gigi*’s tomboy naturalness and candor in a world of artificial cocottes.

By contrast, Lerner shifted Colette and Loos’s vision of *Gigi*, emphasizing the gawky young heroine’s spectacular makeover as a graceful beauty. The screenwriter/lyricist also focused upon *Gigi*’s Sleeping Prince regeneration—and domestication—of the perpetually bored Gaston. Lerner noted, “I explained (to Leslie Caron) it was my intention to concentrate



dramatic attention as much on a girl becoming a woman as on a girl becoming a courtesan.”<sup>70</sup> In the title song, to Lerner’s ardent lyrics and Loewe’s expansively sensuous melody, Gaston echoes Higgins’ “I’ve Grown Accustomed to Her Face.” Here, however, it is Gigi’s nubile youth rather than Eliza’s demotic defiance that both reforms the rake and reanimates the roué Sleeping Prince:

Gigi, you’re not at all that funny, awkward little girl I knew.  
Oh no, overnight there’s been a breathless change in you.  
Gigi, while you were trembling on the brink,  
Was I out there yonder somewhere blinking at a star?  
When did your sparkle turn to fire,  
And your warmth become desire?  
What miracle has made you the way you are?<sup>71</sup>

Like both *My Fair Lady* and *Gigi*, Styne, Comden, and Green’s *Bells Are Ringing* (1956) plays upon the Sleeping Prince narrative. However, the librettists twist the formula to cuttingly satiric ends. In *My Fair Lady*, an older man activates the transformation of a young woman, while Aunt Alicia may be the miracle to which Gaston alludes in *Gigi*, as she too appears to affect a near magical metamorphosis upon her niece toward the end of launching Gigi as a debutante-courtesan. By contrast, Comden and Green celebrate their heroine Ella Peterson as the “wonder girl” to dissipated playwright Jeff Moss.<sup>72</sup> Jeff’s identity as a Sleeping Prince refers both to his literary paralysis and to the alcoholic escapism preventing him from accomplishing his work without his usual writing partner. In contrast to Eliza’s guttersnipe, Ella finds Jeff lying proverbially “face down in the gutter” and lifts him out of it so that he can complete his play, *The Midas Touch*.<sup>73</sup> “Jeff, I have to go,” says Ella (as her mysterious alter ego Melisande), to which Jeff responds, “Mel, you can’t! You dropped into my life like a miracle! You saved me when I was drowning!”<sup>74</sup>

With her vocal charade as both Melisande and “Mom”—as well as her succession of sudden disappearances from Jeff—Ella Peterson represents yet another Broadway Cinderella figure. Richard L. Coe, reviewing the 1960 MGM film version starring Holliday, called *Bells Are Ringing* a “modern fairy tale, wherein Cinderella meets her Prince, leaves same, is tracked down not by a glass slipper but her silvery tongue and finally joins the penthouse set.”<sup>75</sup> At the same time, *Bells Are Ringing* slyly presents Ella as both Cinderella and Fairy Godmother, as well as Pygmalion to her leading man’s Galatea, in a modern musical comedy that confers its American

working-girl heroine more social and behavioral agency than either of the Lerner and Loewe musicals set in period England and France, respectively. At the same time, *Bells Are Ringing* incisively criticizes women’s limited options and stifled voices during a decade of paradoxical liberations and confinements.

Unlike *My Fair Lady* and *Gigi*, *Bells Are Ringing*—directed by Jerome Robbins and choreographed by Robbins and Bob Fosse—appeared as an original musical, based neither on a play nor on a novel. Opening on November 29, 1956, at the Shubert Theatre, where it played a run of 924 performances, the musical elaborated upon working-girl motifs from earlier Comden and Green musicals. Betty Comden (*née* Basya Cohen) and Adolph Green, with Judy Holliday (*née* Judith Tuvim), drew upon “a Jewish-created urban and cosmopolitan working-girl feminism (that) persisted in the 1950s as a cultural alternative to the suburban, domestic consumerism soon eloquently critiqued by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*,” as Judith Smith describes.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, the writers drew from the life experiences of star Judy Holliday, who had once worked as a switchboard operator. The latter had performed alongside Comden and Green in the late 1930s as the celebrated musical parody team, The Revuers, and won the 1950 Oscar for Best Actress for recreating her iconic performance as the politically enlightened chorus girl Billie Dawn in the film version of *Born Yesterday*. Cast regularly as a shrewd dumb-on-the-surface blonde, Holliday (who had a genius IQ) played tougher screwball variations of Marilyn Monroe-like roles (and was, in fact, the first choice to play Monroe’s part of Elsie Marina in *The Sleeping Prince*-based film *The Prince and the Showgirl*).<sup>77</sup> In *Bells Are Ringing*, Comden and Green cast Holliday as Ella Peterson, who puts on an array of vocal personae for her clients at Suzanswerphone in order to perform good deeds for them.

Opening in the wake of *My Fair Lady*’s phenomenal success, *Bells Are Ringing* created a satiric dialogue with the Lerner and Loewe smash, as well as the current cycle of Sleeping Prince stories. At times, Comden and Green make obvious allusions to *My Fair Lady*: in one scene, leather-jacketed Method actor Blake Barton complains to Ella of a failed audition (“They were lookin’ for a Rex Harrison type—English—so I says, ‘Whatsa matter wi’ me? I speak English’”).<sup>78</sup> Similarly, one of the musical’s show-stopping production numbers clearly recalls the satiric cavalcade of high-hat formality in “The Ascot Gavotte.” Dressed in a scarlet, nineteenth-century *La Traviata* ball gown (a visual equivalent to Eliza’s verbal *gaucheries*), Ella appears amid a sea of starlets and socialites wearing sleek designer gowns.

The partygoers make first-name allusions to a litany of celebrities—including the Princess of Monaco—in “Drop That Name,” which critic Cyrus Durgin referred to as the “Name-Dropping Gavotte . . . a bracing satire on the antic social behavior of city slickers who would be smart.”<sup>79</sup> The partygoers breathlessly invoke such celebrities as Fred Astaire, Lynn Fontanne, and “the former Grace Kelly” as Ella responds haplessly with variations on the only celebrity moniker she can think of: Rin Tin Tin.<sup>80</sup>

Yet, a close reading suggests that Comden and Green may have conceived *Bells Are Ringing* as a kind of critical response to *My Fair Lady*, in which the female protagonist assumes full control over the fate of the leading man. In *My Fair Lady*, Higgins is presented as a phonetic puppeteer who gives voice to his Cockney Galatea: an image famously captured in the musical’s poster art, in which Shaw pulls the strings of Higgins, who in turn controls the movements of marionette Eliza. By contrast, “the silver-tongued” Ella is conceived as a sort of switchboard ventriloquist in her own right; a protean mimic effortlessly changing voices to charm such clients as the opera singer Madame Grimaldi, young Junior Mallet, song-composing dentist Dr. Kitchell, and Jeff. Only when “Mom” fails to motivate Jeff to “Do It Alone” (as he sings in his establishing number) does Ella take real-life action: sneaking into his penthouse apartment, and waking her Sleeping Prince from his drunken stupor in the more glamorous form of “Melisande.”

In a plot contrasting with that of *My Fair Lady*, Ella gives Jeff his voice. She sets about inspiring him to meet his writing deadlines, to make amends with his producer, and even involving herself in the casting of the show. Jeff’s producer asks “Melisande, How did you do it? He claims you’re the most brilliant woman since Madame Curie, and when I see the change in Jeff, I think you’re the greatest magician since Houdini!”<sup>81</sup> *Bells Are Ringing* poses Jeff’s success as the project of Ella, to whom he sings the show’s love song, “Just in Time,” while dancing with her against the moonlit backdrop of the Brooklyn Bridge. As Jeff confesses in the song, he was helpless without Melisande, who has brought him back to life:

I was lost,  
The losing dice were tossed,  
My bridges all were crossed—  
Nowhere to go.  
Now you’re here,  
And now I know just where I’m going;  
No more doubt or fear—  
I’ve found my way.<sup>82</sup>

Beyond its subtle subtextual dialogues with *The Sleeping Prince* and *My Fair Lady* (and, likely, with Holliday’s earlier *Pygmalion*-themed hit *Born Yesterday*, as well), *Bells Are Ringing* contained complex cultural and political meanings beneath its confectionary musical comedy surface.<sup>83</sup> These subtexts paralleled Holliday’s subversive performances as a deceptively brilliant “dumb blonde” star. In choosing to make their heroine a switchboard operator at a Brooklyn answering service, Comden and Green drew from Holliday’s experience, in 1938, working at the switchboard at Orson Welles and John Houseman’s Mercury Theatre: an organization that fueled the actress’s involvement with the Popular Front of the late 1930s (a cause that she shared with Comden, Green, and Leonard Bernstein). Holliday was among “the 151 writers, directors, and actors listed in *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*.”<sup>84</sup> In 1950, the star was called to appear before the House of Un-American Activities Committee, where she resisted testifying against her close friends and collaborators Comden and Green, “about (their) associations and their appearances on behalf of Spanish Civil War refugees.”<sup>85</sup> While Holliday’s own name was cleared from Communist allegations, her trial nevertheless resulted in her being blacklisted from performing on radio and television for almost three years.<sup>86</sup>

In one of its seemingly outlandish subplots—the erroneous pursuit of Ella by Vice Squad detectives—*Bells Are Ringing* in fact satirizes both McCarthy-era paranoia, and the 1950s’ repressive suspicion against signs of “sexual deviance.”<sup>87</sup> Suspiciously targeting Suzanswerphone as a front for a “lonely heart’s club,” Detectives Barnes and Francis mistake the switchboard operator for an illicit working girl (as well as her opera singing client Madame Grimaldi for her madam). Setting out to entrap her into confession, Barnes asks Ella, “Tell me—how do you like your work?”

