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VICARIOUS VILLAINY:
A CRITICAL LITERARY ANALYSIS OF SYMPATHETIC VILLAINY IN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Fine Arts
at the University of Kentucky

By

Mary Christopher Grogan

Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Director: Nancy C. Jones, Professor of Theatre
And Dr. Christina Ritter, Lecturer of Theatre

Lexington, Kentucky

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

VICARIOUS VILLAINY:
A CRITICAL LITERARY ANALYSIS OF SYMPATHETIC VILLAINY IN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

A disproportionate amount of research into musical theatre focuses on the positive and accessible nature of the books and librettos. Very little, if any, research into musical theatre explores its darker side, specifically the considerable amount of villainy (i.e., traditionally immoral and/or criminal behavior) practiced by some of its protagonists. Moreover, it is important to note that several of the most popular musicals contain villainous characters, and that many of these characters are highly popular and even sympathetic (i.e., understandable, pitiable, and deserving of compassion) to audiences. Therefore, this thesis explores sympathetic villainous personalities in popular American musicals, focusing on the defining characteristics of the sympathetic villainy presented within specific musical works. Specifically, this thesis examines a variety of American musical theatre pieces, chronologically, from *Show Boat* (1927) to *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* (2003) which have strong sympathetic villainous characters. This thesis primarily addresses musical theatre villainy primarily from a critical literary analysis standpoint.

KEYWORDS: Musical Theatre, Villainy, Broadway, Sympathy, Theatre

MARY C. GROGAN

April 28, 2014

VICARIOUS VILLAINY:
A CRITICAL LITERARY ANALYSIS OF SYMPATHETIC VILLAINY IN AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

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April 28, 2014

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Addison Taylor Grogan, and my niece, Callen Ruth Christopher. May they grow up to follow their passion, whatever it may be, just like their eccentric mom and aunt has.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this thesis, while an individual work, would not have been possible without the guidance and support of many people. First and foremost, I must thank Dr. Christina Ritter, my thesis advisor, for all of her dedication, mentoring, and inspiration on this project. I aspire to be the kind of academician, artist, and human being that she is every day of my life. I also wish to thank my thesis committee, Nancy Jones and Russell Henderson, for their time and insight on this work. Additionally, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the encouragement and devotion of professors Nancy Jones, Dr. Andrew Kimbrough, Dr. Geraldine Maschio, Dr. Jennifer Goodlander, Herman Farrell III, and Russell Henderson, all of whom proved instrumental in my academic and personal success. Similarly, to my undergraduate professors, Dr. James Rodgers, Dr. Rhoda-Gail Pollack, John Holloway, Tony Hardin, Margo Buchanan, Nelson Fields, and Robert Haven, I offer my enduring gratitude for providing a nurturing and safe environment that allowed me to thrive both academically and artistically during my earlier years. Along the same vein, I am eternally grateful to my high school drama teacher, Vanessa Rogers, and my American History teacher, Ann Humble, both of whom ignited my passion for learning and pushed me to strive for academic and artistic greatness long after I left their classrooms.

In addition, I must take time to acknowledge and thank my colleagues, family and friends, without whom this thesis would have never reached fruition. To my husband, Mark Grogan, thank you for being a sounding board for ideas, a proof-reader, a moral compass, an emotional anchor, and a constant source of love during the last four years as I sought to fulfill my dreams, both academically and artistically. To my beautiful

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Chapter 1: An Introduction to American Musical Theatre and Sympathetic Villainy

I. Background: Heroes, Villains, and the Theatre

> *Hero* (noun) – a man who exhibits extraordinary bravery, firmness, fortitude, or greatness of soul, in any course of action, or in connection with any pursuit, work, or enterprise. (def. 3)[1]
>
> *Villain* (noun) – a man naturally disposed to base or criminal actions, or deeply involved in the commission of disgraceful crimes. (def. 1)[2]

Throughout human history, many people have been attracted to both fictional and non-fictional persons of questionable moral aptitude. Rasputin, Genghis Khan, and Jack the Ripper, to name only a few, are famous and, to a degree, celebrated, for their heinous acts against humanity. Iago, Lady Macbeth, and Medea similarly engaged people's curiosity and attention.

Ancient playwrights such as Sophocles and Euripides understood the appeal of the villain well, for their most beloved and studied characters (i.e., Oedipus, Creon, Clytemnestra, etc.) are those with immense moral flaws, not those who emote only goodness and moral perfection. As the theatrical timeline progressed, the most influential and popular playwrights, such as Shakespeare, Ibsen, Williams, and Miller, continued to write memorable, flawed, even villainous, characters (such as Hedda Gabbler, Stanley Kowalski, Joe Keller, etc.) whose thoughts and actions were not always moral or "good."

Today, theatre has reached, at least in America, a point where the most popular plays are no longer non-musical comedies or dramas, but musicals, and the pull of the villain thrives within the genre. Several of the most critically and popularly celebrated American musicals contain villainous characters, and many of these characters are at the

very heart of their shows' success. These villains are often complex, sympathetic characters, eliciting the audiences' understanding, pity, and compassion. This thesis explores sympathetic villainous personalities in popular American musicals, focusing on the defining characteristics of the sympathetic villainy presented within specific musical works. Specifically, this thesis examines a variety of American musical theatre pieces, chronologically, from *Show Boat* (1927) to *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* (2003) which have strong sympathetic villainous characters. This thesis addresses musical theatre villainy primarily from a critical literary analysis standpoint.

II. Evidence of Vicarious Villainy: Current Cognitive Data and Evolutionary Theory on Human Morality

In recent years, there has been a surge in the amount of psychological (cognitive) and sociological research being done by artists, and by theatre scholars in particular. Moreover, contemporary theatre scholars have been striving to understand, from a scientific standpoint, the effect that theatre can have on both the individual audience member and on society as a whole. Theatre, by its very nature, is an art form that requires audience engagement in order to succeed. Whether an audience is thoughtfully engaged during any given theatrical performance depends upon many factors, including, but not limited to, the quality and style of the script, performers, staging, and design. Additionally, each individual audience member brings with them into each performance their own reservoir of personal and cultural experiences, all of which impact their overall interpretation and appreciation of any given theatrical piece.

Hence, examining the sociological and psychological underpinnings of a given theatrical work may offer theatre scholars and practitioners an even deeper understanding of how theatre impacts the human mind and the overall human experience. Specifically,

in relation to musical theatre and sympathetic villainy, which is the primary concern of this thesis, a basic understanding of psychology and sociology in regards to villainy seems in order. Therefore, in this section, I will briefly explore the current state of cognitive (psychological) and evolutionary (sociological) studies in regards to the villainy, music, and the theatre.

To begin, recent cognitive data and evolutionary theories (though often disagreeing whether innate or learned) indicate that people have the propensity to commit great acts of villainy, and that even if they never act on these urges, the unseemly desires still reside somewhere within the recesses of the human mind. Renowned Behavioral Scientist David Churchman, in researching the biology of aggression, had the following to say on the subject of universal aggression in human beings: "Aggression has a biological component that begins with the structure of the brain and the workings of the endocrine system. Emotion, information processing, and decision making are involved in most instances of aggression and conflict."[3]

Churchman is not alone in his assertion that emotions, including aggression (a major component of villainy), are currently part of homo sapiens' biological makeup; however, as stated earlier, controversy does surround whether this biological makeup has always been there, or has been learned as an evolutionary means for the human race to survive.[4] In defending evolutionary theorists' stance on why people have aggressive tendencies, Walter Glannon, a well-established professor and author focusing on biomedical ethics, claims that, "…as humans evolved, they developed the ability to speculate about the future, to consider possible threats that jeopardize their interests and plans, and to choose and act in ways that enable them to avoid these threats."[5] In other

words, humans, over time, may have adapted and developed their aggressive urges based upon the perceived threats around them at the given time.

Churchman and Glannon's findings advance the idea that behaviors, such as aggression, evolved as a way to protect an individual's interests and future plans. Aggression, as defined above, is a trait, like a range of other emotions that is common to human beings. This aspect of human nature is continually depicted in our art, with the hero often behaving aggressively toward a selfless end (i.e., protecting his/her young, defending the weak, etc.), whereas the villain typically demonstrates aggression in a selfish manner (i.e., coldblooded murder, sexual assault, etc.).

Ironically, some of the same characteristics that keep people from acting out their aggressive tendencies in real life are the same ones that allow audiences to understand, and even root for the villain in an entertainment capacity. Often the villainous characters that earn audience member acceptance and understandings are those facing similar moral dilemmas that audiences face in their own lives (at least on some level). Many people, in some way or another have wanted to act on aggressive urges, to seek vengeance, and/or to do harm to another, but their internalized sense of morality (both culturally and biologically cultivated) simply won't allow them to do what the fictitious character *is* able to do. To put it another way, audiences, when viewing characters facing the same or similar moral dilemmas that they too struggle with in the real world, often sympathize with the character's choice to act on their villainous urges.

By sympathizing with the "villainous" character, the audience member is allowed to live vicariously through the characters' actions. Bruce McConachie, a scholar who focuses much of his research on cognitive studies in relation to theatre, has some relevant

theories on audience response and sympathy, which proves useful to understanding how an audience member may experience vicarious villainy in the theatre. In his book *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, McConachie discusses the importance of "mirror neurons" in relation to audience response theory:

> Recent research on mirror neurons has revealed an important part of the neurological basis of stimulation. In the early 1990s, some Italian researchers noticed that many of the same groups of neurons in the brain of a monkey fired when the monkey watched a male scientist bring a peanut to his mouth as when that monkey brought a peanut to its own mouth. Doing an action and watching someone else do the same action brought a similar neurological response….Humans appear to have a more highly evolved mirror system than other animals, allowing them to access the emotions as well as the action of others through direct simulation.[6]

McConachie claims that there may be a neurological basis for the theory that audiences' bodies, on a subconscious level and biological level, actually *mirror* the responses they are viewing on the stage. For example, if an audience member sympathizes with a character being kissed, their brain's mirror neurons may respond as if they too are being kissed; if they empathize with a character that is slitting another character's throat with a shaving blade (a la Sweeney Todd), then their mirror neurons may respond as if they too are slitting the throat with the blade. To put it simply, there is now cognitive evidence supporting the vicarious nature of the theatre.

Returning to the more specific discussion on musical theatre, McConachie also makes claims about music and mirror neurons:

> …research demonstrates that auditors can catch the emotions of a performance through sounds and voices….Music researchers have found that musicians can communicate general emotions to listeners "with an accuracy as approximately as high as if the facial and vocal expression of the emotions," regardless of whether the auditors have musical training….Like speech, music is linked to gesture and intention….and the animation of motor and chemical response brings emotion in their wake.[7]

There is an emerging sub-field examining cognitive and, therefore, emotional responses to music that addresses issues beyond the scope of this thesis. In my discussion, McConachie's ideas bolster the notion that musical theatre has a particular effect on audiences. The genre combines the emotional charge of storytelling with the power of music to reach people's capacity of sympathy.

III. Audience Response Theory and Musical Theatre Villainy

In addition to understanding *how* and *why* audiences respond to sympathetic villainy, it is also important that theatre scholars and practitioners understand *what* theatrical conventions and defining characteristics make for successful sympathetic villains in musical theatre. To better understand how musical theatre is able to garner audience sympathy for the villain, in this section, I will briefly explore current theories in Audience Response and Audience Reception.

Theories in Audience Response and Audience Reception came to the foreground of theatre research beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and continue to grow and adapt in conjunction with contemporary cognitive findings and evolutionary theory. Of particular interest in regards to this work are the theories of theatre scholar Susan

Bennett. In her book *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, Bennett makes great strides explaining how audiences work and why it is important to acknowledge their role in regards to the theatrical production.

Bennett explores three steps an audience goes through, all of which affect the theatrical performance for them as individuals, for them as a collective group, and for the production itself. These three steps include the pre-performance activities, the performance activities, and post-performance activities:

> Whatever the nature of the performances it is clear that established cultural markers are important in pre-activating a certain anticipation, a horizon of expectations, in the audience drawn to any particular event. Multiple horizons of expectations are bound to exist within any culture and these are, always, open to renegotiation before, during, and after the theatrical performance. The relationship between culture and the idea of the theatrical event is one that is necessarily flexible and inevitably rewritten on a daily basis.[8]

Understanding how varying cultural and personal factors contribute to an audiences' acceptance or rejection of a specific production and/or performance seems crucial to a discussion about musicals with sympathetic villains. In short, what an individual audience member brings into a performance from the outside work can impact whether or not they are able to sympathize with the villain presented to them.

Furthermore, Bennett postulates that the first set of factors contributing to an audiences' theatrical experience are also the ones that are most often overlooked:

> Above all, the role of the theatre audience involves the spectator's interaction with performance in both social (audience member) and private (individual) capacities. But these roles do not begin as the curtain rises. Already it is evident that issues such as cultural background and selection play significant parts in constructing these roles and, indeed, in getting audiences into theatre theatres. In the circumstance of the theatre visit, the spectator takes on his/her role(s) before the performance *per se* begins.[9]

In short, the personal history and culture an individual audience member brings into the theatre effects the performance before the curtain even begins to rise. In addition to determining what kind of audience will attend a production, the following factors also impact the audiences' overall theatrical experience: The geographic location of the theatre and the time the performance takes place; the names attached to the production, both actor and production staff; the individual's prior knowledge, or lack thereof, of the selected piece; marketing attached to the production as witnessed by the audience member; the amount of pre-planning, or lack thereof, by the audience member in attending a given performance; and the ticket cost, seat location, and "fullness" of the house in reference to each individual audience member. All of these factors, and more, can predetermine whether an audience, whole and/or individual, will have a positive theatre going experience.[10]

That is not to say what happens before a performance is the main factor to audience enjoyment, or to Bennett's theories. The performance itself is a large, if not the largest, aspect of what contributes to audience reception to a given production. The ephemeral essence of theatre leads audiences to make snap judgments and quick

decisions in relation to what they see on stage. For example, an audience may only have seconds to decide what time period the play is set in, if they like the way a costumer dressed a character, or, in the case of musical theatre, if they enjoyed the way a particular song was staged and sung. If they don't make those judgments immediately, then the moment passes and the set changes or the character changes clothes or the song is over. Unlike a painting or recorded piece of music, audiences of live theatre do not have the ability to study the painting from multiple angles over an extended period time, or to listen to the recording over and over again, seeking out different elements each time. In theatre, audiences have to take in the whole, and they have to take it in the first time, because in reality, the first time is the only time. No two performances are alike, and what may cause a reaction or emotion in one performance may not elicit it in the next.

This being said, Bennett postulates that two things are simultaneously happening to a theatre audience during a performance, one of which is the "outer frame" and the other the "inner frame." The outer frame consists of the "history" (prior knowledge, expectations, cultural background, etc.) an audience brings to the performance. Conversely, the inner frame is:

> …the combination and succession of visual and aural signs which the audience receives and interprets, some fixed but the majority in flux, and which…signify on a number of possible levels….It is the combination of these signs which permits the audience to posit the existence of a particular fictional world on stage with its own dynamic and governing rules."[11]

What the theatrical performance consists of is a series of signifiers an audience must process individually and collectively in order to respond accordingly. This processing is dual layered; meaning signifiers may have both a denotative (real) and a connotative (emotional/symbolic) meaning. In most performances there are two groups of signs: 1) The actor and his/her craft (i.e. facial expressions, gesture, costume changes, etc.); and 2), the external signs not related specifically to the actor. These external signs can come from a variety of sources on stage, including, but not limited to, set, props, lighting, sound, and music. Using both the actors and external signs, audiences create hypotheses about the fictional world they are viewing; evaluate the effectiveness of these elements and the production as a whole; and reconcile these aspects of the live performance with their pre-performance history/culture.[12]

After the actual performance, the audience has one final phase to complete before their theatrical experience is complete. Like the pre-performance factors, post-performance factors are also often overlooked. Bennett argues that the role of the audience does not end with the last action/word on stage, but in fact keeps going past the curtain-call and after they have vacated the theatre. She also argues that the feedback an audience gives a performance is immediate; that the audience, particularly during curtain call, is allowed, indeed expected to offer a ranking of the actors and production through their applause and/or verbal comments. The amount of applause and the level of enthusiasm can be felt, and sometimes even recorded by those involved in a production.

The audience, even after the applause is over, is not finished with their theatrical journey. Bennett proposes that even the acts of the leaving the theatre and discussion/activities enjoyed with friends/colleagues/individually after the performance

are contributing factors to the overall reception of the performance. These activities can include a general discussion about the performance immediately following it; seeing another production or film version of the same text; or reading and processing critical reviews/blogs about the production. On the importance of these kinds of post-performance activities, Bennett states the following:

> All these elements of post-production are potentially significant in the audience's experience of theatre and all promote, if not ensure, the continuance of a culture industry attracting audiences to the theatrical event. It is the reciprocal nature of production and reception which characterizes the formation and reformation of cultural markers for theatre.[13]

In investigating and studying what an audience does both consciously and subconsciously before, during and after a performance, theatre scholars and practitioners may start to gain perspective into what kinds of conditions and productions are conducive for positive audience response and reception. The Audience Response Theory is significant to this thesis because historical context and individual experience is crucial to understanding any given audience member's ability to sympathize with a villain in musical theatre. The above description of Audience Response Theory continually informs the discussion of the musicals that I have analyzed in this thesis. I will explore the pre-performance element of historical/cultural context, as well as several performance elements in relation to sympathetic villainy in the American musical. These performance elements include, primarily, the book and lyrics of the six specific musicals under discussion. Additionally,

I will also touch on, to varying degrees, musical composition, actor performance, dance/choreography, staging, and design within each of the six musicals.

IV. Historical Context: Now is the time of the American Musical

Broadway musicals are the financial backbone of the contemporary American theatre. In 2009, Broadway, the epicenter of America's theatrical world, finally hit the one billion dollar benchmark for gross ticket sales in one year.[14] What kinds of shows managed to help drive audiences to the theatre in record numbers in both 2009 and today? Not surprisingly, the answer is big budget, big spectacle musicals. In 2013, all of the top ten grossing shows on Broadway were musicals. Musicals like *Disney's The Lion King* ($96.9 million), *The Book of Mormon (*$90.4 million), and *Matilda* ($50.1 million) dominated over their non-musical counterparts such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* ($9.9 million), *The Glass Menagerie* ($9.8 million), and *Macbeth* ($8.6 million).[15] If one were to assume that these numbers accurately depict where the average American theatre goer chooses to spend their time and money, then it is clear that the musical is a force to be reckoned with within the theatrical community. More specifically, some of the top grossing musicals of all time are ones with villainy as a central plot or character point. For instance, *The Phantom of the Opera*, the longest running Broadway show ever, has grossed over $870 million since debuting on Broadway in 1988, making it the second highest grossing show of all time. Similarly, *Wicked*, the 2003 smash hit, is the third highest grossing Broadway show, raking in more than $670 million in just over nine years. Therefore it is clear that, as Stephen Sondheim (*Assassins*) co-opted from Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*), "…attention must be paid" to people historically and traditionally viewed as villains.[16]

Musical theatre as audiences know it today grew from a variety of sources (i.e. opera, vaudeville, burlesque, etc.) and became a highly popular form of entertainment circa 1927, with the creation of the first integrated book musical, *Show Boat.* Before 1927 there were attempts at integrating music and spoken dialogue. However, up until *Show Boat* musical pieces tended to either be opera/operetta in form (i.e., little-to-no spoken dialogue, such Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Pirates of Penzance*), or the songs and plot had nothing to do with one another (i.e. *The Black Crook* [1866], *Sally* [1920], and *Oh, Kay!* [1926]). In the early twentieth century, when Broadway first garnered success and mass popularity, vaudeville-style shows ruled the day (i.e. *The Ziegfeld Follies* [1907-1931], *George White Scandals* [1926 and 1939], and *Music Box Revue* [1921-1924]). These pieces, filled with multiple and short pieces of music and stories, once again neglected to integrate them together, at least on a thematic/plot level. *Show Boat* marked the first great transition in American musical theatre, creating a full-length Broadway show consisting of both song and spoken dialogue (integrating dance would come later), both of which helped tell the story and drive the plot. Interestingly enough, *Show Boat*'s libretto also contains, to some extent, examples of sympathetic-villainy which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

After *Show Boat*, Broadway, throughout the rest of the 1920s and 1930s, became a mix of vaudeville-style shows and *Show Boat*-style book musicals. Examples of these early book musicals (i.e., musicals that attempted to integrate song and plot, but not dance) include *Girl Crazy* (1930), *Of Thee I Sing* (1931), and *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937). Most of these early musicals had clearly defined heroes and villains, with little-to-no room for sympathy for the "bad guy." One notable exception is Rodgers and Hart's

1940 book musical, *Pal Joey*, about a manipulative and womanizing nightclub owner, which I will explore in more detail later.

The next big shift in the American book musical came in 1943 with Rodgers and Hammerstein's canonical classic *Oklahoma!*. *Oklahoma!* built upon the formula of *Show Boat* and sought to improve upon it, integrating the plot and characters not only through dialogue and song, but also through dance. Agnes de Mille's fifteen minute "dream ballet" that closes out Act I highlights the internal struggles of the female protagonist. Although, at first glance, the roles of hero and villain seem to be clearly defined in *Oklahoma!* I will argue in Chapter 2 that this is not necessarily the case, and that the "villain," Jud, can in fact be viewed as a sympathetic character.

Although it has been argued that *Oklahoma!* marked the final step in the completion of the traditional book musical formula, I believe that a third milestone show must be included, and that it was with the following show that the fully integrated book musical finally reached its full potential. Jerome Robbins' *West Side Story* (1957) took what *Oklahoma!* had done in attempting to integrate dance into the plotline, and improved upon it. Until Robbins, a choreographer and dancer turned director, the plot-driving dances were performed separate from the rest of the show, meaning dancers and actors/singers were cast, rehearsed, and performed separately. Not only did Robbins require all of the principle actors/singers to dance, he also made the dancing, just as the acting and singing, inseparable from the plot and made them (singing, dancing, and acting) inseparable from one another. *West Side Story* is also important from a sympathetic-villain standpoint. In it, not only are there one or two morally questionable

characters, but almost all of the principal characters are juvenile delinquents and members of New York Street gangs.

After *West Side Story* musical theatre, just as the rest of America, was looking for a change. The traditional book musical had been perfected, and the formula, though continuing to be used, seemed to have gone as far as it could go. In response, beginning in the late 1960s and continuing through the 1970s, new experimentations in musical theatre began to develop in full force. The traditional book musical began to face stiff competition from these new forms, which included the rock musical/opera, the concept/fragmented musical, and the mega-musical/pop opera. The creators of these newer musicals sought to break with tradition and create pieces that would make their audiences think and feel differently and more deeply than they had during the golden era of the traditional book musicals (1940-1960). These newer musicals were often morally ambiguous, satirical, and lacking in a finite truth. Additionally, they expected their audiences to supply their own answers, based on their own individual experiences, to the pieces at hand. Some musicals before 1960, as stated earlier, contained traces of sympathetic villainy, but these shows and characters were far and few between, and none of them exhibited sympathetic, even empathetic villainy, on the scale that many musicals did after 1970. In particular, Kander and Ebb's *Chicago* (1975) and Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* (1979) forever rocked the belief that musicals were all "fluff" and "sunshine." Both dealing with murder, greed, corruption, and vengeance, these musicals may not have found mass success in the decade in which they were first produced, but in the ensuing years would be canonized and revered by musical theatre scholars for their groundbreaking work, both musically and thematically. Additionally, by 2010 both

would find the mass appeal and commercial success that eluded them during their original runs. Later in this thesis, I will discuss in more depth these two shows, as well as the potential reasons why their success took longer to achieve than their predecessors.

By the 1980s, the Broadway musical was facing a crisis. The divide between the commercially-viable, yet critically panned traditional book musical and the critically-successful, yet commercially-lackluster concept, rock, and issue-driven musicals was crippling Broadway. Couple this divide with the severe global economic recession that devastated the U.S. economy from the late 1970s through the mid-to-late 1980s, and it becomes clear musical theatre needed to drastically shift the paradigm if it hoped to survive. The "savior" of the American Broadway musical was the mega-musical. Pioneered by British producer Cameron Mackintosh and composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, along with French composer Claude-Michel Schonberg, mega-musicals like *Cats* (1981), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), and *Miss Saigon* (1989) were conceived in London's West End and quickly moved to Broadway, where they went on to dominate commercial theatre for decades.

With the dire economic condition of both Broadway and the country on the mend in the 1990s, musicals slowly, but surely regained their footing. In addition to Webber and Schonberg's mega-musical hits, musicals like Jonathon Larson's rock musical *Rent* (1996) and corporate musicals like *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* (1994) and *Disney's The Lion King* (1997) helped further reinvigorate interest in musical theatre and bring that interest to a newer, younger generation. On the flipside, however, the corporatizing of Broadway also, in many ways, led to the sanitation of it. The most commercially successful musicals became those that stemmed from popular Hollywood films, and those

that were "kid-friendly." In turn, new musicals with sympathetic-villainy were becoming harder and harder to come by, at least on Broadway (there was still a home for these darker musicals Off-Broadway, where shows such as *Assassins*, *Thrill Me: The Leopold and Loeb Story*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *Evil Dead: The Musical* found critical and commercial success). One notable exception was the 2003 smash Broadway hit *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*. What makes *Wicked*, a new take on the classic tale of *The Wizard of Oz*, unique is that it is a culmination of the best parts of the musicals with sympathetic villains that came before it. *Wicked* is part traditional book musical, part mega-musical, part corporate musical, part kid-friendly musical, and part concept musical. It seems fitting, then, that this musical be the final Broadway show examined in this thesis of sympathetic-villainy (Chapter 3).

In the years since *Wicked*, finding success on Broadway with a sympathetic-villain musical has not been easy, particularly given contemporary audiences seem to be shifting away from "darker" musicals with villains at the helm. However, the musicals with sympathetic villains at the helm are by no means dead. Audiences of the last twenty years have also been drawn to both long-running and new revivals of musicals with sympathetic villains. Recently, revivals of *Chicago* and *Sweeney Todd* have seen successful Broadway runs, national tours, and the creation of major motion pictures based on them. Moreover, *Wicked*, as of 2013, is the third highest grossing Broadway musical of all time ($815.9 million) and shows no signs of slowing down. Clearly musicals with sympathetic villainy are here, and they are here to stay, even if the form and style in which they are delivered continue to change.

V. State of Research and Literature Review: American Musical Theatre and Villainy

A disproportionate amount of research into musical theatre focuses on the positive and accessible nature of the books and librettos. Very little, if any, research into musical theatre explores its darker side, specifically the considerable amount of villainy (i.e. traditionally immoral and/or criminal behavior) practiced by some of its protagonists. Therefore, this thesis will address the lack of research in this area to fill the void in American musical theatre research and to study it as it pertains to villainy.

Although there are very little academic publications concerning villains and the American musical theatre, in recent years there has been a surge in scholarly writings on other topics in musical theatre. Most of these books and journal entries involve the history of the musical and/or an analysis of the musical composition and style of the music within the piece (i.e. Stanley Green's *Encyclopedia of Musical Theatre*[17] and Thomas S. Hischak's *The Oxford Companion to the American Musical.*[18] Other, more recent, publications focus on the gender, racial, sexual, and religious issues within specific musicals. For example, Stacy Wolf, renowned feminist theatrical scholar, published in 2011 the book *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical.*[19] Likewise, scholar Allen Woll wrote *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls* (1991),[20] detailing both the positive and negative depictions and issues of race in musical theatre. And, still others are biographies and/or "making of" tales of how specific musical and artists came to create specific musical theatre masterpieces (i.e., *Geniuses of the American Musical Theatre: The Composers and Lyricists*[21] by Herbert Keyser and Ted Chapin and *Fosse*[22] by Sam Wasson).

For the purposes of this thesis, I have drawn upon several different literary sources in order to conduct my analysis and to support my claims. First, I analyzed the primary texts (i.e. the libretto) of each of the six shows I am analyzing, focusing in on how villainy is

presented within each of them. Additionally, I surveyed several books and chapters written exclusively on the six musicals under discussion. These include, but are not limited to, Mile's Kreuger's *Show Boat: The Story of a Classic American Musical,* Laurence Maslon and Michael Kantor's *Broadway: The American Musical,* Tim Carter's *Oklahoma!: The Making of an American,* Misha Berson's *Something's Coming, Something Good: West Side Story and the American Imagination,* Robert Mack's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (Introduction), and David Cote's *Wicked: The Grimmerie.*

Secondly, I used more general musical theatre history resources to further enhance my own understanding of historical context, as well as offer support and a framework for my argument (that sympathetic villains exist, and have always existed within the American Musical). The following is a list of the musical theatre history resources I most frequently reference: John Bush Jones' *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre,* John Kenrick's *Musical Theatre: A History,* Denny Martin Flinn's *Musical! A Grand Tour: The Rise, Glory and Fall of an American Institution,* Scott Miller's *Strike Up the Band: A New History of Musical Theatre,*and Scott Miller's *From Assassins to West Side Story: The Director's Guide to Musical Theatre.*

Moreover, I also perused more general American history texts in order to place each musical (original and/or revival) with its own unique historical context. Some of these texts include, David E. Kyvig's *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1939: Decades of Promise and Pain,* David R. Farber and Beth L. Bailey's *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s,* Eric Foner and John Arther Garraty's *The Reader's Companion to American History,*Thomas Borstelmann's *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality,* Marc Oxoby's *American Popular*

Culture through History: The 1990s, and Bob Batchelor's *American Popular Culture through History: The 2000s.*

Lastly, I studied critic reviews, interviews, observations, film versions, audio recording, and photographic images from each of the six shows featured. In particular, I read reviews from *The New York Times,* from each show during its initial Broadway run, as well as several reviews from revival productions. Many of the interviews, firsthand accounts, audio recordings, film clips, and photographs I located websites devoted to musical theatre. I have cited the location of these resources as they appear in the text.

VI. Thesis Breakdown and Chapter Outline

To conclude, this thesis focuses on the public fascination with villainous personalities and/or deeds within the Broadway musical. In attempting to make this thesis as accessible as possible, as well as to offer exemplary proof that works with highly sympathetic-villains are indeed popular in musical theatre, I have divided this thesis into two subsequent chapters and a brief concluding section. The following chapters will include an extensive literary analysis of six specific successful Broadway musicals from 1927 through today that include sympathetic villainous characters.

More specifically, Chapter 2 is concerned with sympathetic-villains in pre-1970 traditional American book musicals, including *Show Boat (1927), Oklahoma! (1943),* and *West Side Story (1957).* Similarly, Chapter 3 focuses on sympathetic-villain musicals in post-1970 America, including *Chicago (1975), Sweeney Todd (1979),* and *Wicked (2003).* Each of these shows has been selected for the following reasons: 1) They have proven to have mass popular appeal; 2) They have received, at least to some degree, critical acceptance by the theatrical community; and 3) They exemplify sympathetic-villainy. These six shows in no way encompass all musicals with sympathetic villains, but they do

offer a diverse sampling of the types of these musicals that have been successful at challenging traditional hero/villain roles over the last eighty-five years.

I will conclude this thesis by summarizing my findings in regards to musical theatre villainy and the in-depth literary analysis as discussed within the context of the musicals examined in both Chapters 2 and 3. Furthermore, I will offer what I see as the next logical step in this type of musical theatre research, and what these kinds of investigations could offer to both music theatre scholars and practitioners, as well as informed audience members. However, for now, it seems pertinent that a more detailed discussion of musicals with sympathetic villains take place. The next two chapters are organized chronologically, both because this is an ideal organizational structure for this type of discussion, and because understanding the historical framework of a given musical is crucial to understanding its relative success or failure. I will begin with *Show Boat* (1927), which is traditionally considered the first book musical, and consequently the first to offer, if even on a small scale, sympathetic-villainy.

Chapter 2

Hero or Villain? Sympathetic Villainy from *Show Boat* to *West Side Story*

I. Introduction: Sympathetic Villainy in American Musicals Pre-1960

In this chapter, as well as in chapter three, I will offer an in-depth literary analysis defining the characteristics of specific popular American musicals in relation to the shows' sympathetic villains. Specifically, this chapter will focus on three pre-1960 traditional book musicals: Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Show Boat,* Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Oklahoma!,* and Arthur Laurents, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim and Jerome Robbins' *West Side Story.* Chapter 3, consequently, will focus on three post-1960 musicals, John Kander, Fred Ebb, and Bob Fosse's *Chicago,* Stephen Sondheim and John Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,* and Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman's *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz,* all of which successfully experimented with less conventional methods of form and content than their traditional book musical predecessors. However, before I delve into pre-1960 musical theatre, a more general look at the American theatre landscape during this time period is warranted, in order to better understand musical theatre's place in the larger scheme of things. Overall, American drama (non-musical) from the early twentieth century through the mid-to-late 1960s was heavily influenced by the realist styles of the Moscow Art School and Constantin Stanislavski. The works of American playwrights Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman; All My Sons),* Tennessee Williams *(A Streetcar Named Desire; The Glass Menagerie),* and Eugene O'Neill (*A Long Day's Journey into Night; The Hairy Ape)* permeated the American stage both on Broadway and across the nation, and permanently left a mark in the theatrical cannon by

exploring the struggles of everyday people trying to survive in a complex and difficult contemporary society. Their characters (Willie Loman from Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Yank from O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, Amanda Wingfield from Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*), did not seek to change or fix society as a whole, but merely attempted to adapt to it in hopes of being successful on an individual level. In line with the modernist tenets of the time, these characters had to accept that the ideal world they desired simply did and does not exist, but that, ultimately, they are not alone in coming to terms with this truth (the truth being that everyone must accept the fact that the world is not perfect nor fair if they hope to survive or thrive in it).

Meanwhile, when comparing the more pessimistic American dramas with the more optimistic American musicals, both found adequate commercial and critical success. However, musicals ultimately have had the popular edge over their non-musical counterparts. Furthermore, during the first half of the twentieth century, the go-to musical theatre formula was what is now known as the "Traditional Book Musical" (i.e. musicals that fully integrate dialogue, song and dance into a well-made plot, often with serious dramatic goals, which are able to evoke genuine emotions including, but not limited to, laughter).[23] As far as the traditional American book musical, there is a general consensus among scholars that there are three shows that charted the birth, development, and perfecting of the form: *Show Boat* (1927), *Oklahoma!* (1943), and *West Side Story* (1957).[24] Interestingly, whereas American drama during this time sought to explore and uncover the unpleasantness and harshness of reality, early American musicals tended to do just the opposite, though still adhering to the idea that in order to survive in society you must adapt to it, not try to fix it. Consequently, early American musicals tended to

reward characters who successfully followed the rules and norms put forth by society and punish those that did not.

In short, the hero of early musicals usually came out on top, typically winning the girl and with his happy ending, whereas the villain was defeated, usually dying at the end of the piece. This system of rewarding "good" behavior and punishing "bad" behavior is indicative of the traditional book musical format, the predominant form for Broadway musicals from the mid-1920s through the late 1950s. The most successful of these musicals, stemming from well-known melodramatic novels and dramas of the time, works known for their high emotional appeal, with clearly defined heroes and villains. Examples include *Show Boat*, based on the popular 1926 melodramatic novel of the same name by Edna Ferber; *Oklahoma!*, based on Lynn Rigg's 1931 Broadway play *Green Grow the Lilacs;* and, perhaps most famously, *West Side Story*, based on William Shakespeare's classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet.* The plots of all three musicals were, at least to some degree, known to their initial audiences, and all seemingly relied on a simple plot structure that pitted the "good" guys against the "bad" guys, with the good always defeating the bad. However, upon closer examination, this clear distinction between hero and villain is, in fact, not quite so simple.

In addition to being landmark, canonical American Broadway musicals, these three shows, which were groundbreaking in the times when they were first conceived and produced, also present, within their texts, interesting and noteworthy sympathetic villains. Therefore, in this chapter, I will examine these three musicals and their villains through an in-depth literary analysis, noting the important historical factors at play during their initial conception, as well as their enduring impact on the American theatre.