ELLA: Oh, I love it here! I used to be just a plain switchboard operator—in a lingerie house—Pretty dull except for a little modeling on the side.

BARNES: (*leering*) Modeling on the side, huh? . . . (*Moving in for the kill*) Now, which one of you is the Madame?

ELLA: (*starting to explain reasonably*) That’s Madame Rosina Grimaldi, the opera star, and I happened to recommend a mustard plaster to her for a cold, and this friend of hers—Ohh! (*with sudden realization*) Have you got a dirty mind! (*very strongly, angry now*) Okay, Inspector, you take me down to the Women’s Detention Home! Before I get through with you, I’ll have you demoted to a chicken inspector!<sup>88</sup>

Although musicals like *Gigi* romantically idealized the prostitute, sex workers—along with gay men and lesbians—were regarded in the McCarthy era as “postwar sexual devils.” During the 1950s, “. . . the hooker, the whore, the B-girl, the call girl, the expense-account girl, and the homosexual all became victims of police raids, harassment and arrests,” as Donna Penn describes.<sup>89</sup> *Bells Are Ringing* caustically satirizes McCarthy-era attacks upon uncontained female sexuality, as well as its misguided witch hunts: Detective Barnes continues to spy on Ella (convinced that, if the business isn’t a brothel, Ella must be running a dope ring or a “baby-selling racket”).<sup>90</sup> He remains completely oblivious to the actual bookie ring that has set up shop in the Suzanswerphone building, under the guise of Titanic Records, a classical music record company seeking to “bring culture to the masses.”

Audiences and critics enjoyed *Bells Are Ringing* as a conventional romantic musical comedy, in which Ella’s winning her Sleeping Prince culminates in her engagement to him: the sounds of ringing phones transforming into those of wedding bells. A more activated character, in certain respects, than Lerner and Loewe’s Eliza (and certainly their musical’s *Gigi*), Ella also occupies the functional role of the female savior for an older man: the one whose proverbial kiss will bring him back to life. Yet, Comden and Green also critically examine the repressive implications of the Sleeping Prince myth as applied to the lives of American women.

In *Bells Are Ringing*, Judy Holliday performed “I’m Going Back” as a raucous, virtuosic, Jolson-esque vaudeville turn edged subtly with feminine crisis. Functioning as the musical’s climactic “11 o’clock number,” “I’m Going Back” is an unusual one for the heroine to sing: not an assertion of self-discovery, but rather a recognition of self-ignorance, in which Ella realizes that, while able to put on many voices, she has avoided claiming a strong identity of her own. Having ended her “masquerade” as Melisande (“The Party’s Over”), and convinced that Jeff will never accept her true identity and love her for who she is, Ella confesses: “The trouble is, I don’t really know myself who I am.”<sup>91</sup>

With “I’m Going Back,” Ella vows to return to her previous switchboard operator employment at the Bonjour Tristesse Brassiere Company. The company name juxtaposed the title of the melancholy 1954 French novel by Françoise Sagan (the 18-year-old phenom whom critics compared to Colette) with the part of female anatomy to which women were consistently reduced in an age of both sexual containment and buxom “Mammary Goddesses” like Marilyn Monroe. In the final scene of *Bells*

*Are Ringing*, shortly before Ella’s romantic rapprochement with Jeff, Holliday sang:

I’m going back  
Where I can be me,  
To The Bonjour Tristesse Brassiere Company—  
And while I’m sitting there, I hope that I’ll find out  
Just what Ella Peterson is all about  
In that Shangri-La of lacy lingerie—  
A little modeling on the side—  
At the Bonjour Tristesse Brassiere Company.<sup>92</sup>

In its allusive evocation of a bra factory whose name translates to “Hello, Sadness,” and a heroine yearning to know what her voice really sounds like, *Bells Are Ringing* subtly and humorously undermines the illusions of a feminine mystique that, as Betty Friedan described some years later, created “the problem that has no name, from which so many women in America suffer today, (and which) is caused by adjustment to an image that does not permit them to become what they now can be.”<sup>93</sup>

Yet, as demonstrated by this cycle of Sleeping Prince plays and musicals throughout the 1950s, the feminine mystique itself was predicated on the anxious questioning by American men of a firm and stable masculine identity: a manhood viewed as under siege by women’s continuing advances in the work force and claims to sexual autonomy. In his 1958 essay “The Crisis of American Masculinity” (written the same year as MGM’s *Gigi*), Arthur Schlesinger lamented an age of “sexual ambiguity” while declaring: “Today men are more and more conscious of maleness not as a fact but as a problem. . . . There are multiplying signs, indeed, that something has gone badly wrong with the American male’s conception of himself.”<sup>94</sup> Schlesinger linked the crisis with the sacrifice of individualism to workplace conformity and “the rise of the organization man.” He proposed that, “For men to become men again, in short, their first task is to recover a sense of individual spontaneity.”<sup>95</sup>

All of the leading male characters in this Sleeping Prince cycle realize the need to regain this sense of “individual spontaneity”: from the “organization man” Linus Larrabee in *Sabrina Fair* and the tyrant-regent of *The Sleeping Prince*, to the varied male protagonists of *My Fair Lady*, *Gigi*, and *Bells Are Ringing*. While Jeff Moss faces writer’s block in the latter, Gaston Lachaille and Henry Higgins have both fallen into monotonous routine: Gaston into rote womanizing and the colorfully nonconformist yet “tyrannical” Higgins into an engagement with most human beings as

mechanical as the gramophones with which he records English dialects.<sup>96</sup> Both Lerner and Loewe musicals center upon vivid female characters (and a particularly feisty, dynamic, and complex one in Eliza Doolittle, whose songs, as Stacy Wolf notes, are affectively colored by their spite and defiance: “Just You Wait,” “Show Me,” and “Without You”).<sup>97</sup>

At the same time, Eliza, Gigi, and Ella serve as savior-heroines who open the leading man’s eyes to the color and vibrancy he has been lacking in his own life. These female characters are considerably younger than their male counterparts, while their vernacular earthiness serves to animate the princes’ more rigid upper-class manners.<sup>98</sup> On the ideological level (though not necessarily the performative one), their function is ultimately toward the male character’s regeneration and the reclaiming of his manhood: his “individual spontaneity” as channeled toward the postwar ideals of domesticity and heterosexual romance.

The Sleeping Prince trope can be found in a multitude of stage and film musicals throughout the 1950s (as well as 1949’s *South Pacific*). Other shows lessened the social distance—though not necessarily the age gap—between the male and female lead characters. While *Guys and Dolls* recounts the domestication of both Sky Masterson and Nathan Detroit, *The Music Man* and *The Sound of Music* (with its Sleeping Baron) focus on the domestication and regeneration of, respectively, Professor Harold Hill and Captain Georg von Trapp. In 1955, Rodgers and Hammerstein—whose musicals throughout the World War II and postwar eras heavily emphasized the domestic ideal—also created aspects of a Sleeping Prince story in their famous flop *Pipe Dream*. Here, however, the narrative focus is equally about the transformation of a self-described female “tramp” into a lady: a character that John Steinbeck, though not Oscar Hammerstein, made clear worked as a prostitute.

#### REMAKING THE CINDERELLA PROSTITUTE IN *PIPE DREAM AND HOUSE OF FLOWERS*

While visiting “The Ed Sullivan Show” to promote the NBC live broadcast of their much-anticipated live television musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein sat down for an interview with America’s most popular talk show host.<sup>99</sup> Sullivan asked Richard Rodgers, “Now, Dick, did you come up here with a modern version of Cinderella?” Rodgers responded: “Oh, no, we were very careful. We considered this very carefully and we decided we didn’t want to do a modern version that had gimmicks in it. We wanted

very much to do a traditional Cinderella, which we’ve done.”<sup>100</sup> A lyrical and ebullient fantasy, “Cinderella” starred Julie Andrews, who traveled back and forth between NBC rehearsals and the live taping, and the Mark Hellinger Theatre (where she was still appearing as Eliza Doolittle). The team’s elaborately traditional, Regency-inspired adaptation of Charles Perrault’s tale attracted over 107 million viewers when it premiered on NBC on March 31, 1957, filmed in color and sponsored by Pepsi-Cola.

A spectacular ratings smash, Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Cinderella” sang out from nearly every television in the country, becoming not only a crown jewel of 1950s television theater, but a touchstone of mid-century America’s flourishing “middlebrow moment.”<sup>101</sup> The literary critic Dwight Macdonald famously denounced the sensibility of “Midcult” (in his 1960 essay, “Masscult and Midcult”) as “damnable American.”<sup>102</sup> At the same time, the postwar prosperity, leisure time, and rising educational attainment of the American middle class drove a robust mass consumption of classical music records (satirized with Titanic Records in *Bells Are Ringing*), literary best-sellers, and television musicals like Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Cinderella.”

The cultural production of the era democratically bridged traditional distinctions of high and low culture, while at the same time inducing critical anxieties, like those described by Macdonald. In “Masscult and Midcult,” Macdonald directed critical ire at Rodgers and Hammerstein themselves, while praising Rodgers’ former songwriting partnership: “Midcult is the transition from Rodgers and Hart to Rodgers and Hammerstein, from the gay tough lyrics of *Pal Joey*, a spontaneous expression of a real place called Broadway, to the folk-fakery of *Oklahoma!* and the orotund sentimentalities of *South Pacific*.”<sup>103</sup> Describing the “Midcult” ethos as a priggish one, Macdonald reflected, “Midcult . . . has the essential qualities of Masscult—the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity—but it decently covers them with a cultural fig leaf.”<sup>104</sup>

Yet, two years earlier than their “traditional” and immensely crowd-pleasing fairy tale musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein—perhaps feeling embalmed in their midcult respectability—had adapted a much less traditional take on the Cinderella narrative. The team based *Pipe Dream* upon John Steinbeck’s *Sweet Thursday*—a fig leaf-free novel set among the hard-scrabble, easy-living Monterey denizens of the author’s Cannery Row. Instead of Cinderella and her Fairy Godmother, *Pipe Dream* portrayed the feisty, uneducated drifter Suzy and the madam Fauna. Taking Suzy under her wing at her Bear Flag Café bordello, Fauna teaches her

prideful, yet self-loathing protégée that “Suzy Is a Good Thing” for whom love and happiness are attainable through confident self-realization (a song that can be compared with Andrews’ and Edie Adams’ duet “Impossible” in “Cinderella”).<sup>105</sup>

Now admired as an appealing, underappreciated misfire on the part of Rodgers and Hammerstein, *Pipe Dream* can be counted among several 1950s musicals whose creators sought to adapt literary works about the rise and redemption of gold-hearted working girls. Both *Pipe Dream* and 1954’s *House of Flowers* (adapted by Truman Capote, with Harold Arlen, from Capote’s short story set in a black, Caribbean brothel) struggled to negotiate the sexual candor and realism of their source material with the conventions and audience expectations of a big-budget Broadway musical, in the same era that *My Fair Lady* and Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Cinderella” defined the American middlebrow moment. Yet, whereas critics accused Rodgers and Hammerstein of sanitizing the themes of the Steinbeck novel, *House of Flowers* floundered in its haze of hothouse sophistication.

In the 1950s, prostitutes and courtesans started to appear regularly as central characters in Broadway and Hollywood musicals, including *Gigi*, *Pipe Dream*, *House of Flowers*, as well as in George Abbott and Bob Merrill’s 1957 musical *New Girl in Town*, based on Eugene O’Neill’s *Anna Christie*, and starring Gwen Verdon. A number of Broadway musical plays had earlier recounted serious musical stories about prostitutes or “scarlet women,” including Hammerstein’s own *Carmen Jones* (1943), adapted by Oscar Hammerstein from Bizet’s *Carmen* as a jazz-folk opera with an all-black cast. Yet, as Comden and Green shrewdly satirized in *Bells Are Ringing*, the decade tapped into a cultural fascination with prostitution characterized by its contradictions and double standards: lurid Hollywood eroticism and Kinsey-inspired public discussion, coupled with puritanical expectations of sexual containment and domesticity.

The Broadway prostitution musicals of the 1950s, then, tapped into these anxieties, while also inspired by the mounting artistic aspiration of the Broadway musical play. Since the *Oklahoma!* integrated musical play revolution, the musical had ranged through increasingly weighty literary and dramatic sources for adaptation (arguably culminating with two masterful opera-musical theater hybrids, respectively adapted from Voltaire and Shakespeare, and with music by Leonard Bernstein: 1956’s *Candide* and 1957’s *West Side Story*). Creators of Broadway musicals gravitated to the prostitute as an enduring literary symbol, as well as a core figure of twentieth-century literature and drama. A few 1950s Broadway musicals featured their sex-worker working girls as brassy anti-heroines and sources

of social satire, such as Abe Burrows’ and Cole Porter’s 1953 raucous anti-censorship *Can-Can*, in which the protagonist, La Môme Pistache, is not specifically a prostitute, but a sharp-witted *demi-mondaine* who instructs her can-can girls, “Never Give Anything Away.” Yet, the majority of the decade’s prostitute musicals offered commercially sentimentalized adaptations of morally ambiguous source novels and plays. In all of these musicals, the Magdalene figure is reimagined through some aspect of the Cinderella myth—though only in the case of *Pipe Dream* does the heroine gain social acceptance as a “lady.”

With both book and score by Rodgers and Hammerstein, and directed by Group Theater cofounder Harold Clurman, *Pipe Dream* opened to a mix of critical admiration and disfavor on November 30, 1955, where it ran for 246 performances. Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano Helen Traubel, noted for her Wagnerian roles, received star billing as Fauna. In adapting *Sweet Thursday*, Rodgers and Hammerstein were accused of obscuring the sexual bluntness of Steinbeck’s novel. While multiple critics praised the team’s ambition, as well as the show’s colorfully idiosyncratic score (with such numbers as “Bum’s Opera”), others wrote more harshly that the team had surrendered to midcult gentility. “Rodgers and Hammerstein are great gentlemen of the musical theater, but perhaps they are too gentlemanly to be dealing with John Steinbeck’s sleazy denizens of Cannery Row,” opined John Chapman.<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile, *Time* lambasted *Pipe Dream* as a saccharine desecration of Steinbeck’s literary modernism (perhaps forgetting the raffish appeal of Rodgers’ earlier masterpiece, with Lorenz Hart and John O’Hara, *Pal Joey*):

Always anxious not to repeat themselves, Rodgers and Hammerstein have turned in *Pipe Dream* to the flophouse and bordello set of John Steinbeck’s Cannery Row.... Except for nice music, *Pipe Dream* is pretty much of a bust.... Its bawdyhouse seems about as sinful as Saturday night in a Y.W.C.A.; when its mugs and molls carouse, what is meant to be lowdown seems more like a hoedown.<sup>107</sup>

John Steinbeck, too, noted dissatisfaction with the adaptation of his novel, which euphemized the author’s blunt “hookshop” as the musical’s “Happiest House on the Block.” Steinbeck commented to Rodgers and Hammerstein, “You have turned my prostitute into a visiting nurse!”<sup>108</sup> On a page of dialogue changes, the novelist noted: “One of the most serious criticisms is the uncertainty of Suzy’s position in the Bear Flag. It’s either a whorehouse, or it isn’t. Suzy either took a job there, or she didn’t. The play doesn’t give any satisfaction here and it leaves an audience wondering.”<sup>109</sup>

At the same time, critics complained of the miscasting of central roles in *Pipe Dream*. In particular, they noted the performances of ingenuous Beverly Tyler, playing Suzy, whose “acting in the role of a tough but idealistic girl isn’t as convincing as her singing.”<sup>110</sup> Reviewers also considered Traubel’s Fauna as overly “ladylike” and “lacking the earthy skill of an Ethel Merman.”<sup>111</sup>

Yet, the tonal distance from the earthy *Sweet Thursday* to the gentler *Pipe Dream* spans a less dramatic range than some of the critics implied. In fact, Steinbeck conceived *Sweet Thursday* as not only a follow-up to *Cannery Row*, but as a potential musical comedy to be brought to the stage by producers Feuer and Martin (when their *Guy and Dolls* collaborator Frank Loesser dropped the project, the producers turned instead to Rodgers and Hammerstein). Conceived as a sort of waterfront fairy tale, *Pipe Dream* was described by the author as “kind of light and gay and astringent.”<sup>112</sup> If Rodgers and Hammerstein created a sentimentalized *Pipe Dream*, the novel *Sweet Thursday*, with its rowdy hobo fraternity, blends Steinbeck’s gritty Dust Bowl-tinted authenticity with a heart and generosity not far removed from that of Oscar Hammerstein. In turn, the choice of *Sweet Thursday* as source material for *Pipe Dream* lent the latter musical an unusual spiky toughness countering Hammerstein’s sunny humanism. *Pipe Dream*’s Suzy counts among the team’s most vividly realized heroines. Described in *Sweet Thursday* as possessing a “quick eye” and a “quicker tongue,”<sup>113</sup> Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Suzy is gutsy, hot-headed, and pugnacious as much as she represents the archetypal redeemed whore with a heart of gold.