II. History, Villainy, and Pre-1960s American Traditional Book Musicals

Show Boat, Oklahoma!, and *West Side Story* were all pioneering traditional book musicals conceived, written, and first performed between 1927-1957, an epoch in American history often defined by its clear expectation that all citizens adhere to well-established societal and culture norms, which included having conventional family ties; being pro-American/pro-government; and having an unwavering belief and faith in the capitalistic American dream. Also, it was a time known for its acceptance of universal truths, truths which individuals had to learn to work within if they hoped to thrive in the chaotic, fast-paced industrialized world.

To illustrate this idea of universal truth, art created during this time recognized that bad or unpleasant things happen to everyone, and that justice does not always exist. Furthermore, these artworks often recognized that accepting these universal truths was often difficult, if not entirely impossible, for some people. Examples of this kind of American art include the novels of William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway; the visual works of avant-garde artists Georgia O'Keeffe, John Marin, and Oscar Bluemner; the musical compositions of Aaron Copland, Philip Glass, and Lou Reed; and the plays of Miller, Williams, and O'Neill that were mentioned previously. Though early traditional book musicals are often overlooked in academic discussions of these kinds of artworks (perhaps due to the misperception that these musicals contain overly simple plots and depth-lacking characters), there are several examples of early musical theatre pieces that similarly hold to the characteristics of these other well-respected works. For example, several traditional book musicals, including the three main ones discussed in this chapter, delve into the sometimes unpleasant aspects of

American society and culture; explore the struggle some people face when attempting to cope with the ideals set forth by the notion of universal truths; and challenge, even if somewhat subtly, the notions of binary good and evil, right and wrong, hero and villain.

In short, there are musical theatre pieces that offer characters that, for all intents and purposes, are villains, but that are also able to garner sympathy, primarily because of the hardships placed upon them by those around them, by themselves, and by society as a whole. Three such pieces with sympathetic villains, also happen to be the same three that marked the birth, development, and perfecting of the traditional book musical: *Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!*, and *West Side Story*. In the final sections of this chapter I will examine, in-depth, these three musicals using their texts as my primary source material, as opposed to individual productions or performances of these pieces, which, due to the ephemeral nature of the theatre, are too vast and vary too greatly to include in this scope of this work. However, to illustrate specific points, I will occasionally reference specific theatrical and/or film versions of these works when relevant. I will begin with what is conventionally accepted by scholars as the first successful traditional book musical: Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Show Boat.*

III. *Show Boat*: Can't Help Lovin' That Man

From a cultural and historical standpoint, 1920s America was an anomaly not seen before, and arguably the likes of which was not seen again until the dawn of the post-modern era (1960s/1970s). For a select group of Americans, a counterculture formed which challenged the traditionally accepted values, mores and societal norms discussed in the previous section, specifically ideals concerning what was and was not acceptable

behavior. According to John Kenrick, a musical theatre scholar, historian, and author of the book *Musical Theatre: A History*:

> The nightmare of World War I encouraged a new sense of isolationism, and a series of Republican presidents resolutely kept America as uninvolved in international affairs as possible. The stock market flourished, which did wonders for the general economy. The new Eighteenth Amendment prohibited the manufacture, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages, and thirsty Americans suddenly found it chic to break the law. [25]

Located between two great wars, World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945), as well as just before the greatest American economic depression in modern history, 1920s America is often viewed as a hiatus from the seriousness of previous times and places. It was the decade of flappers, jazz music, the automobile, and speak-easies. It was a decade that pitted the "Fundamentalist" majority (people who believed in adhering strictly to the Christian teaching of the Bible) [26] against the "New Morality" minority (people who sought pleasure and recreation over the "moral" life of their Fundamentalist counterparts).[27] The small, but influential new moralists, as they are often referred, consisted mostly of young urbanites that were rebelling against the perceived constraints placed on them by the older, more conservative generations. The hope and promise of the decade led many to believe that there was hope for a better life for themselves and for future generations. However, the devastating blow of the stock market crash in 1929, and the ensuing economic and social depression, dashed those hopes.[28]

Just as the 1920s was a time of great change and promise for the people of the U.S., it was also a time of great change and excitement in the world of musical theatre. During this decade, musical theatre would draw upon both traditional methods of storytelling and new, distinctive experimentations in formula and format to forever impact the world of the musical. In 1927, Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein's *Show Boat* became the first American musical comedy to successfully integrate song and plot. Before *Show Boat*, Broadway musicals consisted mostly of vaudeville type revues, such as Ziegfeld's *Follies* or *The Music Box Revues*, or light-hearted pieces like *No, No Nannette*, *Oh, Kay!*, and *Sally*, all of which highlighted the musical and dancing abilities of their star performers, but failed to integrate these musical numbers with the plot (if there was a plot at all).[29] *Show Boat* and its creative team set out to change that, and change it they did!

In late 1926, Jerome Kern convinced Edna Ferber to grant him permission to turn her new novel, *Show Boat*, into a musical. Ferber was skeptical, believing Kern and his partner Hammerstein would turn her beloved novel into just another "girlie" showcase musical typical of the decade. Kern, however, promised her that he and Hammerstein planned something much more serious and ambitious for her story. She agreed, and soon Kern and Hammerstein found the perfect producer for their new piece: Florenz Ziegfeld.[30] *Show Boat* was not to be one of Ziegfeld's typical girlie shows:

> This was to be a tightly written musical play with devotion to character development, with songs that grew meaningfully out of the plot, with spectacle and dance only when spectacle seemed appropriate to the story.

> In short, *Show Boat* was to be something the American Musical Theatre had never before experienced.[31]

And Ziegfeld's investment, at least from a critical standpoint, paid off. *Show Boat* forever changed the world of musical theatre.

Show Boat opened on Broadway on December 27, 1927 and ran for 575 performances, before closing on May 4, 1929. Critics were immediately impressed, with the *New York Times* critic saying, "In its adherence to its story it is positively slavish. The adaptation of the novel has been intelligently made, and such liberties as the demands of musical comedy necessitate do not twist the tale nor distort its values."[32] Moreover, audiences flocked to the show for a year and a half until, for financial reasons, Florenz Ziegfeld had to close the show.[33] Since the original run, there have been six Broadway revivals of *Show Boat* (1932, 1946, 1948, 1954, 1983, and 1994), as well as countless international and regional productions. Additionally, *Show Boat* has been adapted for film three times (1936, 1946, and 1951), television once (1989), and radio on several occasions.[34]

Show Boat tells the story of multiple characters, all of whom live and work on the show boat *Cotton Blossom*, over a forty year period (1887-1927), primarily that of Cap'n Andy and his family.[35] In the first act, the audience is introduced to most of the key players and their major conflicts: Cap'n Andy runs the show boat and handles the players on it, but is often thwarted by his temperamental and bitter wife Parthy. Cap'n Andy and Parthy's daughter Magnolia falls for her new leading man in the main show boat production, Gaylord Ravenal, which causes several problems for Magnolia and her family. Magnolia and Ravenal's story is the main through-line of the play. Other

subplots are intertwined with Magnolia and her family: Julie La Verne, the lead actress on the *Cotton Blossom* at the beginning of the show who struggles with being of both black and white descent and, later, with alcoholism; Julie's husband Steve, a white man who knowingly married Julie even though he knew miscegenation was against the law and who eventually abandons her because of it; Joe and Queenie, two black workers on the *Cotton Blossom* who objectively, yet philosophically observe the dramatic lives of the white people for whom they work ; and Ellen and Frank, two supporting actors on the show boat who yearn to be the stars.[36]

For my purposes, I am interested in both the Julie/Steve and the Magnolia/Ravenal storylines. In the case of Julie (portrayed by Helen Morgan in 1927 [Figure 2.1] and Ava Gardener in the 1951 film version [Figure 2.2] and Steve (portrayed by Charles Ellis in 1927 and by Robert Sterling in the 1951 film version) the society in which they live is the real villain of their story. By making marriage between a white person and a non-white person illegal (i.e., miscegenation laws which were not abolished nationwide until 1967)[37], American society and culture are the unseen villain of this show. With the minor exception of Pete, the stagehand who reports Julie and Steve to the authorities, being thrown off the Cotton Blossom the villainy of anti-miscegenation is never fully recognized or punished in *Show Boat*. In fact, it is the victims, Steve and Julie, who are punished for the prejudices of their society. In the end Steve leaves Julie, because he is unable to cope with the societal pressures of being married to a non-white, and Julie, in turn, becomes an alcoholic unable to hold down employment. In the case of Julie/Steve and the villain of societal prejudice and discrimination there is no room for sympatric villainy.

However, when it comes to Magnolia and Ravenal, originally portrayed on Broadway by Norma Terris and Howard March (Figure 2.3), there is a glimmer of sympathetic villainy to be found. Magnolia, at the start of the show, is a young, untouched, unjaded girl who lives a simple, if interesting life, with her mom and dad aboard the *Cotton Blossom.* In the first few scenes, which take place in 1887, Magnolia meets the dashing drifter Gaylord Ravenal when he asks for passage on her parent's show boat. She is immediately smitten with him; but, those around her, including her mother and best friend, Julie, worry he is not at all what he seems. Magnolia promises that she could never love a, "no-account river fella," but Julie says, "love isn't so simple." After Julie and Steve are forced to leave the show boat because Pete, a jealous deck hand, outs them to the local authorities on charges of miscegenation, Ravenal is hired to play the leading man. Magnolia's father, Cap'n Andy, much to the chagrin of her mother, Parthy, casts young Magnolia as Ravenal's love interest. The two quickly fall in love, and Cap'n Andy helps them to secretly elope. However, before the two can marry, Parthy enters, declaring her daughter cannot marry Ravenal, for he is an accused killer. Cap'n Andy demands more details, and Parthy tells him that even though Ravenal was acquitted of the charges, having been found innocent by means of self-defense, he still is a killer and not fit for their daughter. Cap'n Andy dismisses her charges, saying he did the same thing when he was young, so it is forgivable. Parthy faints, but Magnolia says it's no use because she loves Ravenal and is going to marry him anyway.

After they marry, Magnolia and Ravenal spend several years drifting from location to location. Ravenal, as it turns out, is a professional gambler, a fact which Magnolia willingly accepts, even if her mother does not. Their lifestyle is dependent

upon his winnings at the card table, so frequently they are behind in rent or have to move to lower-class accommodations until he starts on a winning streak. This behavior continues well after their daughter, Kim is born.

Eventually, for whatever reason, Ravenal decides in 1903 it will be best for Kim and Magnolia to return to the *Cotton Blossom* and the protection/financial security of Magnolia's parents. He does not tell Magnolia in person, but sends her the news in a letter along with a little sum of money. He visits Kim at the convent, where she is schooled, to say "goodbye." After he leaves, Magnolia is too proud to return to the show boat, and instead takes a job as a performer at the Trocadero, a club in Chicago. When Cap'n Andy discovers this on New Year's Eve, he takes Magnolia and Kim home to the show boat with him. There they live happily until 1927, when by sheer dumb luck Cap'n Andy runs into Ravenal in one of the towns the *Cotton Blossom* is visiting. He says he never tried to contact Kim or Magnolia, but he did see Kim perform once from the shadows. Cap'n Andy convinces him to stay and see his long lost wife and child. When Magnolia enters, Ravenal is unsure what to say or do, but Magnolia rushes and kisses him. She cannot wait to introduce him to their daughter Kim, and without another word, all seems forgiven. The show closes as they walk toward Kim and Joe reprises "Ol' Man River."

Show Boat is an interesting piece of musical theatre, particularly in that it doesn't seem to have one main villain (unless you count Pete, who reveals Julie's secret, but only appears in the first few minutes of the show). One of the reasons for this could be the fact that however endearing and enduring *Show Boat* remains, it still was an *early* attempt to integrate song and plot, and therefore not all the "kinks" were worked out. The plot

and characters, in many ways, seem underdeveloped and under-explored. The reason for this apparently was that Kern and Hammerstein ambitiously attempted to weave together several plots and subplots with several characters spanning almost thirty years of time in one episodic, two act show. On opening night, the show ran over four hours long, and for the sake of time much of the show had to be cut, perhaps resulting in the above mentioned plot and character issues[38]. However, the absence of a clearly defined villain in *Show Boat*, for whatever reason, is interesting in and of itself, particularly given the character of Gaylord Ravenal, who could easily be argued is the male protagonist, has many attributes of a villain, yet remains the "good guy" who receives his happy ending at the close of the show. It is the character of Ravenal with which my analysis will be primarily concerned.

As stated in the plot summary, Gaylord Ravenal (note, in almost all productions, stage and film, he is portrayed by a conventionally handsome and dashing man [Figures 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6]) who is a professional gambler that seduces, marries, impregnates, and then abandons sweet, naïve Magnolia, daughter of Cap'n Andy. Moreover, Magnolia and Ravenal's plotline can be considered the main plot of *Show Boat*, since it continues throughout the entire show, culminating with their reunion after twenty-five years apart. From the first meeting through the emotional reunion, the audience follows the ups and downs between the two extremely different lovers. The relationship seems doomed from the very start, as many characters indicate to each other and, to Magnolia, that Ravenal is not what he appears to be. Magnolia's mentor and friend, Julie, ultimately foreshadows what will happen when she and Magnolia discuss Ravenal for the first time:

> MAGNOLIA: Julie—I'm in love….Julie, he said he liked me. D'ye think he meant it?
>
> JULIE: I don't know, child, I don't know as I like you to go fallin' in love with some man that nobody ever heard of. Suppose he turned out to be a – be just a no-account river feller –
>
> MAGNOLIA: But if I found he was no-account, I'd stop loving him.
>
> JULIE: Oh, no, you wouldn't! Once a girl like you starts to love a man, she don't stop so easy.[39]

Julie then sings the famous song "Can't help lovin' dat Man," in which she implies that no matter what a man may have done, if you love him, you will want to be with him under any circumstances. She wants Magnolia to be careful, for she fears that Ravenal is not what he seems, and that Magnolia is well on her way to falling in love with him.

It turns out Julie is right, for not only does Ravenal have a sordid past, he also continues much of his lewd behavior after he and Julie are married and have a child. Once Magnolia has fallen for him, and refuses to stop loving him no matter what, she and the audience discover he killed a man (though it was believed to be in self-defense); that he lied about where he came from and who his family is; and that he makes his living as a card gambler. However, the musical attempts to make Ravenal sympathetic, if not wholly likeable, by giving him, despite his flaws, immense charm and good heartedness, that leads him to make decisions that may not be right, but ones he truly believes are for the best. For this reason the audience is expected to accept both his marriage to Magnolia and his return to her after a twenty-five year absence.

IV. *Oklahoma!*: Poor Jud is Daid

The Great Depression of the 1930s definitely took its toll on the Broadway musical. With few exceptions, like Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Broadway's exploration with new techniques and styles was stifled. With their audiences dwindling because of the rising popularity and cost efficiency of film and the overall downward state of the economy, Broadway producers wanted any show they invested in to be a sure-fire hit. Therefore, throughout the 1930s a barrage of light-hearted, feel good musicals, like *Anything Goes, The Band Wagon,* and *Babes in Arms,* flooded the Great White Way.[40] It wasn't until the economy began to improve in the early 1940s that Broadway returned to the integration and exploration started by *Show Boat.* In late 1941, when America joined World War II, a push for entertainment that highlighted all-American values and pride sent musical producers rushing to invest in shows that were both feel-good and patriotic.[41]

In 1943, at the height of World War II *Show Boat*'s long awaited successor finally arrived. This show was none other than Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*. The journey to Broadway was similar for both *Oklahoma!* and *Show Boat* in many ways. Both were based on popular fictional writings of the time (*Show Boat* on Edna Ferber's novel of the same name and *Oklahoma!* on Lynn Rigg's play *Green Grow the Lilacs)*, both were helmed by the brilliant librettist Oscar Hammerstein, and both found lasting critical and commercial success.

Oklahoma!'s major difference comes in the approach its creators, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and their creative team took when utilizing dance in the show. Whereas *Show Boat* attempted to integrate plot and song with dances thrown in for good measure,

Oklahoma! was the first musical to attempt to more fully integrate song, plot, and *dance* to create a cohesive piece.[42]

To help them integrate dance with the plot, they brought in Agnes de Mille as choreographer. De Mille conceived what is considered one of the most famous scenes in all of musical theatre history: "The Dream Ballet" sequence, a fifteen-minute ballet at the end of Act I, which foreshadows a possible outcome for Act II (Figure 2.5). Though not a fully integrated show—the dream ballet moves the plot along, but is separate from the rest of the singing and acting—*Oklahoma!'s* daring experiment paid off, and paved the way for shows like *West Side Story* to further, even perfect, the integration process.[43]

Oklahoma! opened to glowing reviews on March 31, 1943 and ran for a record 2,248 performances on Broadway, a record it held for over two decades.[44] It went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, and ultimately usher in the "Golden Age" of the Broadway musical, the likes of which was never seen before or since. Today, after four Broadway revivals (1951, 1953, 1979, and 2002); several successful West End Productions, including the highly revered 1998 Trevor Nunn production starring Hugh Jackman; and a classic Academy Award film (1955), *Oklahoma!* is easily one the most popular and critically acclaimed musicals of all time, and one of America's most important contributions to the world of theatre.[45]

The story of *Oklahoma!* may appear simple, yet the beauty of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals is that wrapped within their seemingly straightforward plots and characters are deeper explorations and examinations of social issues relevant to the time in which they were writing (the 1940s and 1950s):

> With *Oklahoma!* all production elements converged on the single goal of making an organic musical theatre piece capable of containing and expressing themes and ideas of real importance. The theme that first appears in *Oklahoma!* recurs in nearly all of Hammerstein's collaborations with Rodgers—the need for eradicating racial, ethnic, and cultural prejudices, promoting tolerance and acceptance of differences, and bringing about reconciliation, if possible.[46]

All of these things Rodgers and Hammerstein brought to a seemingly simple story of cowhands and farmers struggling to get along on the prairies of the Oklahoma territory at the turn of the twentieth century.