Closely adapted from Steinbeck’s novel, *Pipe Dream* hews tightly to the narrative shape of *Sweet Thursday*, while portraying Fauna as both fairy godmother and female Pygmalion to Suzy’s Cinderella.<sup>114</sup> In *Pipe Dream*’s climactic musical sequence—the costume party set at the Palace Flophouse attended both by the Cannery Row bums and by the working girls at the Bear Flag—Fauna stages a fairy tale “pageant” to romantically unite Suzy and the marine biologist Doc. Directing Suzy to dress “all in white” as Snow White, so that she can musically propose to Doc, Fauna conflates fairy tales to help Suzy find love. Planning her own transformation from the “head witch” to “Snow White’s Fairy Godmother,” Fauna (inspired by Walt Disney’s 1938 film *Snow White*) dresses the Bear Flag girls as a chorus line of witches:

FAUNA: I ain’t no witch at all! I am Snow White’s fairy godmother. (*All the other witches cringe. She waves her wand*) Now I make all of you fairy

godmothers! (*The girls drop their black dominos and emerge as beautiful fairy godmothers*).<sup>115</sup>

Yet the pageant goes awry when, feeling patronized by Doc, Suzy runs away from the party, exclaiming, “You accept your bride! Who the hell would want you?”<sup>116</sup> Rather than retreating to the cinders of the Perrault tale, Suzy leaves the Bear Flag Café and vows to rebuild her life independently: moving into an abandoned boiler pipe on the fringes of Cannery Row, before eventually reconciling with Doc.

*Pipe Dream* can also be considered something of a Sleeping Prince fable. In the musical, Suzy functions as the savior for Doc, whom his friends recognize as “in some kind of trouble.”<sup>117</sup> A gifted but unmotivated marine biologist idling with his pals Hazel and Mac at the Palace Flophouse, Doc lies to Suzy that he is working on a thesis paper—only to be plunged into rueful self-reflection about his “ne’er-do-well” existence as a “lighthearted bum.”<sup>118</sup> In the lightly swinging and bluesy “The Man I Used to Be,” a song that also addresses his dawning need for Suzy, Doc sings of himself in the “third-person past-tense” (as a second performer danced the role of Doc’s former self). To Doc, Suzy represents “individual spontaneity” fused with purpose:

He thought he knew the game,  
Then along came a dame  
Who turned him into some other guy.  
I’ve got ambition now.  
I’ve got a mission now—  
I aim to reach the top of the tree.  
That other fly-by-night  
Who flew so high by night  
Has vanished like a sail on the sea.<sup>119</sup>

Yet *Pipe Dream*, like *Sweet Thursday*, is a story of romantic mutuality as well as mutual transformation. Rodgers and Hammerstein, no less than Steinbeck, characterize Suzy as a strong-minded and self-sufficient romantic heroine, who after receiving both material help and a boost in morale from Fauna, determines to better her circumstances. She obtains a job as a waitress at a local diner and converts the town’s abandoned boiler into a makeshift home (a security first longed for by Suzy in her yearning ballad, “Everybody’s Got a Home But Me”). Initially convinced that she’ll never be good or pure enough for the well-educated Doc, she remarks, “All the time I’m with him, I keep wishin’ I was somebody else—somebody a

hundred times better than me."<sup>120</sup> Suzy ultimately accepts Doc's love—but only on her own terms of self-preservation and mutual respect:

DOC: Suzy, could you tell me—what you want in a man?

SUZY: ... I want a guy that's wide open. He can be tough, but I want a window in him. He can have his guard up every other place, but not with me. And he's got to need the hell out of me. He's got to be the kind of guy that if he ain't got me, he ain't got nothing!<sup>121</sup>

When Doc confesses to her, "Suzy, I love you. I need the hell out of you," she agrees to accompany him to La Jolla, while he takes up a research grant at the California Institute of Technology. Suzy exclaims, "Brother, you got yourself a girl!"<sup>122</sup>

The creation of *House of Flowers*, by librettist/lyricist Truman Capote and composer/co-lyricist Harold Arlen, echoed Rodgers' and Hammerstein's struggles to adapt *Sweet Thursday* as *Pipe Dream*. Then celebrated for his lyrical short stories and novellas, as well as for his Southern-dandy literary persona, Capote transformed his own bordello-set novella *House of Flowers* into a lavish Broadway musical spectacle with a mostly black cast. Opening at the Alvin Theatre on December 30, 1954, *House of Flowers* was greeted as "a gaudy, bawdy, tropical, horticultural show" by *The New York World-Telegram's* William Hawkins.<sup>123</sup> Whereas Harold Clurman would make his Broadway musical debut with *Pipe Dream* the next year, *House of Flowers* marked an early Broadway credit for Peter Brook, who was joined by choreographers Herbert Ross and Geoffrey Holder (with Alvin Ailey among the dance ensemble).

Set on an unnamed island in the West Indies, at the Maison des Fleurs bordello, *House of Flowers* starred three eminent female performers of the mid-century Broadway musical. In a breakout performance, Diahann Carroll played the ingénue Otilie, while Pearl Bailey appeared as Madame Fleur, and Juanita Hall played her rival Madame Tango. *House of Flowers* received mixed reviews and had a disappointing Broadway run (of 165 performances) despite its melodious profusion of hit songs (including "A Sleepin' Bee" and "I Never Has Seen Snow"). *Time's* reviewer captured the consensus that *House of Flowers*, with its eye-popping sets and costumes designed by Oliver Messer, dazzled as an exotic folk spectacle steeped in "luxe, calme et volupté" while sagging as musical drama:

Out of a West Indian yarn of high-toned rival bordellos, of Mardi Gras and cockfights and voodoo worship, spill brilliant color, exotic fragrance and

tropical profusion. To be sure, the very things that give *House of Flowers* its charm and freshness also tend, after a while, to drain them away. For flowers wilt, and scent induces drowsiness.<sup>124</sup>

By contrast to the sentimentalized *Pipe Dream*, *House of Flowers* struck critics as an adult-themed musical spiced with Bailey's "sophisticated sincopation" (sic).<sup>125</sup> However, John McClain of *The New York Journal-American* complained, "The whole thing is an unhappy juxtaposition—there is so much that is pleasant to the eye and ear, played against so much that is squalid."<sup>126</sup> In adapting *House of Flowers* as a Broadway musical, Capote only heightened the bawdiness of his novella, a slight but atmospheric folk fable inspired by his observations of island prostitutes on a 1948 trip to Haiti.<sup>127</sup> While Bailey's character, "the ruthless and ribald" Madame Fleur, is present in the original novella, Capote enhanced her role in the musical.<sup>128</sup> She presides over a staff of elegantly dressed, florally-named working girls Pansy, Gladiola, and Tulip, who are "waiting for their ships to come in."<sup>129</sup> At the same time, Capote fabricated a bitchy and flamboyant rivalry between Madame Fleur and Hall's "dancing instructor" Madame Tango.

Caught in the madams' battle for seductive supremacy is Otilie, whom Madame Fleur has renamed Violet LaRose. Clearly a prostitute in Capote's novella (as well as in his more sexually frank 1968 revision of the musical, which played Off-Broadway at the Theatre de Lys), Capote sweetened Otilie into a virginal pawn for Madame Fleur in the musical. "Among Miss Bailey's staff of girls (in *House of Flowers*) is a sweet young one whom she is saving for a rich white man," euphemized *The New York Daily News's* John Chapman of the musical's plot.<sup>130</sup> Instead of complying with Madame Fleur, and agreeing to long-term "protection" by the wealthy Monsieur Jamison, Otilie plans a secret wedding with her fellow mountain-bred Royal Bonaparte—the true love for whom, according to the island's *Houngan* (or shaman), a bee will be unable to sting her when she holds it sleeping in the palm of her hand. Although Madame Fleur attempts to shanghai Royal, Otilie seeks assistance from the *Houngan*, who casts a voodoo spell that returns Royal to Otilie from the depths of the sea.

Opening three years after Loos's Broadway adaptation of Colette, *House of Flowers* offered something of a racialized variation on the themes of *Gigi*, in which courtesans emulate and outshine bourgeois ladies. Like *Gigi*, *House of Flowers* portrayed dainty-mannered prostitutes and an ingénue who "finds love (amid) lustful surroundings."<sup>131</sup>

Yet, echoing its primitivist *mise-en-scène* (and its “number of wild, grotesque, animalistic dances,” as described by Brooks Atkinson),<sup>132</sup> *House of Flowers* also echoed the earlier *Princess Tam-Tam* in reinforcing long existing cultural stigmas about the inability of black women—long represented as uncivilized, sexualized “nature”—to assimilate into the upper tiers of society.

In the tradition of *Princess Tam-Tam*, *House of Flowers* portrays the elegantly dressed Otilie as not fully civilizable. Steinbeck’s *Fauna* (in *Sweet Thursday*) had described Suzy, “She ain’t a good hustler because of that streak of lady.”<sup>133</sup> By contrast, Capote characterizes Otilie as a refined ingénue with an ineradicable streak of “wild thing” (as Pansy describes Otilie in the *Theatre de Lys* libretto).<sup>134</sup> In *Gigi* and *Pipe Dream*, respectively, the gamine and the tramp are fluid social roles for the Caucasian heroines, who, despite their proximity to the worlds of the courtesan and the prostitute, are able to be accepted as “ladies” in part by “virtue” of the color of their skin. This is not the case in both the novella and musical *House of Flowers*. Capote’s work represents Otilie and Royal—with his blossoming flower-woven house in the mountains—as a romantic match united by a primitivist harmony with nature (though Capote may also be illustrating Otilie’s defiance of white, Colonialist “protection,” represented by Monsieur Jamison).

Like many of the white-created “Negro musicals” of the 1940s and the 1950s, *House of Flowers* presented a tangle of contradictions about the representation of race. According to Capote biographer Gerald Clarke, the production’s troubles started with the choice of Peter Brook as director: “Brook understood Shakespeare as well as anyone alive. But a Broadway musical, particularly a black musical, was beyond his comprehension.”<sup>135</sup> In spite of Brook’s reported discomfiture, *House of Flowers* presented a brilliant and idiomatic score mixing jazz, blues, and Calypso (by a Jewish American composer who consistently promoted racial tolerance and equality in his musicals).<sup>136</sup> It also offered powerful turns by its leading actresses, who advanced the mainstream prominence of African American performers during the Civil Rights era. Bailey earned raves for her bawdy wit as Madame Fleur and her subtle delivery of such numbers as “What is a Friend For.” As Robert Coleman noted, “Such is Miss Bailey’s genius that with a lift of an eyebrow or the toss of a hip, she can make a leaden line ring as if it were pure gold.”<sup>137</sup> While *House of Flowers* only added to Bailey’s acclaim as a performer, the musical made a star of the elegant Carroll, who was praised for her “rich, lovely, easy voice, and rare freshness of personality.”<sup>138</sup>

Negotiating between the volatile roles of “lady” and “tramp,” princess and prostitute, *Pipe Dream* and *House of Flowers* also evoked contradictions about female sexuality. Both musicals narratively reinforced the era’s ideals of domestic and sexual containment. Just as these works imposed “cultural fig leaves” upon their source novels and plays, both *Pipe Dream* and *House of Flowers* drew to a considerable extent upon moralistic whore-with-a-heart-of-gold tropes and the redemption of their heroines through marriage.

At the same time, in positioning prostitutes (and marginalized women coded as prostitutes) as Broadway musical heroines, *Pipe Dream* and *House of Flowers* defied or complicated the decade’s persecution of “sexually deviant” women by sympathetically portraying their *demimondaines* as complex and self-assertive heroines, merged with aspects of the Cinderella myth. The female protagonists of both musicals display determination and agency in their struggles to redefine themselves. While Suzy independently seeks out “honest” work in her desire for social advancement and self-acceptance, Otilie defies Madame Fleur to pursue a less artificial life of her own making with Royal, for whom there is no obligation to play the “lady,” as she chooses her house of flowers over the posturing *Maison des Fleurs*.

While their adaptors would continue to soften overtly sexual themes into the years of the Sexual Revolution, Broadway musicals in the 1960s continued to tell stories about Cinderella prostitutes, with the Fosse-staged *Sweet Charity* (1966, adapted by Cy Coleman, Neil Simon, and Dorothy Fields from Fellini’s *Nights of Cabiria*, with its Chaplin-esque prostitute changed to a promiscuous taxi dancer) playing to great commercial success.<sup>139</sup> Yet, while 1950s Broadway romanticized the prostitute, and remolded her into the bourgeois wife, other musicals blended the Cinderella myth with another kind of social renegade who threatened domestic containment: the female intellectual.

#### “THE SHARP, INTELLECTUAL KIND”: RAGGING 1950S MAKEOVER NARRATIVES IN *WONDERFUL TOWN*

In the 1953 Broadway musical *Wonderful Town*, the bookish Ruth Sherwood embarks upon conquering Manhattan—not with a glamorous makeover, but through the means of her literary talent. Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green’s *Wonderful Town* offered the definitive adaptation of Joseph Fields’ and Jerome Chodorov’s romantic comedy



*My Sister Eileen*, starring Rosalind Russell as the sharp-witted Ruth, an aspiring writer less beautiful than her titular sibling. Set in a colorful (if depoliticized) 1930s Greenwich Village, *Wonderful Town* adroitly blended romance and satire, while offering a joyful paean to bohemian New York. The musical satirically undermined the imperatives of female glamour, consumerism, and the feminine mystique, as well as the stigmatization of female intellect in the 1950s.

On one level, women's magazines and the popular media circulated the message that women should aspire to more than mere feminine loveliness. "For you're a cutie/With more than beauty/Because you've got a lot of personality for me," as Dick Avery (Fred Astaire) sings to cerebral book clerk-turned-style muse Jo Stockton (Audrey Hepburn) in the title song of *Funny Face*, a satiric Cinderella musical of "extraordinarily stylishness."<sup>140</sup> In the 1957 Paramount film, fashion editor Maggie Prescott (Kay Thompson), planning a new issue of *Quality Magazine* targeted at educated women, imperiously proclaims, "The woman who thinks must come to grips with the reality of fashionable attire. A woman can be beautiful as well as intellectual. See facing page."<sup>141</sup>

At the same time, however, 1950s American culture vilified intellectual women (along with career women, along the "Boss Lady" lines of the 1940s) as spinsters, shrews, and menaces to the male ego. "We're going to have trouble. . . . She's a thinker," remarks Maggie of Jo in *Funny Face*, prior to the latter's princess-like transformation as "the Quality Woman."<sup>142</sup> While the percentage of young women enrolled in college dramatically increased, many encountered the temptation to abandon or diminish their intellectual accomplishments, and the "cultural pressure to consider marriage a more important goal than a degree caused many young women to withdraw from college once they became engaged. . . . It (was) not uncommon for girls who grew up in the 1950s to talk of the stigma of being 'too smart.'"<sup>143</sup> Despite their attempts to appeal to "the woman who thinks," women's magazines played a large role in reinforcing the stigma, with Betty Friedan describing the July 1960 issue of *McCall's Magazine*:

The image of women that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home.<sup>144</sup>

Almost uniquely among the 1950s' Broadway musicals (with such other exceptions as *Pipe Dream*), *Wonderful Town* tells a female success story while refraining from overhauling its heroine's makeup and wardrobe. In

this sense, *Wonderful Town* both anticipates and diverges from the cycle of Cinderella/Galatea musicals driven by makeover narratives. In contrast to the heroines of *My Fair Lady*, "Cinderella," *Gigi*, and *Funny Face*, Ruth Sherwood undergoes a transformation of confidence that improves her professional prospects rather than essentially altering her appearance or character. Despite her incipient success in glamorous Manhattan (and publication in the *Manhattan Magazine*), Ruth retains her identity as a free-thinking Villager who achieves both love and success on her own terms.

With Rosalind Russell in the role of Ruth, *Wonderful Town* counted among the biggest Broadway musical hits of the 1950s. Opening at the Winter Garden Theatre on February 25, 1953, for a run of 559 performances, *Wonderful Town* was hailed as a show so effervescent that it "aroused cries of delight from the first night audience."<sup>145</sup> Librettists Fields and Chodorov based the book of the musical on their 1940 Broadway play *My Sister Eileen*, itself adapted from Ruth McKenney's witty and autobiographical series of *New Yorker* stories. Reuniting *On the Town*'s Bernstein, Comden, and Green with the 1944 musical's director George Abbott, *Wonderful Town* earned ecstatic critical notices: for Russell's star turn, Abbott's "robust, high-spirited" direction, Bernstein's "bright and witty score in a variety of modern styles," the "crack-brained comedy" of Fields and Chodorov's book, and Comden and Green's "extraordinarily inventive lyrics in a style as unhackneyed as the music," according to Brooks Atkinson.<sup>146</sup>

Flavored with the antic brilliance of Russell, *Wonderful Town* (like *On the Town* before it, and *Bells Are Ringing* after it) brazenly celebrated female wit, intellect, and ambition. The musical strongly drew upon the persona of Russell, who had epitomized the sharp-tongued career woman in multiple 1940s Boss Lady films, including the 1940 Columbia film version of *My Sister Eileen*. Described as "a versatile clown who can shake the slapstick or point up a deadpan line with equal dexterity," Russell once again played Ruth Sherwood.<sup>147</sup> Along with her aspiring actress sister Eileen, Ruth leaves provincial Ohio to pursue literary success in Manhattan, while the sisters find affordable rooming only in a dilapidated West Village basement. Ruth, after much comic travail, attains both professional accomplishment and romantic fulfillment. Yet, she also jealously observes the powerful effects of Eileen's gorgeousness: a beauty romantically rated above the nonglamour queen bookishness of Ruth. The latter quips of her typewriter missing its "W" button: "It fell off after I wrote my thesis on Walt Whitman."<sup>148</sup> While Comden and Green would

(three years later) slyly cast the brilliant Judy Holliday as not-so-dumb-blonde Ella Peterson in *Bells Are Ringing*, their Ruth Sherwood dominated *Wonderful Town* with her unabashed intelligence.