Oklahoma! reflects its beautiful simplicity by opening without much spectacle, with the romantic protagonist Curly, a cowhand, belting "Oh What a Beautiful Mornin'" to a lone Aunt Eller who sits on the porch of her farmhouse churning butter. Curly is there to flirt with and tease Aunt Eller's lovely niece Laurey, and to ask her, at the last minute, to the box-social and dance that is being held that evening. Upset that he waited so long to ask her, Laurey refuses and instead accepts her farmhand's (Jud Fry) invitation in order to make Curly jealous. She immediately regrets this decision because Jud scares her. However, she is afraid to reject Jud after previously accepting. Curly goes to the smokehouse, where the isolated Jud lives, and Curly suggests that if Jud doesn't feel appreciated by the people in the territory perhaps he should hang himself. Curly also implies that everyone would appreciate Jud much more once he is dead. The two sing of this possibility in the song "Poor Jud Is Daid," which I will discuss in more detail during

my analysis. Jud refuses to back down, and after Curly departs, his resolve to have Laurey only escalates. Alone in his room he sings the powerful ballad "Lonely Room."

Back at the farmhouse, Laurey has taken a "magic potion" (i.e., smelling salts) in order to reveal who her true love is. She falls asleep and the famous de Mille "Dream Ballet" sequence ensues. In the beginning, it is a lovely dream for Laurey, who envisions herself happily married to Curly. The dream soon turns to a nightmare, however, as Jud (Figure 2.7) enters and kills Curly, leaving Laurey defenseless against Jud and his desire for her. Laurey awakes and realizes that it is Curly that she wants to be with, but knows it is too late to change with whom she is going with to the dance.

Act II picks up at the dance where a fight has broken out between the cowhands and the farmers about fences and water rights. During this, Laurey gets jealous when she sees that Curly has brought Gertie as his date to the dance. After Aunt Eller ends the fight, bidding begins on the picnic baskets the girls have packed to raise money. Laurey's friend Ado Annie is caught up in her own drama between her beau Will and a Persian salesman named Ali Hakim. After this is resolved, a fierce bidding war takes place over Laurey's basket, with many men in the town trying to protect her from having Jud win it. In the end Curly gives everything he owns to win Laurey's basket and protect her from Jud. Jud tries to kill Curly with a trick viewfinder he buys off of Hakim, but Aunt Eller secretly foils his plans. Jud confronts Laurey about his feelings, but she rejects and fires him. He leaves, but not before threatening her. Laurey bursts into tears and calls for Curly. Realizing she loves him, Curly proposes and she accepts. A few weeks later they wed, but a drunken Jud arrives and tries to attack Curly. During the struggle Jud falls on his own knife and dies. A judge at the wedding holds an impromptu

trial, and quickly finds Curly "Not Guilty" so he can leave on his honeymoon with Laurey. The show ends with everyone celebrating the wedding, the demise of Jud, and the news that Oklahoma is about to become a state.

Though on the surface *Oklahoma!* may seem like a show with a conventional love triangle, with a traditional hero and traditional villain vying over the affections of the traditional ingénue, Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote a much more complex musical than many audiences may realize, particularly when it comes to the villain Jud. My analysis of sympathetic villainy in *Oklahoma!* will focus on the character Jud, originally portrayed by Howard Da Silva (Figure 2.8), and later replaced by Murvyn Vye (Figure 2.9), as well as by Rod Steiger in the classic 1955 film version (Figure 2.10). More specifically, I will hone in on two particular scenes in which Jud is the focus: The "Poor Jud Is Daid" scene and the "Lonely Room" scene, both of which appear in Act I.

Jud appears only briefly in the scenes preceding his confrontations with Curly in the smokehouse, but his ominous presence clearly leave the other characters ill-at-ease around him, all of them falling silent and eyeing him suspiciously whenever he is around. Even Aunt Eller, who is friendly to everyone else, seems unable to offer kindness to Jud. Awkward and seemingly socially unaware, Jud does not fit into *Oklahoma!'s* world of picnics, dances, and friendly banter. In the book *Oklahoma! The Making of an American Musical*, Tim Carter argues that:

> …Jud remains an object of fear (for Laurey), of disgust (for Curly), and worst of all, indifference (from the rest). Save for his strange funeral duet with Curly ("Pore Jud Is Daid"), he cannot sing with, or to, anyone else, an isolation rendered still more complete as Hammerstein moved his drafts

> to the final libretto…Jud's eventual death does not even merit the decency of a proper trial.[47]

In many ways, Jud deserves pity, but his violent reactions to rejection from Laurey, bullying by Curly, and cool indifference from the others may make it hard for some audience members to feel anything but hatred towards him. Many productions, including the classic 1955 film version, tend to take a simple stock, or generic, villainous view of Jud, making him no more than an angry, sexually deviant attempted murderer. However, I believe there is more to Jud than first meets the eye, and given the right push an audience may be able to sympathize with him, particularly a contemporary one. One such production that was able to garner some compassion, perhaps even sympathy for Jud was Trevor Nunn's 1998 interpretation. In this award winning production, Shuler Hensley's performance of Jud sought to find the deeper sadness and isolation of the character (Figures 2.11, 2.12, and 2.13). Reviewers found Hensley's "villain" Jud to be "fleetly tender," horribly frustrated," and "anguished", with one even stating, "As played by the hulking, Georgia-born Shuler Hensley, 'Pore Jud' is not a stock villain; he's a tortured soul, trapped in ugliness and rage."[48] In examining Rodgers and Hammerstein's original text, it can be reasonably assumed Hensley's portrayal of Jud is closer to what the author's imaged for him, rather than how most other productions have overly simplified his villainy.

Again, when looking at the text for the first time one might feel sympathy for Jud comes in Act I when Curly goes to Jud's living quarters to bully him into withdrawing his invitation to take Laurey to the dance. When Laurey accepted Jud's invitation to the dance (can he be that bad if she accepted?), Jud is unaware she has done so only to get

back at Curly. He is left believing he has a chance to win Laurey's affection, and perhaps have the normal life and acceptance he has not yet seemed to garner from the people of the territory. Therefore, he becomes increasingly angry as he realizes why Curly is in his home. Thus, his confrontation with Curly in his smokehouse and the duet "Poor Jud is Daid" results in a pitiful realization that Jud will never gain the acceptance he desires from Laurey and the rest:

> Hammerstein also said in his "Notes on Lyrics" that as a result of "Poor Jud Is Daid," Jud "becomes, then, for a while, not just wicked, but a comic Figure flattered by the attentions he might receive if he were dead. He becomes also a pathetic Figure, pathetically lonely for attentions he has never received while alive. The audience begins to feel some sympathy for him, some understanding of him as a man."[49]

During the scene our hero Curly could be perceived as a cruel bully who is encouraging the social outcast to commit suicide, implying through the song "Poor Jud is Daid" this is the only way he will ever really be appreciated by the others, even getting Jud to willingly join in on the mournfully comedic tune:

> CURLY: Nen the preacher'd git up and he'd say: "Folks! We are gathered here to moan and groan over our brother Jud Fry who hung hisse'f up by a rope in the smokehouse." Ne there'd be weepin' and wailin' *(Significantly)* from some of those women. *(JUD nods his head understandingly).* Nen he'd say, "Jud was the most misunderstood man in the territory. People useter think he was a mean, ugly feller. *(JUD looks up)* and they called him a dirty skunk and an ornery pigstealer. *(CURLY*

switches quickly) But—the folks 'at really knowed him, knowed 'at beneath them two dirty shirts he alw'ys wore, there beat a heart as big as all outdoors.[50]

After a few more verses Jud takes over the song singing:

(JUD is too emotionally exalted by the spirit of CURLY's singing to be analytical. He now takes up a refrain of his own)

JUD: Pore Jud is daid, candle lights his haid, He's layin' in a cawfin made of wood.

CURLY: Wood.

JUD: And folks are feelin' sad, cuz they useter treat him bad, and now they know their friend has gone for good.[51]

If one really listens to the words of both Curly and Jud, it's almost impossible not to feel sorry for a man who is so desperate for love and friendship that he allows himself to fantasize about the love he will receive if he kills himself. Jud gets so caught up in the fantasy that, according to the stage directions listed in the text, at the end of the song he weeps and buries his head in his hands.[52]

Shaking free from the fantasy, it finally dawns on poor Jud that Curly is up to something and he goes on the defensive, demanding to know why Curly is there. During the conversation he subtly threatens Curly and implies strongly he knows how to get away with punishing employers if they treat him badly. Jud knew the farmhand at the tragic Bartlett farm up the road that burnt down, killing all of the family, and he knows how the farmhand set the fire without getting caught. His story pushes Curly to demand how Jud became this way: "How'd you git to be the way you air, anyway—settin' here

in this filthy hole—and thinkin' the way you're thinkin'? Why don't you do sumpin healthy once in a while, 'stid of stayin' shet up here-a-crawlin' and fresterin'!"[53]

Jud snaps and seizes his gun almost as an automatic reflex and shoots a hole in the ceiling, his rage barely contained. Curly, remaining cool, seems as though this is the reaction he was hoping for and goes on to show Jud what a good shot he is by shooting a bullet through a knot-hole in the wall. Tension remains high, but is broken when Aunt Eller and several others burst in demanding to know what happened. Pleased with himself, Curly leaves and is followed by the others.

Jud, left alone again, laments his situation and articulates his desire and plans for Laurey and himself in the soliloquy-style song "Lonely Room," (a song that was curiously absent from the 1951 celebrated film version). Carter argues, and I agree, that "Lonely Room" is one of the most moving moments in *Oklahoma!:*

> "Lonely Room"…is arguably the most powerful song in *Oklahoma!* It is unique Rodgers famously associated with Cole Porter's opportunistic appropriation of "Jewish" music. Its relatively free form is also unusual…it breaks significantly the bounds of musical decorum in and for the show—just as Jud is isolated from the rest of his world. But it also brings a clarity, and even power, to the character that he would otherwise lack. [54]

Jud, the only character with a solo in the show, seems to indicate that Rodgers and Hammerstein wanted him to be more than a one-dimensional villain audiences could easily hate. Jud's solo includes beautifully angry lyrics such as:

> But when there's a moon in my winder and it slants down a beam 'crost my bed, then the shadder of a tree starts a-dancin' on the wall and a dream starts a-dancin' in my head. And all the things I wish fer turn out like I want them to be, and I'm better'n that Smart Aleck cowhand who thinks he's better'n me! And the girl I want ain't afraid of my arms, and her own soft arms keep me warm.[55]

Jud longs for love, but is unable to express this desire in a healthy way. Audiences should be able to sympathize with Jud's struggle to find companionship in this warm and friendly world, that only seems to be cold, lonely to outsiders like himself. Very often, however, this song and its powerful meaning are too easily swept under the rug in many productions (including the 1955 film, and many regional and school productions, that attempt to mimic well-known film version), or quickly forgotten by the audience, particularly given in the very next scene, which is the "Dream Ballet," Laurey's dream version of Jud is exactly that, a one-dimensional villain, who is a killer and a rapist. Audiences quickly forget, however, this is just Laurey's psyche projecting her feelings about Jud, not actually Jud. Though the real Jud does attack Curly at the end of the play, it is not as cold and calculated as in Laurey's dream; it is a drunken man railing at the world which has once again rejected him.

Of course Jud's violent actions must be punished, and in the world of *Oklahoma!* there seems no alternative for Rodgers and Hammerstein but to kill Jud. A musical in the age of a chaotic global conflict (World War II) could leave no doubt that Jud is a villain and must die. In short, there is just no room for Jud, because once Laurey and Curly are married; the farmers and the cow-hands become friends; and everyone joyous

over *Oklahoma!* becoming a state, there is no place for a "bad guy" in this purely "good" world. His death is glossed over, seen by the other characters as a necessity, and no one stops to mourn the fact that "poor Jud is daid" because everyone else in the show received their happy ending, because everyone but Jud conformed to and accepted the rules and norms firmly established in the world of *Oklahoma!*

V. *West Side Story*: There's A Place for Us

If *Show Boat* marks the birth of the traditional book musical and *Oklahoma!* the further development of the form, then I would argue that the perfection of the form arrived with the 1957 hit musical *West Side Story*. For the first time, song, music, and dance in particular, are perfectly integrated in order to tell a well-thought out and fully developed story:

> ...*West Side Story* used dance to a degree never before attempted in musical theatre. Though George Balanchine [*Babes in Arms*] and Agnes de Mille [*Oklahoma!*] had succeeded in integrating dance into musicals, even advancing the plot with it, Jerome Robbins took their tradition to new extremes. There were twelve major dance sequences in the show, providing most of the exposition—Tony and Maria's meeting, the deaths of Riff and Bernardo, Anita's foiled attempt to deliver the message to Tony, and other important moments. The show had one of the shortest books ever written for a musical, leaving much of the plot and characterization to the songs and dance. Dance had become an element every bit as important as the book, music, and lyrics.[56]

In making dance just as integral to the story and characters as the songs and dialogue, *West Side Story* was able create a traditional book musical the likes of which had never been seen before.

West Side Story, therefore, is the perfect musical to bookend a discussion of traditional book musicals, and the beginning of explorations in unconventional forms of musical theatre that come into full fruition in the ensuing years. Interestingly, the budding young lyricist involved with *West Side Story,* Stephen Sondheim, went on to create some of the most innovative and experimental pieces musical theatre has ever seen (i.e. *Company, Sweeney Todd, Sunday in the Park with George*, etc.). In addition to Sondheim, *West Side Story* was created by three additional men who, today, are legends in the field of musical theatre: Visionary director and choreographer Jerome Robbins, producer Hal Prince, and composer Leonard Bernstein.[57] Together they created something of an enigma: A traditional book musical in form and structure, *West Side Story* contains aspects that, when viewed at in the correct context, can also be seen as an early form of the "concept musical" (i.e., a musical that favors theme over plot), particularly when asking, "Are these gang members heroes or are they villains?":

> The singers never broke the fourth wall; songs were not sung to the audience as they were in most musicals. It was closer to reality—painfully so—than other shows, yet also more stylized, more theatrical with sets flying in and out, and invented slang, choreographed knife fights, and several extended musical scenes.[58]

In this section, I will explore these elements and others of *West Side Story* that, upon critical analysis, leaves audiences wondering who exactly are the protagonists and

antagonists of this story? Who are the heroes? Who are the villains? More ambiguous in addressing these questions than any musical before it, *West Side Story* seems to be the perfect musical to bridge a discussion of sympathetic villainy from the era of the traditional book musical to that of the concept musical (Chapter 3). Opening on Broadway on September 26, 1957 and closing on June 27, 1959, *West Side Story* had a decent initial run, racking up 732 performances. Walter Kerr of the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote in his review:

> Mr. Robbins never runs out of his original explosive life-force. Though the essential images are always the same--two spitting groups of people advancing with bared teeth and clawed fists upon one another--there is fresh excitement in the next debacle, and the next. When a gang leader advises his cohorts to play it "Cool," the intolerable tension between and effort at control and the instinctive drives of these potential killers is stingingly graphic. When the knives come out, and bodies begin to fly wildly through space under buttermilk clouds, the sheer visual excitement is breathtaking.[59]

However, the true success, popularity, and acceptance of *West Side Story* came in the years that would follow. There have been four Broadway revivals of *West Side Story* (1960, 1964, 1980, and 2009), including the highly successful 2009 production which concluded by running longer and with more total performances than the original. Ben Brantley, of the *New York Times*, reviewed the 2009 revival positively, saying:

> Youth has always been the engine of this epochal musical from 1957….But usually it's the scare adrenaline-stoked energy of youth that

> sets the tones and rhythms of the show. In the production that opened Thursday night at the Palace Theater, which lovingly replicates Mr. Robbin's balletic choreography, what prevails is a tenderhearted awareness of the naked vulnerability of being young and trapped in an urban jungle. Half a century ago middle-class adult theater-goers were shocked and appalled by the brutality of the ethnic gang warfare of "West Side Story"….Age would seem to have brought a new detachment and gentleness to the famously feisty [show]…[60]

Additionally, *West Side Story* has had several successful West End runs; three highly profitable national tours; dozens upon dozens of regional productions; and international success with productions in Japan, Israel, Africa and many other countries.[61] The 1961 film adaption garnered eleven Academy Award nominations, winning ten of them, including Best Picture and honors for Jerome Robbins, as well as being the second most profitable film of the year.[62]

The appeal of *West Side Story* to audiences of yesterday and today lies with several factors, but perhaps besides highly creative and catchy musical and dance numbers, the attraction lies with the story being told. Jerome Robbins had wanted to create a musical re-envisioning of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. For several years he toyed with the idea, brainstorming new versions of the rival Montagues and Capulets set in contemporary surroundings. At first he thought of exploring a Catholic/Jewish rivalry in New York City, then differing Latino/Mexican-American gangs feuding in Los Angeles. Eventually, he and his creative team settled on rival Puerto Rican and Polish-American gangs of New York's Upper West Side. Thus the

Sharks (the Puerto Rican gang) and the Jets (the Polish-American gang) and ultimately *West Side Story* were born.[63]

Like *Romeo and Juliet*, *West Side Story* opens with a confrontation between the two opposing families/gangs, however, unlike Shakespeare's piece, Robbins conveyed his expositional information through a non-speaking dance sequences (Figures 2.14 and 2.15) that lasted a record breaking four minutes (eight minutes for the film version).[64] The highly stylized dance, which combines jazz, ballet, and contemporary dance styles, allowed audiences to understand the tension and violence that exists on a daily basis between the Sharks and the Jets. The number did an amazing job of establishing character, setting, and conflict, particularly considering the characters barely ever speak.

The dance ends with the escalating fight being broken up by Officer Krupke and Lieutenant Schrank. Krupke and Schrank predominantly blame the Sharks for the situation. After the Sharks exit, the police inform the Jets they have to "make nice" with the Sharks from now on. The Jets agree to stop fighting with the Sharks, but as soon as Krupke and Schrank exit, Riff, the leader of the Jets, explodes in anger. He says that the Jets own the neighborhood and informs the other gang members that he plans to challenge Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks, to an all-out rumble that will decide things between the two gangs once and for all. Riff plans to make an official challenge to Bernardo at the neighborhood dance being held that evening. Riff also wants his best friend, and former Jet member, Tony to come with him.