In Ruth's establishing number, "One Hundred Easy Ways (To Lose a Man)," Ruth self-effacingly lists the ways in which her braininess alienates potential love interests, even as Comden and Green satirize the cultural stigma of female intellectualism. As Ruth quips, "I'm the world's leading expert on discouraging men. I ought to write a book about it. Girls, are you constantly bothered by the cloying attentions of the male sex? Well, here's the solution for you. Get Ruth Sherwood's new bestseller—*One Hundred Easy Ways*."<sup>149</sup> Over the course of four verses Ruth successively instructs women to tell a man how to fix her broken-down car; how to interact at a baseball game; how to deal with heroic male lifeguards; and how to correct a lover's grammar. Ruth concludes her bravura thesis by "waving goodbye toward an imaginary retreating figure."<sup>150</sup>

While Ruth eventually finds romance with Bob Baker, the handsome *Manhattan* editor who both encourages her talent and constructively critiques her stories, she also has to overcome his ambivalence about getting involved "with a genius from Ohio."<sup>151</sup> With the ballad "A Quiet Girl" (which recalls Frank Butler's "The Girl That I Marry" in *Annie Get Your Gun*), Bob laments how he repeatedly falls for intellectual women. In *Wonderful Town*, Comden and Green satirize not only the 1950s' negative attitudes about intellectual women, but also their basis in Freudian psychoanalytic theory and ego psychology (ideas that had only intensified since the 1947 publication of *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*). Reviewing some of Ruth's more derivative short stories (all centered upon romantically frustrated heroines), Bob tells Ruth to "write about something you know—something you've actually experienced":

RUTH: I write the things I feel! I put myself in every one of those characters!

BAKER: Then you must be hopelessly repressed.

RUTH: That's a terrible thing to say! I'm the most normal person you'll ever meet.

BAKER: That's a sure sign. All inhibited people think they're normal.

RUTH: Oh! So now I'm inhibited.

BAKER: I'm afraid so—if you claim you're really those frustrated heroines.

RUTH: Repressed! Inhibited! Frustrated! What else am I?... What are you, an editor or a psychoanalyst?<sup>152</sup>

In fact, *Wonderful Town* does cure Ruth of her "inhibitions"—but in a manner that subverted much of the postwar era's Freudian rhetoric, which advocated sexual containment within marriage, as well as motherhood, as the ways to treat "neurotic" women. *Wonderful Town* eschews this psychoanalytic variation of the era's makeover plots. Instead of finding a husband to treat her "repressions," Ruth sheds them through the swinging liberation of her urban adventures and madcap professional exploits. In a series of increasingly frenzied and screwball episodes and musical numbers (choreographed by Donald Saddler), Ruth loses her repressions on the job. Following a false assignment to interview a fleet of Brazilian sailors at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Ruth is frenetically whirled about by the sailors in the production number "Conga," where she starts her own conga line before she and Eileen are arrested for disturbing the peace (see Figure 4.2).

Similarly, the dance number "Swing" follows Ruth's work advertising the jazz show at the Village Vortex (a fictionalization of Comden and Green's old *Revue*s stomping ground, the Village Vanguard). Here, she

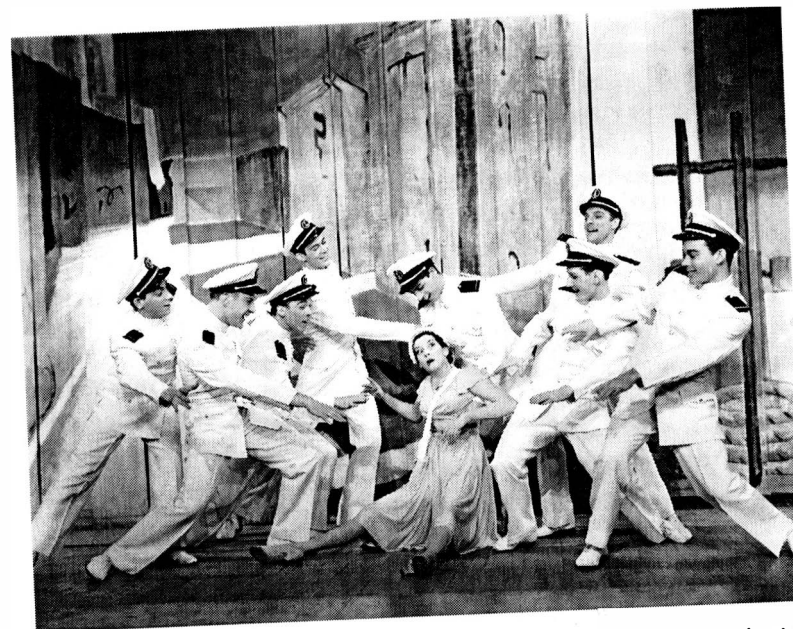


Figure 4.2 "Oh! So now I'm inhibited." Rosalind Russell as Ruth Sherwood, with the Brazilian naval fleet, in the "Conga" number of *Wonderful Town*. Courtesy of Photofest.

falls into a wild, "glaze-eyed hypnotic trance" while scattering to a chorus of hepcats, whom she then leads in an "abandoned dance" with a "sent finish."<sup>153</sup> Of Russell's giddy virtuosity in the role of Ruth, Walter Kerr observed:

What (Russell's) been keeping from us is the open-armed abandon, the sheer animal spirits with which she can set a whole stage to rocking around her. . . . In the second act, she sets the beat for an exercise in rhythmic mayhem known as "Swing"—proving herself a past mistress of glassy-eyed jive—and together with Edith Adams, she brings a final frenzied curtain down on a rollicking duet labeled "Wrong Note Rag."<sup>154</sup>

No less than the liberated wartime women of the similarly modernist *On the Town* (which likewise resisted the temptation of full, Rodgers and Hammerstein-style narrative integration), *Wonderful Town* celebrates women's individual experiences and professional adventures—not magazine-prescribed domesticity or fairy-tale romance—as the essence of getting "carried away."

With its unabashed working-girl feminism, *Wonderful Town* contributed to debunking the gender myths that Friedan addressed so influentially in 1963's *The Feminine Mystique*. As numerous scholars have pointed out, Friedan expanded and synthesized a large body of existing criticism.<sup>155</sup> *Wonderful Town*, in fact, joined a multitude of plays, books, and films (including *Funny Face*) that framed "femininity" as a problematic construct. Both Rona Jaffe's best-selling 1958 novel *The Best of Everything* and Sylvia Plath's 1963 *The Bell Jar* used backdrops of Manhattan media (book publishing in the former and women's magazines in the latter) to confront the challenges faced by working-girl heroines considered "too smart" by society. In *The Best of Everything's* protagonist Caroline Bender is chastised by a wealthy, small-minded suitor, "You're much too ambitious."<sup>156</sup> Similarly, *The Bell Jar's* brilliant Esther Greenwood similarly narrates her desire for professional and intellectual autonomy despite the courtship of several ostensible Princes Charming:

That's one of the reasons I never wanted to get married. The last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself, like the colored arrows from a Fourth of July rocket.<sup>157</sup>

While social expectations contribute to Esther's mental breakdown, domestic conformity is embraced only as a last resort by Sally Jay Gorce,

the astute, free-spirited actress protagonist of Elaine Dundy's 1958 novel *The Dud Avocado*, set in Left Bank Paris, and inspired in part by Dundy's marriage to Kenneth Tynan (and the latter's resentment of Dundy's literary talent). Sally Jay leaves Paris to escape the realization of her "Dreaded Librarian Dream" of brainy spinsterhood.<sup>158</sup> She marries the fashion photographer Max Ramage, suppressing her own ambitions in the process.

*Wonderful Town* demonstrates how, along with such literary counterparts, the Broadway and Hollywood musical both contributed to destabilizing and debunking the feminine mystique years before the publication of Friedan's landmark book. Finally, one of the last musicals of the decade—1959's *Gypsy*—resonates with four decades of Cinderella-themed musicals, while joining *Bells Are Ringing* and *Wonderful Town* as a work that deeply calls into question the cultural assumptions and mythologies of an age of beautiful Grace Kelly-esque princesses.

#### "A PRINCE NAMED ZIEGFELD": *GYPSY* AS CINDERELLA NARRATIVE AND MUSICAL ANTI-FABLE

Thirty-nine years after *Sally* recounted the fictional rise of its title waif from dishwasher at the Elm Tree Alley Inn to prima donna of *The Ziegfeld Follies*, librettist Arthur Laurents, composer Jule Styne and lyricist Stephen Sondheim collaborated on *Gypsy*. The team based their "musical fable" upon a fabulist book, drawn loosely from autobiographical fact. In *Gypsy* Rose Lee's 1958 *Gypsy: A Memoir*, the "former stripper and present gentlewoman" narrated her own descent from vaudeville into burlesque, and her dramatic rise into the ranks of the *Follies* and cultural legend.<sup>159</sup> At the same time, the book focused upon Lee's brazenly ambitious stage mother Rose Hovick, "a woman of iron guts and determined character."<sup>160</sup> Despite losing the 1960 Best Musical Tony Award to Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*—based on a memoir by a very different show business matriarch from "Mama Rose"—*Gypsy* earned raves from critics, including Walter Kerr, who called the show "the best damned musical I've seen in years."<sup>161</sup> The musical starred Ethel Merman as Rose, in a legendary performance that earned the former burlesque-streaked comedienne resounding acclaim as a dramatic actress. Directed and choreographed by Jerome Robbins, *Gypsy* ran for 702 performances at the Broadway Theatre, where it opened on May 21, 1959.