Tony, who as the "Romeo" of the tale and who is also often considered the protagonist of the piece, does not want to re-enter the world of violence and fighting that he abandoned when he retired from the Jets. Although he images a better life for himself,

his loyalty to Riff persuades him attend the dance. Meanwhile, across town, Maria, sister of Bernardo, the "Juliet" of the story, and thus the female protagonist, is seen working in a bridal shop with Bernardo's girlfriend, Anita. Maria has just arrived to America from Puerto Rico and has been promised in marriage to Bernardo's friend Chino.

At the dance, Maria and Tony's eyes meet from across the room. They immediately fall for each other, and begin to dance. Just as they are about to kiss, Bernardo pulls Maria away. After sending her home, Bernardo and Riff agree to hold a War Council at Doc's Drugstore (Tony's place of employment, which is also considered neutral ground) to establish the guidelines for the impending rumble. Tony, however, is unaware of these plans, as he leaves to find Maria. He finds her on her fire escape, and in parallel to the Shakespearian balcony scene, the two profess their love and agree to be together, jointly singing the touching song "Tonight."

During the War Council, Tony suggests that the fight be "fists only," which upsets many members, but eventually they all agree. The rumble is to be a one-on-one fight between the best fighters from each side. Bernardo hopes to fight Tony, but must settle for Diesel, Riff's second in command. Tony visits Maria at work and the two plan their wedding, and Tony agrees to try to stop the rumble.

At the rumble, Tony makes a valiant effort to stop it, however things escalate and switch blades are drawn. In the ensuing confusion Bernardo is accidentally stabbed and killed by Riff. In his rage over losing his best friend, Tony kills Bernardo. The act ends with the sound of police sirens, both the Jets and Sharks fleeing the scene, and the bodies of Riff and Bernardo lying lifeless on the stage.

Act II picks up with Maria, blissfully unaware of what has happened, singing the upbeat "I Feel Pretty." Shortly after, however, Chino arrives and tells her that Tony killed Bernardo. Later Tony arrives and, though she is upset, Maria says she still loves him and wants to be with him. They sing the hauntingly beautiful "Somewhere," in which they envision a world of peace where they can live contently together. At the end of the scene, they sink onto the bed, consummating their union. The next morning Anita arrives and is grief stricken. She sees that Tony and Maria have been together and rails at Tony. However, after Tony leaves Anita is persuaded that Maria really loves Tony. She confesses that Chino has a gun and is looking for Tony.

Out of loyalty and love to Maria, Anita goes to Doc's to warn Tony. However, the Jets taunt her with racial slurs and insults and eventually physically and sexually assaulting her (in many productions she is raped). Doc stops the attack, but in her hurt and anger she delivers the wrong message: that Chino, in his anger, shot and killed Maria. Doc relays this information to Tony, who seeks out Chino to beg him to kill him as well, so that he can be with Maria. Before Maria can stop him, Chino shoots and kills Tony. In the most climatic moment, just as the Jets are about to attack the Sharks for the death of another friend, Maria raises the gun at Chino and shouts:

> MARIA: How many bullets are left, Chino? Enough for you? And you? All of you? WE ALL KILLED HIM; and my brother and Riff. I, too. I CAN KILL NOW BECAUSE I HATE NOW. How many can I kill, Chino? How many—and still have one bullet left for me?[65]

As both Sharks and Jets stand in shocked silence, Maria rushes to Tony's body. Moved by her love and devotion, both the Sharks and Jets help carry Tony's body out, implying

the feud is at an end. The show concludes with one of the Jets placing a shawl over Maria's head as she follows the procession off stage.

In a traditional book musical, rife with violence and turmoil, one would think there would be at least one clear hero and one clear villain. However, in *West Side Story* the line between hero and villain is irrevocably blurred by the actions and deeds of the characters. With the exception of Maria, the rest of the main characters, both Sharks and Jets, seem to live in the gray area somewhere between hero and villain, even the male protagonist, Tony. In this analysis of villainy, heroism, and *West Side Story* I will focus on three key characters (Tony, Bernardo, and Baby John), and how their contrary deeds and actions leave it unclear whether any of them are truly heroes or villains, or if they are merely products of their environment, striving to survive under the unfortunate circumstances placed on them by society.

Before I discuss the three characters, I feel I should speak generally on how the gang violence is presented on stage. In truth, the young men, both Jets and Sharks, should, in all rights, be considered villains, or if not villains, at least wayward and dangerous juveniles living outside the bounds of civilized society. However, the audience can easily find themselves liking members of one or both sides. Perhaps one of the reasons it is easy to like gang members is the highly stylized manner in which the violence and bullying is portrayed. No blood is ever seen on stage, and honestly, it is hard to feel a real sense of danger and violence from the characters when they are pirouetting, finger snapping, and leaping their way through the fight scenes. Intentional, or not, the choice to turn violent gang rumbles into beautifully, albeit powerfully emotional, choreographed dance blurs the lines between whether what these characters

are doing is meant to be seen by the audience as beautiful or ugly; good or bad. In short, it should be noted, the style and form of *West Side Story* contribute highly to sympathetic villainy in this particular piece.

Along those same lines, there are specific characters who contribute to *West Side Story's* unclear depictions of heroism and villainy. One of these characters is Tony, the "Romeo" of *West Side Story*, portrayed by Larry Kert (Figure 2.16) in the original production, and by Richard Beymer (Figure 2.17) in the 1961 film version. Contemporary theatre critic and author Misha Berson observed the following about the character of Tony in her 2011 book *Something's Coming, Something Good*:

> Is Tony a hero? A victim? A natural-born killer? One of the cornerstones of "West Side Story" is that it does not impose such a rigid moral judgment on him or his peers. But an actor needs to research beyond the obvious with Tony, to match his male ingénue romantic swoon with the grit and toughness that made him form the Jets with Riff in the first place – and, reflexively but not reluctantly, still live by the gang code.[66]

Of all the male gang members, perhaps Tony is the most sympathetic, if not fully heroic, character in the show. He has left the gang life behind, though we are never clearly clued in as to what crimes/violent acts he committed before retiring, and he has an honest job, working at Doc's Pharmacy. Clearly, he is a likeable guy in that his former gang members still think of him as a friend and confidant. Once he meets Maria, he is immediately in love with her, indicating he has less racial prejudice and devoted to gang loyalty than the other characters. Along with Maria, he dreams of a world where

everyone gets along and is at peace. This is indicated strongly in the duet "A Place for Us:"

> TONY and MARIA: There's a place for us, somewhere a place for us. Peace and quiet and open air wait for us somewhere. There's a time for us, someday a time for us, time together with time to spare, time to learn, time to care, some day! Somewhere. We'll find a new way of living, We'll find a way of forgiving somewhere . . .[67]

Tony's abandonment of the gang lifestyle, love of Maria, and hope for peace is further illustrated when he attempts to keep the big rumble from happening at the end of Act I.

However, things do not work out well when in a moment of grief induced rage, Tony is unable to stop himself from reverting to his old gang ways, murdering Bernardo (the man who killed his best friend, Riff, during the rumble). Tony, however, immediately regrets his actions and implores Maria to forgive him. His genuine remorse coupled with the fact that Maria stands by him, leads the audience to sympathize and embrace Tony. Furthermore, most audiences are sad that Tony dies at the hands of Chino, and that he and Maria are not able to pursue the dreams expressed in their loving duet ("Tonight"). Audiences tend to want Tony and Maria to receive their happy ending, although they accept this is not probable after Tony has committed the heinous act of murder.

Conversely, if Tony is the male protagonist of *West Side Story*, then his male antagonist would have to be the Shark leader Bernardo, portrayed by Ken Le Roy (Figure 2.18) in the original Broadway production and by George Chakiris (Figure 2.19) in the

1961 film version. However, just as Tony is not necessarily the hero, Bernardo is not necessarily the villain of the piece:

> A beefed-up variation on Shakespeare's Tybalt, Bernardo is Riff's counterpoint: a natural leader admired by his gang, and a suave king to Anita's steamy queen. He's tough and calloused by necessity, from dealing daily with virulent prejudices of not just the Jets and the cops, but bigoted New York in general. He has a sardonic streak, and is quick to call out adversaries (including the cops) on their hypocrisy. And he has no illusions about his place at the bottom rung of the social ladder, but still resents it.[68]

Yes, unlike Tony, Bernardo is still very much involved with the gang lifestyle and violence, and yes he strives to keep Tony and Maria apart. However, his actions against and hatred of the Jets is not completely unwarranted. As a Puerto Rican immigrant he, as well as his friends and family, have faced much discrimination and violence. Bernardo has become disenchanted with America and the American dream, and rightly so. All he wants is a place for his loved ones and himself to be happy, but the native population, mainly the Polish-American Jets, simply cannot accept Bernardo and his kin sharing their "turf." Bernardo's gang, and the actions they take, seems born out of necessity; a defensive mechanism forged to protect the Puerto Ricans from the harassment of their neighbors.

Some may argue that Bernardo is still a villain, because he is the one who disrupts the fists-only brawl by pulling a switchblade, and ultimately by committing the first killing the audience sees in the show. However Bernardo's desire to attack Tony at the

rumble, and thus his choice to pull the knife, stems from a desire to protect his sister and her honor from a man whose friends have been nothing but disrespectful and rude towards him and his kind. He has no way of knowing Tony's intentions are pure. Everything he has experienced at the hands of people like Tony has been unpleasant, and he has no reason to believe Tony is any different than Riff and the other Jets. Yes, Bernardo kills Riff, but it is clearly indicated in the script and in performances that Riff's death is ultimately an accident. Bernardo has been pushed to the breaking point by the Jets and his situation in life, and Tony's dalliance with his beloved sister has caused him to snap. It is in this moment he, clearly without premeditation, pulls the blade, attempts to attack Tony, and accidentally stabs Riff.

After it is over, Bernardo is clearly shaken by the fact that he actually killed someone. He is not allowed to contemplate his remorse long, as Tony swiftly enacts his vengeance, killing Bernardo. Like Tony, we understand that Bernardo cannot be allowed to live. He must pay for the death of Riff with his own life. However, by understanding Bernardo's situation and back-story, an audience can see that he is not a one-dimensional villain like those in so many earlier musical theatre pieces (if he is really even a villain at all).

The third and final character I wish to discuss in *West Side Story* is not a leading character, like Bernardo and Tony, however many of his actions in the play are often the most shocking and controversial. According to the text, Baby John, portrayed by David Winters (Figure 2.20) in the original Broadway production and by Eliot Feld (Figure 2.21) in the 1961 film version, is the youngest Jet, and often the most eager to prove himself to Riff and the other gang members:

> A comic book-reading puppy, Baby John is the most innocent, impressionable and fearful member of the Jets. He's thrilled to be in the club, and like Anybodys tries to bluster his way to their approval. But when it comes to the rumble, he's frightened beforehand, and anguished and weepy afterwards. Baby John is a small but choice role, another character…forced to grow up to fast before our eyes.[69]

Additionally, it is Baby John's best friend, A-Rab, who is beaten up and has his ear forcibly pierced by the Sharks at the beginning of the show. This angers Baby John greatly. In his youth and inexperience, Baby John is potentially the most unpredictable and dangerous of the Jets. For example, Baby John, though after the fact he is upset and regretful, is one of the gang members upset by the "fists-only" rule implemented for the rumble. He thinks weapons would make for a better fight.

Furthermore, the moment that really brings Baby John to the forefront of the villain debate is in Act II, Scene 4. In this scene, Anita arrives at Doc's store to warn Tony that Chino wants to kill him. However, before Anita can find Tony, the other Jets, still reeling from the rumble and Riff's death, taunt and harass her with racial slurs and sexual innuendo. Things quickly escalate, and Anita is physically attacked by the Jets (Figure 2.22), ending in Baby John being lifted on top of her. In several productions, including the recent 2012 national tour, Baby John, at the encouragement of his friends, proceeds to rape Anita (Figure 2.23). Arguably the most shocking and gut-wrenching moment in the play, Baby John and the others only cease their attack of Anita when Doc enters and orders them to stop. Understandably, because of what has just happened to

her, Anita does not warn Tony, and instead lies, claiming Maria has been killed. This, ultimately, leads to Tony's death only minutes later.

As an audience, we are not privy to how Baby John feels about what he did to Anita. We do not see him again until right after Tony's death. If not for one more action on the part of his character it would be easy to write him off as a total villain, particularly given what he did to Anita. After Tony's death, and Maria's speech and threats of suicide, it is Baby John who goes, picks up Maria's shawl, and gently places it on her head. It is the last interaction Maria has with another character on stage, and it is a moving one. Whether audiences can forgive Baby John for attacking Anita is still unclear (rape is a heinous act after all), but in his moment with Maria audiences may still see hope for Baby John. It is nice to think that Tony's death and Maria's impassioned plea to end the violence reformed Baby John and caused him to turn his life around.

In conclusion, after examining these three characters (Baby John, Tony, and Riff), as well as the stylized nature of the gang violence in *West Side Story* it should be evident that musical theatre, as well as how villains and heroes are defined and portrayed within the genre, was undergoing extensive changes near the end of 1950's. The explorations of death, violence, and other dark themes may have been unusual for musicals before *West Side Story*, but in the turbulent era that followed these themes would become more commonplace. In the next chapter I will explore several musicals of the post-1960s era, and illustrate why these musicals are even more clearly earmarked for sympathetic villainy than the three pre-1960s musicals ((*Show Boat, Oklahoma!,* and *West Side Story)* explored in the previous sections.

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Chapter 3
Living in the Gray: Sympathetic-Villainy from *Chicago* to *Wicked*

I. Introduction: Sympathetic Villainy in American Musicals Post-1960

In the previous chapter, I explored three early American musicals (*Show Boat*, *Oklahoma!*, and *West Side Story)*, all of which were first created and produced prior to 1960 and were all defined as traditional book musicals. In this chapter I will explore three post-1960 American musicals, all of which break, in some way, with the conventional form and/or content posited by their traditional book musical predecessors, and which exemplify sympathetic villainy in some way. These three post-1960 musicals include John Kander, Fred Ebb, and Bob Fosse's *Chicago* (1975), Stephen Sondheim and John Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), and Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman's *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* (2003), all of which successfully experiment with less conventional methods of form and/or content than their traditional book musical predecessors. Additionally, all three offer some of the most popular sympathetic stage "villains" of the past fifty years.

As previously discussed, the notion of a sympathetic villain isn't unique to any specific time period. However, from the late 1960s until very recently, American musical theatre has experienced a surge in protagonists of ambiguous virtue. Primarily through a literary analysis that contains some individual production analysis as well, this chapter explores three specific musicals--*Chicago*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Wicked*—and explains how sympathetic villainy is exemplified, if not glorified within each text and/or production. To better understand this contemporary attraction to morally ambiguous characters, one must first understand the historical context in which these musicals were produced.

II. History, Villainy, and Post-1960s American Non-Traditional Book Musicals

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s America underwent vast changes politically, socially, economically, and globally. Initially, in the 1960s, the nation experienced an unprecedented economic boom:

> Between 1961 and 1965, Kennedy's economic promise to the American people was made good with an average yearly economic growth of more than five percent. At the beginning of 1966, with Kennedy's policies fully in place the unemployment rate had dropped to less than four percent. The number of people living in poverty fell from more than one out of five in 1960 to one in seven by 1966.[92]

Nonetheless, 1960s America saw more than its fair share of violence and upheaval. Between 1963 and 1969, the nation witnessed the brutal public assassinations of not one, but four prominent American political and social figures (President John F. Kennedy [1963], Civil Rights Activist Malcom X [1965], Civil Rights Activist Martin Luther King, Jr. [1968], and U.S. Senator and Presidential Candidate Robert F. Kennedy [1968]).[93] Moreover, on the home front, tensions were sky-high as the Civil Rights Movement kicked into high gear, demanding equality for minority populations across the U.S.[94] Additionally, the United States found itself embroiled in an ongoing global conflict with the Soviet Union in attempts to stifle the spread of communism to other nations. The Cold War lasted approximately from the end of World War II (1945) until the fall of the Berlin Wall in East Germany (1989) and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union (1991). Although no direct conflict between the United States and the

Soviet Union ever occurred, bloody skirmishes and long-lasting military involvement did take place between the United States and other communist nations: Korea (War: 1950-1953), Cuba (Bay of Pigs invasion: 1961; Cuban Missile Crisis: 1962), and Vietnam (Military Conflict: 1961-1973).[95]

By the dawn of the 1970s, the economic prosperity of the early and mid-1960s began to wane, and in its place a significant recession. The internal conflicts over civil rights and women's rights, as well as the external conflicts around the globe had taken its toll on the American people. As historian Thomas Borstelmann states in his book *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality:*

> The 1970s are a decade of ill repute….The nation's core institutions seemed to be breaking down as the United States…sank into a mire of economic decline, political corruption, and military retrenchment. The last U.S. troops left Vietnam in defeat and demoralization, a new outcome for armed forces that…had little experience with outcomes other than victory. The United States withdrew from, or scaled down, much of its presence in international affairs, from Southeast Asia to Panama to Iran. Public confidence in the nation's leadership withered. Richard Nixon disgraced the office of the presidency in the Watergate scandal and became the nation's first chief executive to resign.[96]

Furthermore, Borstelmann contends that, "If the nation's military, political, and economic institutions sputtered in the 1970s, the private lives and culture of its citizens seemed equally wracked by confusion and failure."[97] In the 1970s, disillusionment and disenchantment stemming from war, political corruption, and economic distress led to a

general decline in the quality of life for many American citizens. War-weary veterans returned with severe psychological issues including PTSD, divorce rates severely increased, and the use of alcohol and other illicit drugs (marijuana, cocaine, heroin, etc.) soared. By the mid-1970s, "Americans tended to think of themselves no longer as chosen people, but more often as survivors…"[98]

These dramatic cultural, economic, and political changes not only impacted individual thoughts and ideologies, they also had a profound impact on the art world. New and experimental forms in the visual, performing, and literary arts sought to question, understand and challenge the confusing and cynical times in which they were created. Visual artists like minimalist sculptor Donald Judd, pop artist Andy Warhol, and conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth, along with performance artists like Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, and Chris Burden challenged what it meant to be an artist in the latter have of the twentieth century.[99] Musicians like Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and the Beatles found critical and commercial success by singing about the challenging times in which they lived.[100] In the world of theatre, playwrights LeRoi Jones (Black Theatre Movement), Luis Valdez (El Teatro Campesino), and Peter Schumann (Bread and Puppet Theatre) sought to incite social reform and education through their works.[101]

Musical theatre was undergoing significant changes as well. Though traditional book musicals continued to be written, produced, and commercially successful (i.e., *Bye Bye Birdie* [1960], *Fiddler on the Roof* [1964], *1776* [1969], *Grease* [1972], and *Annie* [1977]),[102] producers and writers began to rethink what it meant to be a Broadway musical, taking risks with both form and content. Starting with Joseph Papp's successful transfer of the controversial musical *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock*

Musical from his Off-Broadway Public Theatre to Broadway in 1968 fresh types of musicals (i.e. rock, concept, issue-driven, mega, pop, etc.) found initial critical, and later commercial, success on the Great White Way.

It is from these turbulent historical and innovative artistic times that the three musicals discussed in this section took their roots. Two of the three musicals, *Chicago* and *Sweeney Todd*, were both conceived and produced in the stormy 1970s, meeting with critical, if not overwhelming commercial, success. However, as Americans came to terms with, and even embraced the horrific and unsettling events of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as continued their struggle to understand the uncertain world in which they lived, both of these seemingly cynical musicals found renewed life and unprecedented popularity in the 1990s and 2000s. Additionally, they helped pave the way for the most popular Broadway musical today, *Wicked* (2003), which blends the old traditional book musical with the newer pop, mega, and concept forms, also reframes the optimistic children's story *The Wizard of Oz* into a darker, more complex story better suited for a jaded, yet cautiously optimistic twenty-first century audience.

Within these three pieces, *Chicago, Sweeney Todd,* and *Wicked,* new types of sympathetic villainy emerge, blurring the line even further between hero and villain. Therefore, in the remaining sections of this chapter I will examine each of these musicals through a critical literary analysis lens, offering examples from specific productions where appropriate.

III. *Chicago*: He had it Comin'

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the 1970s were a turbulent time in American history. According to musical theatre scholar and author John Bush Jones:

> For many Americans the 1970s were difficult times. The strides made in civil rights and women's rights and the U.S. exodus from Vietnam, notwithstanding. Watergate, Nixon's resignation, several recessions, the "energy crisis," and, late in the decade, the Iranian hostage crisis challenged many American's trust in the government and their belief that it could solve problems on a global scale. Americans began to turn their attention from the public to the private….Shaken from the '60s and depressed by the '70s, many Americans turned inward, exploring their own feelings and psyches.[103]

Bush goes on to contend that, "Self-absorption and self-analysis found theatrical expression in the fragmented musicals."[104] Fragmented, or concept, musicals are defined as ones in which the plot and characters come second to the theme and ideas presented within the show. Martin Gottfried, who coined the term "concept musical" in his 1971 *New York Times* review of the musical *Follies*, defined these types of musicals as, "a show whose music, lyrics, dance, stage movement and dialogue are woven through each other in the creation of a tapestry-like theme (rather than in support of a plot)."[105] However, it is important to note that a common misconception about concept musicals is that only musicals with no linear plot whatsoever, like Sondheim's *Company* (1970), fall under this term, when in truth there are several that have a cohesive plot, but whose primary objective is still to illustrate a particular theme rather than to simply tell a story. Jones offers the following as his definition of fragmented/concept musicals:

> The usual linear progression of incidents logically and dramatically strung together as a coherent story is replaced by what may appear to the viewer

> as a series of seemingly (and sometimes in fact) haphazardly ordered songs, dance numbers, monologues, dialogue scenes, and visual images and effects, each of which exists to convey an aspect of the musical's central theme. Hence, the actual structure or form of these musicals not only appears fragmented but *is* fragmented by design, accurately mirroring the fragmented American society of the 1970s and the anxieties of inward-turning individuals.[106]

He goes on to explain:

> Irony and paradox are key elements of some fragmented musicals, and there is also an overarching irony about form and substance in this musical genre. In a word, by depicting fragmented individuals within the shows' fragmented structures, these musicals became some of the most *integrated* musicals ever created. Their form, subject matter, songs, dances, visual presentation, and so forth work together to convey a single theme or idea.[107]

In other words, fragmented/concept musicals are theme, rather than plot driven. This does not necessarily mean that they are devoid of linear plots, fully fleshed out characters, or traditional musical styles and forms. Rather these fragmented, or concept musicals, often layer complex plots, characters, and music to create a fuller, more robust musical than their non-fragmented counterparts. Often irony, sarcasm, wit, and symbolism are used to enhance these fragmented/concept pieces, allowing them to converge on a set of themes intentionally decided upon by the creators of the musical. Many fragmented/concept musicals deal with themes that stem from self-questioning and

self-doubt.[108] For example, the primary themes dealt with in Sondheim's famous concept musical *Company* (1970) are love and commitment. The central question Sondheim and his musical posed to its audience was, "Should I or shouldn't I get married?" [109] The musical fails to answer the question, leaving it up to the audience to decipher the ambiguous ending. Like *Company*, most fragmented/concept musicals force the audience to sift through the symbols and metaphors in the piece and to decide for themselves what the "point" is. In short, fragmented/concept musicals are "thinking man's" musicals—they force the audience to put in some of the work. This is not to say that traditional book musicals are devoid of depth and complexity. As with most forms of theatre, the line between concept/fragmented musical and traditional book musical can, and often does, converge.

Furthermore, fragmented/concept musicals thrived from the late 1960s through the late 1970s and, as Jones put it, "catered to "audience narcissism," since introspective people usually enjoy watching themselves."[110] Additional examples include: *Hair* (1968), *Follies* (1971), *Godspell* (1971), *Pippin* (1972), *A Chorus Line* (1975), *Chicago (1975),* and *Working* (1978). Of these fragmented musicals, perhaps the darkest and most complex is John Kander, Fred Ebb, and Bob Fosse satire on crime and celebrity, *Chicago.*

Chicago is a concept musical, based on Maurine Dallas Watkin's 1926 non-musical play about two real life female killers. The musical uses a series of vaudeville-inspired numbers to explore what happens when a nation "celebritizes"[111] and, to a degree, glorifies immoral behavior, such as adultery, drunkenness, greed, murder, and

corruption. In fact, the "Master of Ceremonies" character fully prepares the audience for what *Chicago* offers with his opening monologue by proclaiming:

> MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Welcome. Ladies and Gentlemen, you are about to see a story of murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery,
>
> and treachery - all those things we all hold near and dear to our hearts. Thank you.[112]

With those few, but very powerful words, audiences of *Chicago* are drawn into 1920s Chicago and the lives of vicious, yet charismatic murderesses Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly. The following is a synopsis of the musical taken from the original 1975 libretto.[113]

Succeeding the opening monologue, the audience is transported to a nightclub where Velma Kelly, a vaudeville performer, sings and dances the sultry number "All That Jazz." The act is supposed to be a double one with her sister. However, the audience quickly learns that the reason Velma is performing the number alone is that she has killed her sister and her own husband just before the performance, because she discovered they were having an affair. Meanwhile, the audience is also introduced to want-to-be star Roxie Hart, who is having an affair with a married man, named Fred Casley, in hopes that he will land her a role in show business. Upon learning he has no intention of helping her career, Roxie shoots and kills Fred, and manipulates her dimwitted husband, Amos, into taking the fall for the murder. Amos tells the police that he shot the man because he was a burglar. However, Amos soon discovers the man is their furniture salesman, Fred Casely, and that Roxie has been sleeping with him. Upon learning of

Roxie's betrayal, Amos recants his story and Roxie is arrested and taken to the Cook County Jail.

At the jail, Roxie meets Matron "Mama" Morton, who through the song "When You're Good to Mama" explains the way the corrupt prison system works (i.e., Mama will do you favors, so long as you pay her enough money). Roxie also meets the other "merry murderesses," including Velma Kelly, who take turns explaining why their victim's all "had it comin'" and "they only had themselves to blame" through their rendition of the "The Cell Block Tango."[114] Velma, as the audience already knows, killed her husband and sister because she caught them in bed together; Liz, as it turns out, shot her husband because he wouldn't stop popping his gum; Annie poisoned her boyfriend because he had six wives; June stabbed her husband because of his unwarranted jealousy of the milkman; and Mona killed her boyfriend because he was cheating on her with a guy named Ira. None of the women deny they're guilty, and none show an ounce of remorse. Only the Hunyak, who speaks only Hungarian, denies she killed her lover, and is the only one who may in fact be truly innocent of murder.[115]

Roxie soon discovers that Velma Kelly is using her crime to gain publicity and increase her celebrity and notoriety. Roxie, desperate to be famous, pays Mama to get her a meeting with famed lawyer Billy Flynn. Unscrupulous Flynn, after taking Amos for everything he possesses, agrees to defend Roxie and help make her famous. Flynn spins the story so that Roxie looks like a helpless victim, drawn into a life of drinking and sex by the abusive and jealous Fred Casley. He convinces the media, including the gullible newspaper reporter Mary Sunshine via the song "We Both Reached for the Gun," that during a jealous rage Fred came after Roxie with a gun, and after a struggle, Roxie ended

up shooting him in self-defense. The press becomes enamored with Roxie, and her celebrity rises. Jealous of the attention everyone is giving Roxie, Velma attempts to broker a deal, offering Roxie her sister's old part in their Vaudeville Act, singing "I Can't Do it Alone." Roxie scoffs at the idea, feeling her fame has far surpassed Velma's and that she no longer needs or wants her friendship. As Act I closes, Roxie finds herself replaced in the media, and by Flynn, when a new, more exciting murderess comes into the picture. To hold onto the spotlight, and retain the attention of Flynn, Roxie fakes a pregnancy at the end of Act I.

Act II opens with Velma welcoming back the audience with the line, "Hello, suckers." She goes on to lament the fact that everyone is buying into Roxie's fake pregnancy, including Roxie's estranged husband, Amos, who is overcome with joy at becoming a father (though no one notices poor "Mr. Cellophane"). Roxie's ego and arrogance spiral out of control, and after an argument with Flynn, she fires him, claiming that she doesn't need him anymore. However, after the Hunyak (again, perhaps the only innocent inmate) becomes the first woman in Cook County history to be executed, Roxie becomes scared and begs Flynn to take her back. Flynn agrees and uses the old "Razzle Dazzle" to gain Roxie an acquittal from the jury, while simultaneously manipulating the system to get Velma Kelly off as well. After her verdict, Roxie's joy is short lived, as the media quickly turn their attention to yet another sensational crime. Roxie is devastated:

> ROXIE: Where are all the photographers—the reporters? The publicity? My name in the papers. I was countin' on that. I was countin' on that.
>
> BILLY: You know, your gratitude is overwhelming. But forget it, I'm only in it for the money anyway.

ROXIE: Yeah, you get five thousand dollars, and I wind up with nothin'.

BILLY: You're a free woman, Roxie Hart, and God save Illinois.[116]

Billy exits, leaving Roxie alone in the courtroom with Amos. Amos wants Roxie to come home with him so they can raise the baby together. Roxie cruelly informs him that, "There ain't no baby!"[117] As Amos sadly exits, Roxie says to herself, "They didn't even want my picture. I don't understand that. They didn't even want my picture." [118] Things, however, are not over for Roxie, as she begins to sing "Nowadays" to herself, and is then whisked away to a theatre where she and Velma Kelly are the headlining act:

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Ladies and gentleman, the Vickers Theatre, Chicago's finest home of family entertainment, is proud to announce a first. The first time, anywhere, there has been an act of this nature. Not only one little lady, but two! You've read about them in the papers and now here they are—a double header! Chicago's own killer dillers—those scintillating sinners—Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly.[119]

Chicago closes with Roxie and Velma singing and dancing their way through "Nowadays" and "Hot Honey Rag." As they take their final bows, they break the fourth wall (as they do many times during the show) and thank the audience:

VELMA: Thank you. Roxie and I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you. Not only for the way you treated us tonight, but for before this—for your faith and belief in our innocence.

ROXIE: It was your letters, telegrams, and words of encouragement that helped see us through this terrible ordeal. Believe us, we could not have

done it without you. (*As the ORCHESTRA plays the Battle Hymn of the Republic).*

VELMA: You know, a lot of people have lost faith in America.

ROXIE: And what America stands for.

VELMA: But we are the living examples of what a wonderful country this is. (*They hug and pose.)*

ROXIE: So we'd just like to say thank you and God Bless you.

VELMA and ROXIE: God Bless you. Thank you and God Bless you…[120]

The show, as one can sense from the previous synopsis, is about much more than just two women trying to get away with murder. It is Kander, Ebb, and Fosse's biting criticism and critique of celebrity and criminal culture in the United States. Scott Miller, in his book *Strike Up the Band: A New History of Musical Theatre* claims:

> Like Oliver Stone's film *Natural Born Killers, Chicago* took the form of that which it criticized….[*Chicago*] was a scathing satire of how show business and the media make celebrities out of criminals—and thereby make crime attractive….*Chicago* was a show overflowing with raw sexuality, creating a world that was shocking, frightening, intentionally offensive….Bob Fosse made theatre pieces about the decadence of our world, the lies and conceits and compromises, the deals with the devil we all make….He attacked hypocrisy wherever he saw it, even in his own work. He knew that the world of *Chicago,* in which killers are made into stars, wasn't far at all from the real world.[121]

Mockingly, Fosse and company hold a mirror up and show us that are not only we responsible for people like Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly, but our celebrity culture actually breeds people like this; people who will do anything for fame and fortune.

Employing irony and satire to demonstrate America's fascination with all things "bad," *Chicago* was a musical ahead of its time, not being fully appreciated by its 1970s audience. Perhaps, the foibles and wounds of the previous two decades were simply too fresh for audiences to truly appreciate the brilliantly dark and twisted world of Fosse and company's concept musical. Though the original Broadway production of *Chicago* (1975) was met with some critical success, eleven Tony nominations; no wins, but reviews were mixed and the show ran only for two seasons, garnering a respectable, if not memorable, 936 performances, *Chicago* faced stiff competition in 1975, opening alongside Michael Bennett's commercial and critical hit *A Chorus Line.* According to *New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley, "'Chicago' was, in a sense, the evil twin of its rival musical, as acerbic and cold-hearted as the other was sentimental and warm."[122]

Furthermore, as Jessica Sternfeld, in her article, "Revisiting Classic Musicals: Revivals, Films, Television and Recordings," had the following to say about the initial runs of Kander and Ebb's most famous musicals, "…*Cabaret* (1966) and *Chicago* (1975), had successful initial runs and became regional theatre staples, even though the world perhaps was not ready for them."[123] Sternfeld is probably correct, that 1960s and 1970s audiences weren't completely ready to embrace such an acrimonious and brutal depiction of their own society. The director of the 1996 revival *Chicago*, Walter Bobbie, seemed to concur with Sternfeld, when asked by a reporter why the cynicism was easier to take now than in the 1970s, he responded:

> It [1975] was the year of *Chorus Line.* And it was a year of the "feel good, find out who I am, share it with the world" musical, and there was this dark, nasty thing about, you know, the justice system in America in Chicago, about the abusive celebrity….[Today] we've watched incredible celebrity trials in our living rooms for the past five years. We've seen them the Menendez Brothers; we've seen O.J. So that we've absorbed that cynicism into our consciousness in some way that we're not stunned by it, but we are provoked by examining the difference between truth and justice and the law, which are clearly very different issues.[124]

Additionally, the design differences in the original 1975 production and the later, more successful, 1996 revival of *Chicago* may have also been a contributing factor to the successful latter. In examining Figures 3.1 to 3.10 one can quickly decipher the dramatic contrast in design concepts from the 1975 production to the 1996 revival. For example, the 1975 set (Figure 3.1) was an elaborate and extravagant silver plated series of platforms and stairs, whereas the current production and tour (Figure 3.2) is minimalistic, simple, and almost completely monochromatic. In Figures 3.3 through 3.10 the glaring differences in costume designs from the 1975 to the 1996 production are also apparent; with the 1975 being colorful, covered in sequins, skimpy, and exaggerated 1920s period pieces, and with the 1996 revival being entirely monochromatic in color, sleek, simple, sexy and ambiguous with regards to time period.

In his 1975 *New York Times* review for the original Fosse production, Clive Barnes explained:

> Form or content, shadow or substance—those classic alternatives of artistic endeavor had their day in court at the 46th Street Theater last night. Well, not really. For neither content nor substance were truly represented, and the result was a foregone conclusion; Bob Fosse's new musical, "Chicago," is one of those shows where a great deal has been done with very little. One might be tempted to say that never in the history of Broadway has so much been done by so many for so few final result….There is a great deal of glossiness to admire in "Chicago." We are given three superlative, knock-em-in-the-aisles performances by three stars who glitter like gold-dust all evening: Gwen Verdon, Chita Rivera, and Jerry Orbach. Even more, there is the incredibly authoritative directorial voice of Mr. Fosse (stentorian, individual, and precisely articulated), unfortunately shouting hoarsely over a desert of style. Style is everywhere: "Chicago" drips with it like a dowager with opals.[125]

Barnes' review implies that whatever substance Kander and Ebb's musical contained, seemed to get lost behind the glitz and glam of the design elements in the original production of *Chicago*. The 1975 production was clearly set in the 1920s, with period costumes and scenery that ultimately may have contributed to audiences confusing it with a traditional book musical, rather than seeing it for the theme-driven concept musical it really was. Even Gwen Verdon (the original Roxie Hart) felt this might have played a factor, commenting on why she felt the 1996 revival was more successful:

> I think the actual story and the depth of the story was covered up by all the razzle dazzle of costumes, sets, in my opinion, Bob will strike me dead,

> but this [1996 version] is a better production of that show because it really hit right between the eyes with what it's about, instead of what they're wearing. And your vision of the show is not diffused by sequins.[126]

In short, all the "Razzle Dazzle" may have bogged down the 1975 show, hindering audiences from appreciating the witty, satirical lyrics and dialogue of Kander and Ebb, and the sharp, sexy choreography of Bob Fosse.