With a title character that ascends to the topmost echelons of burlesque—from shoestring vaudeville to G-string royalty—*Gypsy* can also be

considered at the crest of the wave of stage and screen Cinderella-princess musicals that flourished in the wake of the Kelly–Rainier Wedding of the Century. Yet, at the same time that *Gypsy* recounts a nontraditional American show business Cinderella story (Ray Bolger quipped of Lee as, “the little lady who went without rags to riches”), the musical also dramatically undermines the Cinderella mythology of passive waiting for Prince Charming. It does so both in Louise/Gypsy’s narrative, and particularly that of Rose, who defies her Bible-clutching, plaque-hanging Pop, the latter convinced that “God put you down right here because He meant for you to stay right here”:

POP: Nothin’ wonderful is going to happen to her or June—or to you.  
 ROSE: Maybe not to me, but they’re gonna have a marvelous time! I’ll be damned if I’m gonna let them sit away their lives like I did. And like you do—with only that calendar to tell you one day is different from the next. And that plaque—from your rotten railroad company to say congratulations: for fifty years, you did the same dull thing every dull day!<sup>162</sup>

As Rose defies her father, *Gypsy* portrays a “completely woman-dominated world” that refuses to move into domains of domestic containment.<sup>163</sup> Instead, *Gypsy* progresses into the female-centric landscape of burlesque, and follows what Stacy Wolf calls the musical’s “two narratives... about women becoming singular women.”<sup>164</sup> Similarly, Rose imagines only the professional show business figure of Florenz Ziegfeld “as the millionaire Prince Charming” able to lift her daughter “from impoverished obscurity,” as Stuart Hecht observes.<sup>165</sup> When Herbie dismisses Rose’s dreams for Louise as a grandiose folly—“Once upon a time there was a prince named Ziegfeld”—Rose shoots back, “It could happen!... Anyway, everybody needs something impossible to hope for.”<sup>166</sup>

*Gypsy* reiterates the Cinderella motif of *My Fair Lady*. However, while Eliza moves from guttersnipe to duchess, the dreamy and awkward adolescent Louise progresses through a show business journey from “the Bottom” (as Laurents, in his stage directions, describes the Wichita burlesque house and perceived-cultural gutter into which Rose has mistakenly booked “Rose Louise and her Hollywood Blondes”) to celebrity as a bejeweled sophisticate posing for *Vogue* as “The Lady of the Striptease” (see Figure 4.3). For *Gypsy*, Laurents tamped down Lee’s own powerfully ambitious nature, and concentrated the narrative on that of her mother. As the burlesque queen recalled in her memoir, she propelled herself onto the



Figure 4.3 Princess of Burlesque: Sandra Church as Gypsy Rose Lee in *Gypsy*. Courtesy of Photofest.

burlesque stage of Kansas City’s Missouri Theatre, and shaped her own persona as Gypsy Rose Lee.<sup>167</sup>

In addition to softening the burlesque star’s ambition and biographical history, Laurents also softened Lee’s original striptease routines (in a process that reflected the decade’s cycle of sentimentalized prostitute musicals). Lee had satirized the ladylike ideal and the genteel tradition throughout the 1930s. By contrast, Laurents stressed that, as the rechristened Gypsy strips, “no matter what she does she is, as always, the lady.”<sup>168</sup> According to Lee’s sister June Havoc, in her own 1980 memoir *More Havoc*, Havoc told Lee (who sings, as the young Louise, the yearning ballad “Little Lamb” in *Gypsy*), “You never were that pathetic Cinderella... You have always been strong and positive.”<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, in portraying the Broadway musical’s

emblematic fairy tale figure as a self-made (if maternally molded) burlesque stripper, *Gypsy* radically reconceived the 1950s Cinderella story. *Gypsy* portrayed its title character not only as a stripteaser, but channeled Lee's identity as an autodidactic female intellectual (i.e., "The Naked Genius"), as Louise/Gypsy, in "Let Me Entertain You," makes erudite banter with her Minsky's audience:

Some man accused me of being an ecdysiast. Do you know what that means? . . . An ecdysiast is one who, or that which, sheds its skin. In vulgar parlance, a stripper. But I'm not a stripper. At these prices, I'm an ecdysiast!<sup>170</sup>

Even more so than Louise/Gypsy, however, the character of Rose represented a powerful repudiation of the 1950s' Cinderella mythology, and an implicit subversion of the feminine mystique. While Sondheim and Laurents portrayed Rose—described by *Time* as "a kind of Orpheum Circuit Medea"<sup>171</sup>—as almost monstrous in her self-deluded show biz ambition, *Gypsy*'s creators also depicted the character with psychological depth and social insight as a woman who (as she confesses to Louise), "was born too soon and started too late."<sup>172</sup> As John Chapman noted of Rose, who "is determined to keep her daughters children forever, like Peter Pan," "Mama is a blustering, quarrelsome conniver and her ethics are lousy—but, by golly, she is a gallant woman."<sup>173</sup> Other critics made connections between Merman's famous ambition and professionalism, and the resourceful grit of Rose, who refuses to let her daughters "be just like other girls; cook and clean and sew and die!"<sup>174</sup> *The Baltimore Sun*'s Margaret McManus noted Merman as "the embodiment of Broadway, Show Biz, and Tin Pan Alley," adding, "She's (also) a symbol of independence sand strength. She's loud and gusty and free-wheeling. She is the master of her fate."<sup>175</sup>

Described by Herbie as resembling "a pioneer woman without a frontier,"<sup>176</sup> Rose, no less than Louise, can be viewed as the gypsy of the title, in an epic musical caravan that ranges vertically up the show business hierarchy, and, horizontally, cross-country through a declining vaudeville circuit stretching from Seattle to New York. Set during a historical peak of American urbanization (*Gypsy* starts in the mid-1920s and ends in the early 1930s), the musical also encompasses an agrarian-rural vision of the American frontier past from which Rose is determined to rise and reinvent herself, self-propelled into the Runyonland of tabloid headlines and electric marquees. These transformations inform the spectacularly gaudy barnyard-to-Broadway vaudeville turn "Dainty June and Her Farmboys." As fabricated by Rose, the number functions in *Gypsy*'s plot as the teenaged

June's audition number for J. T. Granziger (the gatekeeper of Rose's fairy-tale dream of the Palace Theatre).

In fact, "Dainty June and Her Farmboys" also contains resonant thematic dimensions that both self-reflexively comment upon, and ironically invert, Rose's own defiance of domestic containment. In "Dainty June and Her Farmboys"—in which Louise appears as the front half of a dancing stage cow—June's retinue of farmboys "stand with rakes, hoes, etc. in a picturesque tableau (!) as birds and music twitter the approach of dawn—which comes up violently."<sup>177</sup> Farmgirl June (an adolescent arrested in stage-childhood) dances and sings her devotion to Caroline the cow, before the farmboys return and dance on "in Eton suits with high hats and canes."<sup>178</sup> The farmboys herald the arrival of a Broadway-bound cardboard train (ironically echoing the "rotten railroad company" that has allowed Pop to "sit away his life" in Seattle, as Rose accuses her father). In chorus, they offer to sweep June away to sophisticated Manhattan and "star her in a show," as June sings back:

Broadway! Broadway! How great you are!  
I'll leave the farm with all its charm,  
To be a Broadway star!<sup>179</sup>

Yet, at the last minute, Farmgirl June forswears the "bright lights, white lights/rhythm and romance" to stay on the farm with Caroline. When the Eton-clad Broadway boys ask her why, she responds "to soupy music," and with saccharine, exaggerated emotion: "Because everything in life that really matters is right here! What care I for tinsel and glamour when I have friendship and true love? I'm staying here with Caroline!"<sup>180</sup> As Rose cues on the orchestra to play "Stars and Stripes Forever," Farmgirl June frenetically twirls a baton, as sentimental values prevail and the Farmboys fire American flags from their canes in a George M. Cohanesque finale.