Therefore, true appreciation and embracement of *Chicago* did not take place until more than twenty years after its initial run. With Walter Bobbie and Ann Reinking's 1996 Broadway revival, people really stood up and took notice of the show. The 1996 revival held true to the original text and, for the most part, the original choreography. However, "Most critics praised the reduction of production to its bare essentials: simple, stark sets; slinky uncomplicated black-and-white costumes; and intense full-frontal performances."[127] The scaled down design elements helped put Kander and Ebb's story and Bob Fosse's choreography center stage, and allowed audiences to see *Chicago* as it was meant to be seen: A dark satirical musical, with hints of irony, humor and high value entertainment.

As of December 22, 2013, Bobbie and Reinking's reinvention of *Chicago* was still running on Broadway, garnering 7,101 performances and making it the longest running American musical in Broadway history.[128] To date, the 1996 revival has been seen by over six million people and has grossed over $400 million in New York City alone.[129] Additionally, the success of the revival spawned an Academy Award winning film version of the musical (2002).

Moreover, the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century saw some dramatic events and developments that may account for the growth in *Chicago*'s popularity. Like the 1920s, a new wave of media driven celebrity was in full swing by the mid-1990s. The rise of cable television and the World Wide Web gave people instant, round the clock access to news all over the world. Often that news included celebrities and crime, and people liked nothing more than to combine the two. Sternfeld posits:

> When the revival opened, America had weathered the O.J. Simpson trial, teenager Amy Fisher's sensational shooting of her older lover's wife, the continuing dramas of Michael Jackson, and countless other strange comings-together of scandal, fame, the media and the justice system. *Chicago,* with its tale of media manipulation, now made perfect sense.[130]

The fascination with crime, scandal, and celebrity only increased as the twentieth century drew a close. Like the O.J. Simpson case, people were enthralled with the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky sex scandal, the Amy Fisher crime and subsequent trial, and the Tanya Harding violent ice-skating attack on Nancy Kerrigan. Celebrities became criminals and criminals became celebrities. Instead of shunning these individuals the country glorified them, giving them constant media coverage. Many people involved in those crimes/scandals, just like Roxie and Velma, were not severely punished (if they were at all), and have gone on to greatly profited from their villainous and scandalous actions. Clearly, Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly became yet another set of celebrity criminals the nation could fixate on. Strangely, however, unlike the real scandals and court cases where people rooted for those involved to be punished, the opposite became

true for the Velma and Roxie. The difference is that, in real world situations, victims of violent crime seem to be innocent and wholly undeserving of what happens to them. However, in the case of Roxie and Velma, because of the way the story is framed, audiences come to understand that both women were, in some way, provoked into killing. Neither woman committed pre-meditated murder, and both demonstrated to audiences why their victims, "had it comin'." Roxie killed Fred Casley because he had been lying to her in order to repeatedly get her into bed. Additionally, in many versions he became physically violent towards her. In the heat of the moment, Roxie finds her husband's gun and shot him. She seemed just as surprised as the audience at what she had done.

Velma, as she explains in the song "Cell Block Tango," that after she walked in on her husband and sister doing "number seventeen, the spread-eagle" that, "I was in such a state of shock, I completely blacked out. I can't remember a thing. It wasn't until later, when I was washing the blood off my hands I even knew they were dead."[131] In other words, Velma was so devastated by what has happened to her husband and sister that she ends up suffering from a form Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and completely blocked the horrific crime from her own subconscious. Even though she was obviously lying about her PTSD, clearly feeling no remorse for killing her cheating husband and traitorous sister, many audience members could sympathize with her anger and her momentary lapse in judgment, when she shot and killed her sister and husband.

In finding out why and how Velma came to be a murderess, audiences are able to understand, and possibly even sympathize with her, just as they might with Roxie. It may also help that Roxie's victim, Fred Casely, is only seen and heard from for about two minutes at the beginning of the show, and that Velma's husband and sister are never seen.

By framing the narrative around Roxie and Velma, and almost entirely excluding the victims and their side of the story, the show encourages audiences to root for the murderess women as heroes, rather than as the villains they would traditionally be. However, if one were to really stop and think, it is clear Roxie and Velma have been conning everyone, that *Chicago* and Fosse have manipulated everybody.

Deep down, audiences know Roxie and Velma are not helpless victims of poor circumstances beyond their control. The audience knows in deep down that Roxie and the other murderesses didn't have to kill, but that they chose to, and that their victims really didn't deserve to die. Audiences know that they really shouldn't like Velma or Roxie, or root for their success, but that they are having such a good time watching the murderesses sing and dance their way through the justice system that they just can't help vying for them. Audiences are played, and they love it. Fosse proved his point: That America is a nation who loves their celebrities and their criminals, and that they have little problem combining the two. Additionally, audiences' love of *Chicago* shows that maybe they are often hypocritical too, with audiences claiming to have the moral high ground, but actually relishing the greed, corruption, and outright violence illustrated by the characters in the musical.

And so the legacy and popularity of *Chicago* continues. In 2002 the major motion picture was released, starring loveable *Bridget Jones's Diary* actress Renée Zellweger and sultry *The Mask of Zorro* actress Catherine Zeta-Jones (Figure 3.11). The charm and likeability of these two well-known and congenial actresses helped catapult *Chicago* to even greater popularity and acceptance. Between the two genres (film and stage), the musical has now been firmly ensconced in the American pop-cultural cannon.

Today the musical *Chicago* is still going strong, and the film version has become a contemporary classic. People of all ages know the story and its songs. Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly were just the first in a new line of sympathetic-villains, and it seems important they are given credit for the sympathetic-villains they were instrumental in inspiring. Characters like Sweeney Todd (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street)* and Elphaba (*Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*) are a new type of sympathetic-villain who are embraced and beloved by audiences nationwide. Their stories fill the seats just as often, if not more often, than their traditional hero counterparts, and *Chicago* seems to mark the birth of this type sympathetic-villain. Just four short years after *Chicago* and its sympathetic-villainy broke new ground, Stephen Sondheim and his controversial, revolutionary musical *Sweeney Todd* (1979) would take the sympathetic villain musical to a whole new level, and demand more of its audience than any musical before it, and perhaps since.

IV. *Sweeney Todd*: They All Deserve to Die

"The more he bleeds, the more he lives. He never forgets and he never forgives. Perhaps today you gave a nod to Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street."[132]

As mentioned in the previous sections, 1960s and 1970s America was marred by a series of harsh economic, political, and social events, and by 1979, the year Hugh Wheeler and Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* debuted on Broadway, most Americans had been personally effected by the economic recession, soaring oil prices, government corruption, and the Vietnam War. Like *Chicago*, *Sweeney Todd* was more of a concept, issue-driven musical than it was a traditional book musical, and like *Chicago,* Wheeler and Sondheim's musical thriller did

not find massive commercial success nor widespread popularity until many years after its initial Broadway run.[133] *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* first premiered on Broadway in the spring of 1979, running a respectable, if not impressive 557 performances, but its popularity grew immensely over the next several decades, due to two Broadway revivals (one in 1989 and one in 2005), several national touring productions, and a 2007 major motion picture starring Johnny Depp. Combined, the three Broadway runs of *Sweeney Todd* have been viewed by nearly 400,000 people,[134] while the film grossed over $150 million worldwide.[135] Today, the story and the music of *Sweeney Todd* have become legend internationally, and the title character is one of the most beloved musical theatre villains of all time.

Just what is it, then, about *Sweeney Todd* that has captivated audiences' fascination for over thirty years? This is a difficult question to answer. Of course, at least part of the success can be attributed to Sondheim's masterful score, which is both memorable and hauntingly beautiful. However, many of Sondheim's works have this type of score, but do not find the popularity or the financial success that *Sweeney* has (see *Company* or *Assassins)*. Perhaps, then, in addition to the score, there is something about the story and the characters that have managed to captivate audiences. In analyzing the libretto, perhaps the reason contemporary audiences both sympathize and embrace Sweeney Todd will be revealed.

Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* opens with the company singing "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd," which includes the poignant lyrics that foreshadow the tale to come: "Swing your razor wide, Sweeney! Hold it to the skies! Freely flows the blood of those who moralize!" and "Sweeney pondered and Sweeney planned, like a perfect machine 'e

planned. Sweeney was smooth, Sweeney was subtle, Sweeney would blink and rats would scuttle."[136] At the end of the prologue Sweeney Todd rises from his grave and sings with the company, "Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd. He served a dark and a vengeful god. What happened then — well, that's the play, And he wouldn't want us to give it away, not Sweeney, not Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street..."

Act I begins with Sweeney Todd, a man in his forties arriving in London on a small boat with the younger and more jovial Anthony in the year 1846. The libretto indicates in the stage directions that when it comes to Todd, "There is about him an air of brooding, slightly nerve-chilling self-absorption."[137] The audience learns upon their landing in London that Anthony rescued Todd, whom he found adrift at sea. After both are sexually solicited by an old beggar woman (who seems to recognize Todd), Todd thanks Anthony for his good deed, and warns him to be careful of his own innocence and naivety while in this horrid place called London. He offers an example of the dangers of the city in the song "The Barber and His Wife":

> There was a barber and his wife, and she was beautiful. A foolish barber and his wife. She was his reason and his life, and she was beautiful. And she was virtuous. And he was —(*Shrugs*) Naive. There was another man who saw that she was beautiful, a pious vulture of the law who with a gesture of his claw removed the barber from his plate. Then there was nothing but to wait, and she would fall…[138]

After heeding Todd's warning, the pair head off in different directions.

The next scene transports the audience to Mrs. Lovett's Pie Shop on Fleet Street, an economically depressed part of London. As Todd approaches the shop, in a trance of

memories, Mrs. Lovett spies him and shrieks, “A Costumer!” She then proceeds to sing “The Worst Pies in London,” where she complains to Todd about the lack of meat available for her pies and the overall poor economic conditions of London at this time. She even claims that her competitors are using unsightly ingredients in their cooking:

> Mrs. Mooney has a pie shop, does a business, but I notice something weird —Lately all her neighbors' cats have disappeared. Have to hand it to her —Wot I calls enterprise, popping pussies into pies. Wouldn't do in my shop —Just the thought of it's enough to make you sick. And I'm telling you them pussy cats is quick. No denying times is hard, sir…[139]

Todd then inquires about the empty apartment above her shop. Mrs. Lovett tells him the story (“Poor Thing”) of young barber Benjamin Barker, who was falsely accused of crimes by the wicked Judge Turpin and shipped to a prison colony in Australia. When asked what happened to the barber’s wife and child, she informs him that the wife, Lucy, was raped by the Judge and his friend Beadle Bamford and then poisoned herself. Their infant girl, Johanna, was then adopted by Judge Turpin and raised as his own. Todd’s rage at the story reveals to Mrs. Lovett and the audience that he is in fact the tragic Figure, Benjamin Barker. Mrs. Lovett offers him the apartment above her shop and returns his old shaving blades to him, which she has kept since his wrongful imprisonment. Together they sing “My Friends,” as Todd plots his revenge against those who have wronged him and his family, and Mrs. Lovett vows to help her old friend in this quest for vengeance.

Meanwhile, across town young Anthony notices a beautiful woman sitting in a window. The same beggar woman from before informs him that the young girl’s name is

Johanna and that she is the ward of Judge Turpin. Anthony falls immediately in love with her (singing the ballad "Johanna"), not knowing her father is his friend Todd, and vows to woo her. He attempts to give her a bird, but she is frightened away by the return of Judge Turpin and Beadle. Enraged by Anthony's encounter with Johanna, the Judge threatens Anthony and tells Beadle to, "Dispose of him!"[140] Beadle then proceeds to wring the bird's neck and hands Anthony back the empty cage. Anthony more determined than ever, vows to rescue Johanna from her vile captor.

Back on Todd's side of town, he and Mrs. Lovett concoct a ruse to get Beadle to come back to Todd's for a shave. They expose renowned "Italian" barber Adolfo Pirelli's "miracle elixir" for hair loss as a fake, and Todd challenges Pirelli to a shaving contest. Todd easily wins and an impressed Beadle agrees to come to his apartment in a few days for a shave.

A few days later, as an impatient Todd waits for Beadle, young Anthony arrives to tell Todd how he has fallen in love with a lovely girl named Johanna. He asks if he can bring her to Todd's apartment once he rescues her, in order to keep her safe. Todd agrees, and after Anthony exits he and Mrs. Lovett discuss the lucky coincidence. Todd is pleased he will see her again, but laments that Anthony will soon whisk her away from London. Mrs. Lovett not-so-subtly implies he should slit Anthony's throat and then she and Todd can raise Johanna together. Todd does not appear to like the idea of killing Anthony, violently withdrawing from Mrs. Lovett. However, Pirelli and his assistant Toby enter Todd's apartment before the issue is resolved.

Mrs. Lovett takes Toby downstairs while Todd remains alone with Pirelli. Pirelli reveals that his real name is Danny O'Higgins and that he was once the apprentice of

Benjamin Barker. He knows that Todd is Barker and attempts to blackmail him. Todd strangles O'Higgins and stuffs him in a trunk until Toby is out of sight, and then he opens it and finishes O'Higgins off by slitting his throat with his razor blade.

Back at Judge Turpin's, the audience learns that Turpin has long lusted after Johanna. Consumed by his passion for the girl, he informs her he plans to make her his bride. Johanna is disgusted, and, in the duet "Kiss Me," decides to run away and elope with Anthony. Simultaneously, Beadle through the song "Ladies in their Sensitivities" suggests that Turpin visit this amazing barber he found so he can clean himself up for Johanna. Turpin agrees and heads to Fleet Street.

Just as it seems Todd finally has Turpin where he wants him, in his barber chair, Anthony bursts in to tell his friend of his plans to elope with Johanna. This enrages Turpin, who leaves and vows never to return. Devastated and angry at missing his chance at vengeance, Todd banishes Anthony and, in the song "Epiphany," vows to take his vengeance on all of humanity:

> There's a hole in the world like a great black pit and it's filled with people who are filled with shit and the vermin of the world inhabit it — But not for long! They all deserve to die! Tell you why, Mrs. Lovett, tell you why: Because in all of the whole human race, Mrs. Lovett, There are two kinds of men and only two. There's the one staying put in his proper place and the one with his foot in the other one's face — Look at me, Mrs. Lovett, look at you! No, we all deserve to die! Tell you why, Mrs. Lovett, tell you why: Because the lives of the wicked should be — made brief. For the rest of us, death will be a relief—We all deserve to die![141]

In short, Todd is going to start slitting the throats of both the rich and corrupt (who deserve death), as well as the poor (for whom death will be a blessing). Mrs. Lovett enthusiastically agrees with his plan, and decides they can use the bodies of his victims for her meat pies. The first act closes with the cannibalistic duet "A Little Priest," which finds Todd and Mrs. Lovett delighting in all of the different kinds of pies they can make once Todd starts killing again.

Act II opens back at Mrs. Lovett's pie shop, which is now booming. Even Pirelli's assistant Toby is helping serve customers, Mrs. Lovett has created a mechanical barber chair for Todd's apartment, which allows him to send the bodies of his shaving victims' right down a chute and into the basement, where Mrs. Lovett can cut them into meat for their pies. Mrs. Lovett daydreams of a life with Todd once they have made enough money in the song "By the Sea." Todd, however, seems uninterested and grows increasingly unhappy about never seeing his daughter again. Anthony also laments being parted from his dear Johanna ("Johanna Reprise").

Anthony soon discovers that Turpin has had Johanna committed to an insane asylum. Once again vowing to rescue her, Anthony enlists Todd's help in a scheme that uses the ruse of a wigmaker needing human hair to infiltrate the asylum and free Johanna. Overjoyed at the prospect of getting another chance to kill Turpin, Todd sends the Judge a letter ("The Letter") detailing Anthony's plan in hopes that Turpin will come to Todd's shop (where Anthony plans to bring the freed Johanna).

At the same time, young Toby has become suspicious of Mr. Todd, and voices his concerns to Mrs. Lovett. She proceeds to lock him in the basement where he discovers hair and finger nails in some of the pies. Upstairs Todd finally gets his hands on Beadle,

who has come to the pie shop in response to complaints about the strange smell coming from the smoke in their chimney. Todd finishes Beadle off as Mrs. Lovett makes noise in the pie shop to cover his screams. Todd pushes him down the shoot where Toby discovers his corpse. Mrs. Lovett tells Todd that Toby is onto them, and they head to the basement so that Todd can kill him.

Anthony, at the asylum, manages to free Johanna, and in doing so, the other prisoners as well. The inmates pour into the streets, proclaiming it is the end of the world. Anthony and Johanna, who is disguised as a sailor, make their way to Todd's apartment. Todd and Mrs. Lovett abandon their search for Toby when Judge Turpin approaches. Anthony leaves Johanna alone in Todd's apartment while he searches for transportation, and she hides because the crazy old beggar woman has entered the barbershop. Realizing he may miss his chance at the judge because of the old woman, Todd quickly slits her throat and pushes her down the chute. After getting the Judge in his chair and making him aware of whom he is, Todd finally enacts his revenge and violently slashes the judge throat and shoves him down the chute as well. Johanna, scared from what has just happened, emerges from hiding and is also almost slain by Todd. However, a Todd is distracted by Mrs. Lovett's screams from the basement and Johanna escapes.

In the basement, Todd finds Mrs. Lovett under attack from a fatally wounded, but not yet dead Judge Turpin. After Turpin finally dies, Todd finally clearly sees the face of the old beggar woman he recently killed. In horror, he realizes that the woman is his wife Lucy. He quickly turns to blame Mrs. Lovett, whom he feels lied about Lucy's death. Mrs. Lovett's tells him she only told him Lucy poisoned herself to spare his feelings. She

didn't want him to know that the rape had driven her mad. She also confesses that she is in love with Todd. Todd feigns calmness and forgiveness, but ultimately shoves Mrs. Lovett's into the blazing hot oven and slams the door. He then weeps over his beloved Lucy's body, dropping his razor in the process. Toby, driven mad by what he has seen in the basement, grabs the razor and kills Todd. Anthony, Johanna, and the police arrive on the scene and find the corpses of Lucy and Todd, with a deranged Toby standing over them, making the motion of a meat grinder and chanting, "Three times. That's the secret. Three times through for them to be tender and juicy. Three times through the grinder. Smoothly, smoothly…"[142]

The show ends with an epilogue that has the company reprising "The Ballad of Sweeney Todd" for the seventh and final time. At the end of the reprise both Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett rise from their graves singing, "Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd! He served a dark and a hungry god! To seek revenge may lead to hell, but everyone does it, and seldom as well as Sweeney, as Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street!"[143] In other words, reminding the audience that everyone seeks revenge, but rarely are any of us as successful at achieving it as Sweeney Todd. It is also a haunting reminder that vengeance comes with a hefty price. In the case of Sweeney Todd it cost him his sanity, his family, and his life.