Rose garishly exploits such myths and platitudes, for the sake of her daughters' show business success, as much as she brazenly overturns them in her offstage behavior (and *Gypsy*, by extension, subverts them in its musical satire). Laurents, in his *Gypsy* libretto, demonstrates how almost all of Rose's loved ones—particularly Pop, then Herbie, and, finally, Louise—pressure her to stay at home on the proverbial farm. The second scene of *Gypsy* opens with illuminated placards that read "Home, Sweet, Home: Seattle," as Rose and Pop debate Rose's leaving home in "the kitchen of a frame house" strewn with markers of domesticity (Laurents' stage directions read, "We see an icebox, a sink overflowing with dishes; calendars and

timetables on the walls, a rocker, etc.” as well as Pop’s Bible and unmovable plaque).<sup>181</sup> To the scriptural Pop—who tells Rose, “that plaque belongs there like you belong home”—Rose remonstrates, “After three husbands, I’m through with marriage.”<sup>182</sup> Rose insists upon leaving home just as her own restless mother did before her, even while abandoning Rose’s Pop and herself.<sup>183</sup>

Pop’s Victorian rhetoric finds more benign, affectionate echoes in Herbie, the candy salesman and veteran vaudeville agent whose proposals of matrimony Rose repeatedly evades (if less comically than Nathan Detroit postpones marriage with the domestically minded Miss Adelaide in 1950’s *Guy and Dolls*, also billed as a “Musical Fable”). Despite expressing infinitely more patience and tenderness than her Pop, Herbie too, hopes for Rose to settle down. When June elopes with Tulsa, consequently threatening to end the act, Herbie implores Rose, “It’s going to be fine now, honey. Everything happens for the best. OK, the act’s finished. But you and me and our daughter, we’re going to have a home—say, we got a cow for the backyard.”<sup>184</sup> Once again, Rose postpones the wedding, but keeps Herbie hanging. His hopes for their marriage recall Pop and the plaque, as he says of their marriage license, “Say, the minister doesn’t keep this, does he? I want to have it framed. Framed and hanging in our living room.”<sup>185</sup>

Reborn in “The Bottom” of burlesque as Gypsy Rose Lee, Louise also pleads for her mother to let go of her persistent dream (the leitmotif that urgently cycles through *Gypsy* from “Some People” to “Everything’s Coming Up Roses” to “Rose’s Turn”). Backstage in her luxurious dressing room at Minsky’s, Louise, too, speaks in terms that recall the “Home, Sweet, Home” of Rose’s life in Seattle, and the cardboard farmhouse of Dainty June:

ROSE: Let go?

LOUISE: I’ll give you anything you want—

ROSE: You *need* me!

LOUISE: A house, a farm, a school—a dramatic school for kids? You were always great with kids!

ROSE: (*cutting in*) *I’m a pro!* Not an old workhorse you can turn out to pasture just because you think you’re riding high on your own!<sup>186</sup>

Only with Rose’s bravura striptease-soliloquy “Rose’s Turn” does the stage mother realize that “I guess I did do it for me.”<sup>187</sup> *Gypsy*’s final image of Rose and Louise is that of a semi-reconciled mother and daughter, and two

fiercely independent women. The two head off together to a cocktail party celebrating Gypsy Rose Lee’s professional ascent: as Rose grandly salutes, “Madam Rose and her Daughter Gypsy.”<sup>188</sup>

Opening at the end of a decade obsessed with the topic of “Momism,” *Gypsy* played into Cold War-era cultural anxieties, while also dispelling the notion of motherhood as a sacrosanct domestic calling. Numerous scholars have compared *Gypsy* with the same year’s *The Sound of Music*. Merman lost the 1960 Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical to *The Sound of Music*’s Mary Martin, “a decision that clarified mainstream cultural values by rewarding a nun-turned-wife over a relentlessly ambitious stage mother,” as Wolf observes.<sup>189</sup> The comparison between the two musicals is a fruitful one. In *The Sound of Music*’s Maria von Trapp—as the child-woman/foil to cosmopolitan “corporation president” Elsa Schraeder—advises Leisl (in a reprise of “Sixteen Going on Seventeen”), “Lo and behold!/You’re someone’s wife/And you belong to him.”<sup>190</sup>

By contrast, *Gypsy*’s Rose eschews belonging to a fiancé or husband, even as she destructively displaces her own ambition onto her two daughters rather than nurturing them in the manner of Maria von Trapp. Whereas Maria—a woman coded as essentially natural as the romantic Austrian countryside—yodels the story of “The Lonely Goatherd,” Rose reconstructs nature—and feminine “nature”—as theatrical artifice: as a maudlin dancing cow in a pasteboard vaudeville set. Whereas Maria thriftily recycles old curtains into clothing for the von Trapp children, the resourceful Rose lifts hotel blankets that Louise sews into coats. The distance between the two characters, in the top Broadway musicals of 1959, was both as small and as vast as the line of popular opinion separating a virtuous mother from a selfish one.

*Gypsy* draws upon the decade’s princess motifs in its striptease Cinderella title character. The musical aligns Madam Rose—a canny show biz hustler—with the prostitutes, madams, and demimondaines who proliferated in Broadway musicals throughout the 1950s. As Wolf has noted of Merman and her resourceful characters, the diva “never played ingénue romantic heroines, always played women who defied gender expectations in some way, and often played women who were performers of some sort. She specialized in women who had a certain wisdom about them, and she read lines with double entendres and impersonated the ‘whore with a heart of gold.’”<sup>191</sup> In *Happy Hunting*, the 1956 musical comedy that spoofed Princess Grace and the Royal Wedding, librettists Lindsay and Crouse (who also wrote the book *The Sound of Music*) comically juxtaposed Merman’s own androgynous, tough-broad persona with the princess

ideal of the 1950s. Obeying her friend's instructions to "be delicate and ladylike" in order to win her Spanish duke, Liz is contradicted by the royal Jaime (which she mispronounces as "Hymie"):

DUKE: Stop trying to be feminine.

LIZ: (*more determinedly feminine*) Hasn't a woman the right to be feminine?

DUKE: Not your kind of woman. Leez, there are two kinds of women—feminine and female, and you're female. (*The "feminine" vanishes; Liz jumps up*).

LIZ: Female! That's a hell of a thing to call a woman.<sup>192</sup>

The same year, too, that *The Sound of Music* and *Gypsy* dominated the Broadway musical stage and the 1960 Tony Awards, a female composer—and no less than the daughter of Richard Rodgers—also satirized the decade's myths about "feminine and female" in a sly musical comedy that originated Off-Broadway (before moving to Broadway's Phoenix Theatre later in 1959). A spoof of *The Princess and the Pea*, *Once Upon a Mattress* cast Carol Burnett not as a delicate damsel, but as a brassy, rambunctious royal from a wild swampland. In a star-making performance, Burnett played Princess Winnifred (or, simply, "Fred") in composer Mary Rodgers' and lyricist Marshall Barer's *Once Upon a Mattress*, raucously answering the call from the kingdom of Prince Dauntless, seeking a "a genuine, certified princess."

Directed by George Abbott, and peppered with the burlesque antics of Burnett, *Once Upon a Mattress* joined *Gypsy* in undermining a feminine mystique that was already starting to crumble—in part due to such earlier Broadway musicals as *Wonderful Town* and *Bells Are Ringing*, as well as to the growing awareness of domestic discontent that would soon after usher in the age of second-wave feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement. Following the influential 1953 English translation and American publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (originally written in 1949), Helen Gurley Brown published 1962's *Sex and the Single Girl*, urging single, young, urban women toward both professional and sexual liberation. The next year, in 1963, Friedan followed Brown with her own seismic manifesto. Along with the FDA's approval and marketing of the Pill in 1960, and the dawn of the Sexual Revolution and the Rock and Roll Era, these ideas and developments permanently altered the cultural landscape for American women, and drew near its close an era strongly dominated by Broadway musicals (and Hollywood movies) reimagining

Cinderella as an American working girl: a cultural figure aligning with the rise of the New Woman into the labor force at the end of World War I, and through the dawn of second-wave feminism in the 1960s.

Transforming from the "Alice Blue Gown" of *Irene* to the rhinestone G-strings of *Gypsy*, the Broadway musical stage repeatedly and powerfully adapted the most transformative of fairy tale icons to address changes for American women both in the labor force and in the public sphere. At the same time, these musicals drew upon the Cinderella motif to explore American women's shifting relationships to marriage, domesticity, and the necessity of a Prince Charming: roles and relationships negotiated by beauty, fashion, and glamour, as much as by intellect, talent, and ambition. As musicals like *Lady in the Dark* demonstrate, Broadway musicals from 1919 to 1959 were not uniformly progressive in their visions of women's personal and professional autonomy. Informed as much by commercial imperatives, collaborative compromise, and conservative mainstream attitudes as by the frequent social liberalism of their (often Jewish American) creators, the makers of Broadway musicals, along with studio-system Hollywood, only infrequently forwarded a consciously articulated feminist vision (though—as I have argued throughout these chapters—the female creators of musical comedies, such as Anita Loos, Dorothy Fields, and Betty Comden, regularly promoted feminist ideals in a deliberate and self-aware manner).

Nevertheless, in adapting the Cinderella motif to confront the advances and challenges faced by American working girls and career women alike, the Broadway musical in the early and mid-twentieth century meaningfully contributed to women's liberation. During these years, these working-girl Cinderella musicals variously stimulated cultural debate, satirically challenged outmoded values, centralized powerful female voices, and allegorized working-class and working women's struggles as at the very center of the American dream of mobility and self-invention. Far from the pallid stereotypes of feminine passivity that have frequently been associated with the motif, Broadway's Cinderellas have appeared as the ambitious immigrant working girls, wily gold diggers, brassy broads, authoritative boss ladies, seductive enchantresses, cosmopolitan princesses, and resourceful prostitutes, among the many other powerful heroines of the American twentieth century.