Thus is the story of Sweeney Todd. However, it is important to note that the character of Sweeney Todd is not the original brainchild of Wheeler or Sondheim, but rather a mythical character infamous in England since the 19th century. Todd first appeared in the popular Victorian penny dreadful (a weekly serial that contained lurid tales) *The People's Periodical and Family Library* in an eighteen-week story called *The*

String of Pearls: A Romance (1846-1847).[144] The character of Sweeney Todd shortly thereafter appeared on the British stage in George Dibdin Pitt's *A String of Pearls, or The Fiend of Fleet Street.*[145] From there Todd became part of English folklore. According to Laurence Maslon and Michael Kantor, authors of the book *Broadway: The American Musical*: "The legend of Sweeney Todd means very little in this country [America], but in his native England, Todd is the fictional boogeyman par excellence, a cross between the Headless Horseman and Lizzie Borden."[146] However, in Christopher Bond's 1973 London play, *Sweeney Todd,* from which Wheeler and Sondheim's musical is primarily based, Maslon and Kantor argue that, "Todd was no longer an obtuse monster, but a pathetic cog in the Victorian class system; sent to a prison colony by a venal judge who uses the barber's absence to rape his wife and adopt his daughter, Todd returns to London incognito to begin a reign of terror and revenge on the man who wronged him."[147]

Wheeler and Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* is the story of a villainous barber, but it is also the story of injustice and vengeance. It is a theme-driven musical about a man who, by suffering the injustices of a cruel and unfair world, becomes a ruthless, vicious, and merciless killer. The story is unique in that it asks the audience to not only accept Todd as a killer, but also to root for his success at villainy throughout the musical. The musical banks on the audience sympathizing with a character who seeks revenge for atrocities committed against him, boldly implying that anyone of us may be capable of the same if put in a similar situation. Though Todd's vengeance ultimately costs him his life and the life of his tortured wife, audiences can't help but pity; even sympathize with, his tragic plight.

Certainly very few, if any, musicals up until the arrival of *Sweeney* had demanded such an astonishing response from its audience. To do something so unprecedented as make, by all accounts, someone completely devoid of a conscience the hero of the musical, and to make light of many unseemly issues (i.e. murder, rape, and cannibalism) was a bold and risky move. That risk was noted by critics during the initial 1979 run, which starred Len Cariou and Angela Lansbury (Figure 3.12). Robert Berkvist of the *New York Times* claimed, "One man's meat pie is another man's person—hardly the usual stuff of musical comedy, one would think. One would, except that both Mr. Sondheim and Mr. Prince, who is directing "Sweeney," have repeatedly demonstrated their abhorrence of the usual….they have encouraged theatre goers to expect the unexpected."[148] Richard Eder, another *New York Times* columnist, wrote the following in his 1979 article, "Critic's Notebook: 'Sweeney's' Dark Side:"

> Attend the tale of Sweeney Todd. Like many other things in the Stephen Sondheim musical, the title song sticks in the mind long afterward….Perhaps it is because as the show's leitmotif, it snakes its way in and out of the memory as it did through the scenes of this dark work. Darkness, and its purpose, is the question. It is why the musical, though it is doing quite well at the box office, is some way short of being a smash hit. It has something to do with the note of critical reserve that attached itself even to enthusiastic reviews—and with the decided aversion a number of sophisticated theatergoers felt on seeing it.[149]

This aversion to the "darkness" of Sondheim's musical may have helped lead to it prematurely closing a little more than a year after opening (June 1980). However,

popularity of the score and story continued to gain momentum even after the Broadway show closed, and a mere nine years later the show was revived on Broadway.

The 1989 revival garnered generally positive critical reviews, particularly for Bob Gunton (Figure 3.13), which portrayed the title role, with one reviewer saying:

> Of all the powerful moments in the American musical theater, there may be none more perverse than the Act I apex of 'Sweeney Todd.' That moment has never seemed either more moving or more sick than as played by Bob Gunton, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street, in the revival of Stephen Sondheim's musical that has arrived at the Circle in the Square.[150]

Another *New York Times* reviewer praised the 1989 revival for its scaled down setting and more "intimate feels" saying, "The York Theatre Company's stunning revival happily proves the show can be just as gripping when done as a small chamber opera. In some ways it even benefits from the more intimate scale." The same reviewer praised Gunton's performance claiming:

> …the brilliant performance of Bob Gunton in the title role, surpassing even Len Cariou's iron portrayal in the original cast. Hollow-eyed and zombie-like, ignited by an unappeasable lust for vengeance, Mr. Gunton projects an intensity that at moments borders on seizure. Even in the show's lighter moments, he remains a tense, quivering hulk, wracked with demons. And as his murderous fury escalates into a literal foaming at the mouth, he becomes a terrifying, pitiable creature who still retains enough humanity to engage compassion. Vocally Mr. Gunton has a harder, more

> gravelly tone than Mr. Cariou's more mellifluous baritone. But this harsher quality gives his solos an extra edge of crazy determination.

Sadly, audiences did not take to Gunton or the revival of *Sweeney Todd* as much as the critics did, and the show closed after a mediocre 188 performances.[151]

Sondheim and Wheeler's *Sweeney Todd* lay dormant on Broadway until its most recent revival in 2005, which starred Michael Cerveris (Sweeney Todd) and Pattie LuPone (Mrs. Lovett) (Figure 3.14). John Doyle, serving as both director and designer, mounted a unique and inventive interpretation of the musical for this revival. Not only did he pare down the size and scope of the cast, stage, and all around spectacle, he also cast ten musicians as the ten principle (and only) actors. Each actor both performs vocally and instrumentally, playing instruments that range from guitar to cello to violin (Figure 3.15). Reviewers praised the production for its minimalist set and innovative casting. Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* raved, "…because the performers are the musicians, they possess total control of those watching them in a way seldom afforded actors in musicals: They *own* the story they tell, and their instruments become narrative tools." Brantley also states, "Mr. Cerveris's stunningly realized Sweeney seems destined to haunt the nightmares of anyone who sees him….His voice has both a fiery sheen and coldness of Sweeney's silver razors. He is, in a word, magnificent. (He also plays a lovely lyric guitar)."[152] But perhaps the most accurate and insightful observation made by Brantley was the following:

> …theatregoers may find that this raw new 'Sweeney' matches their moods. For many Americans, the course of current events, at home and abroad, has engendered an attitude that has progressed beyond cynicism

> into a wondering disgust and on into a blazing anger in search of an outlet. Unreleased anger has been known to turn simply being mad into madness. Mr. Doyle's production is perfect for vicarious venting. Instead of going postal, let Sweeney do the slashing for you.[153]

In short, in post-9/11 America, the time seemed right for *Sweeney Todd.* Doyle's production may have only run 349 performances[154] (still a respectable number), but it not only spawned a highly successful national tour, it also led to an award winning and highly stylized major motion picture starring Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter (Figure 3.16) which grossed over $150 million dollars during its thirteen week release.[155] The film catapulted Sondheim and Wheeler's musical to a level of commercial and popular success it had failed to achieve in its thirty year existence as a stage musical.

To conclude this section on *Sweeney Todd*, it is worth noting that in the thirty-five years history of this musical, regardless of commercial success or the particular production, critics have had an overwhelming positive reaction to Sondheim and Wheeler's score, lyrics, and book and to the character of Sweeney Todd. One must also look to the actual text of the musical to understand why Sweeney Todd, both as a musical and a character, have not only endured, but thrived. Of the musical itself John Bush Jones, author of *Our Musicals, Ourselves: a Social History of the American Musical Theatre* believes that the *Sweeney Todd's* use of traditional revenge conventions (i.e. elements such as the hero returning from afar, the hero seeking vengeance for the great injustice put upon him by another, and the hero slipping into madness whilst pursing his vengeance, used in classic revenge tragedies like *Hamlet)* contributed to the acceptance of Todd as the protagonist, and the success of the musical as a whole:

> That *Sweeney's* use of revenge conventions had its desired effect is clear from the audience reaction to Todd. No turning away from him in fear and loathing as from an unregenerate serial killer in a Hollywood slasher. No laughing at him, except where appropriate, as a comically deranged murderer in a parody melodrama. To the contrary, the audience I was in was so moved by how deeply Todd had been wronged that when the vile Judge Turpin slipped from his grasp in act 1, audible boos, hisses, and groans broke out from a presumably sophisticated press-night audience. When Todd finally 'did in' Turpin in act 2, the audience applauded and cheered.[156]

Jones discovered, as others before and after him, that Todd is in fact a sympathetic-villain, even, perhaps, an empathetic character; that his motives for killing are based in the need to avenge a great wrong done to him by another. Jones also claims, "…many [real] people, like Sweeney, feel disempowered and without access to 'the system' so that the only choices left are despair or desperate action." [157] In essence, audiences, and people in general, tend to understand, even if they would never personally do so, taking the law into your own hands when there really seems to be no other option.

When audiences learn that Todd's wife, child, and freedom were taken from him for unjustified reasons, they, quite understandably, clamor to defend his actions. Why? Perhaps, because, as Jones suggests, the need for revenge is relatable to most, if not all, people, at least in some capacity.[158] In finding something relatable in Todd, the character, audiences found a way to sympathize with his situation, and thus a way to root for him to succeed, even if that meant rooting for him to do atrocious things, like slitting throats and

selling them as 'meat pies' to Mrs. Lovett's costumers. In summation, *Sweeney Todd,* despite having the odds stacked against it, obtained popular and critical success, not only with a villain in the role of protagonist, but, at least in part, because of it.

V. *Wicked*: No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

As discussed in the previous sections both *Chicago* and *Sweeney Todd* found substantially more commercial and popular success in the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century than they did during their initial runs in the 1970s. It seems as though a zeitgeist formed during the 1990s and 2000s that allowed Americans to gain a greater appreciation for darker, more satirical art forms, particularly in film and on stage, than they had in years past. No longer wearing the rose-colored glasses of hope of the 1940s and 1950s, but also no longer feeling the overwhelming shock, rawness, and despair of the 1960s and 1970s, American society, by the mid-1990s, was regaining its footing. After working through some growing pains in the 1980s, the 1990s/2000s found Americans both cautiously optimistic and yet somewhat cynical and detached. In the 1980s they had attempted to return to the "small town" conservative values of the 1940s and 1950s by electing Ronald "The Great Communicator" Regan to the presidential office for not one, but two terms:

> For some, the 1980s meant an era of grand prosperity characterized by a political leader who symbolized a nostalgic 1950s view of America—patriotism, conservative family values, and conspicuous consumption—Ronald Reagan. For those on the other end of the socioeconomic scale, the decade represented a time of great despair….To these people, the numbers of homeless who slept in the streets (by some estimates 350,000),

> and the countless ill felled by a new, unknown virus made the president's emphasis on conservative family values appear to be a reflector, bent on catching the light in such a way as to blind others to the realities of the culture.[159]

By the 1990s, most of America realized that there was no returning to the so-called "good old days" of the 40s and 50s, because those days never really existed in the way many wished they had. Just like any other time in American history, the 1940s and 1950s had their share of problems, particularly for poor and minority populations, and that in trying to return to that way of life in 1980s was ultimately a step backward. In the 1990s Americans looked to the future, but they did so with a jaded cynicism that urged them to tread lightly. With a Democrat, Bill Clinton, in the white house hoping to make positive social reforms, an economy on the rise, and a new technological age booming (thanks to the World Wide Web and cellular telephones), Americans had reason to hope. However, they knew they were not immune to hardships and flaws within their society (i.e. the Clinton Sex Scandal, the Gulf War in the Middle East, and domestic terrorism in the forms of the Unabomber and the Oklahoma City Bomber).[160] In short, the nation was experiencing its share of up and downs, and its citizens, perhaps for the first time, were willing to accept their country was not perfect, and never was. Many were more willing to accept that Americans are human, and that human beings are flawed. They started to recognize that social injustice still exists, that the world is not perfect, and that people are rarely ever all good or all evil.

As America entered the new millennium, however, that cautious optimism was shattered on a warm, clear Tuesday in September of 2001. The terrorist attacks on 9/11

struck fear into the hearts of every American man, woman, and child, and helped kick off the "War on Terror," America's longest war (over twelve years and counting). The world Americans thought they knew, the world where they were safe from the violent terrorism than ran rampant in the rest of the world, no longer existed.

In response, Americans, in the immediate post-9/11 world, wanted nothing more than comfort food for their ailing souls. As is usually the case, the arts helped provide this comfort. The most popular films in the years immediately following the attacks were overwhelmingly happy and nostalgic, many being sequels or remakes of familiar American stories and characters. The top grossing movies in 2002/2003 included the sequels/remakes, all with clear depictions of "good" and "evil," *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones* (2002), *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) and the uplifting, family films *Spiderman* (2002), *Scooby-Doo* (2002), *Elf* (2003), *Finding Nemo* (2003), and *Cheaper by the Dozen* (2003).[161]

On television, *American Idol* premiered in 2002, and harkened back to the days of *Star Search* (a hugely popular program in the 1980s), where the youth of America could put their talents on display. Each week young American men and women sang classic and contemporary pop hits and each week Americans tuned in by the millions to vote for their favorites. By 2003, *Idol* was the number one show in the nation every week it aired.[162] *Idol* offered the people a way to be proud of their nation (its display of talented American youth and art), and an escape from the seriousness of 9/11 and the war.

Perhaps no place was more affected by 9/11 than New York City. The city, which lost over 2,500 citizens and emergency personal when the twin towers fell, became the focal point of the nation's fear and grief in the weeks and months following the attacks. That fear and grief led to a sharp decline in New York City tourism, business, and trade. The stock market took a sharp dive, with the New York City Stock Exchange was forced to close for several days following the attacks, and many (roughly 18,000) small businesses in the vicinity of the towers were forced to temporarily or permanently close. According to Gail Makinen, a specialist in economic policy, in her 2002 report to Congress entitled "The Economic Effects of 9/11: A Retrospective Assessment," the attacks on the trade center would ultimately cost the New York City economy 100 billion dollars and would require substantial amounts of federal aid to recover.[163]

The New York Theatre District was, of course, not immune to these economic repercussions. Maslon and Kantor, authors of *Broadway: The American Musical:*

> The cataclysm of the World Trade Center attacks sent shock waves through the Theater District five miles uptown. Many Off Broadway theaters downtown were disrupted for months, and on Broadway, houses were dark for an unprecedented two days. Times Square was nearly deserted. When, at the insistence of Mayor Giuliani and Schuyler Chapin, commissioner of cultural affairs, the theaters reopened on September 13, the drop in attendance at some shows was as great as 80 percent.[164]

In response, the "I ♥ NY" campaign was restarted (the original campaign to bring tourism back to New York started in 1977), with many Broadway actors and other celebrities filming a national commercial (singing Kander and Ebb's "New York, New York" in

Time Square), to encourage people to overcome their fear and grief and return to the theatre for some much needed escapist entertainment.[165] This coupled with other promotions, resident New York and tourist theatre goers slowly, but surely, trickled back into the Broadway theatre houses. Ultimately, the box office receipts for the 2001-2002 season were only slightly less than the 2000-2001 season, and in the 2002-2003 season they saw an impressive 11% increase.[166]

Broadway audiences, however, were very particular about the type of shows they wanted to see immediately following 9/11. Like their film and television counterparts, fans of the Broadway musical longed for light, entertaining fair that brought a sense of escape and nostalgia. The top grossing Broadway show of 2002 was Mel Brook's 2001 musical *The Producers*, a light- hearted musical about two guys trying to create the biggest musical flop in Broadway history. The other top grossing shows of the 2002/2003 season included Disney's long running hit *The Lion King*, the Abba pop hit *Mamma Mia*, and the revivals of the classics *42nd Street* and *Oklahoma!* [167] Darker, more cynical musicals like *Chicago* (which continued to run) and *Sweeney Todd*, fell, at least temporarily out of favor.

However, in 2003 a musical phenomenon hit Broadway that appealed to both the sensitive post-9/11 audience and to the fan of the cynical, jaded style of musicals made popular in the 1970s. Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman's *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* (2003) took the Gregory Maguire's 1995 novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West.* Maguire's novel, in turn, took its source material from L. Frank Baum's classic children's tale *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), and offered a prequel to the famous story. The musical, like Maguire's novel, reframed the

narrative, making the Wicked Witch of the West the protagonist instead of the antagonistic villain she was in other interpretations and adaptations of Baum's story. The following is a summary of Schwartz and Holzman's musical *Wicked*.

Act I of *Wicked* begins with the citizens of Oz (a fictitious land located "somewhere over the rainbow") celebrating the demise of the dreaded Wicked Witch of the West ("No One Mourns the Wicked"). Just as in Baum's version, the evil witch was "melted' when Dorothy of Kansas (the heroine of Baum's novel) threw a bucket of water on her. Glinda, the Good Witch of the North, another familiar Baum character, arrives via bubble to address those at the celebration. When a young girl in the crowd asks Glinda why wickedness happens Glinda poignantly responds, "That's a good question. One that many people find confusifying: Are people born Wicked? Or do they have Wickedness thrust upon them?"[168] From there the audience is taken into a series of flashbacks that show just how the green woman named Elphaba became the infamous Wicked Witch of the West.

Produced from a secret affair her mother had with a "mysterious man" who seduced her with a special green elixir, Elphaba emerges from her mother's womb with bright green hue to her skin. Her mother's husband, the governor of Munchkinland, who is unaware of his wife's unfaithfulness, is disgusted by his new green daughter, and has her taken away from his sight.

The show picks up years later when Elphaba, now a teenager, arrives with her younger sister, Nessarose, at Shiz University. Their father, who blames Elphaba for Nessarose's disability (she is wheelchair bound) and the death of their mother, demands she stay at the University with Nessarose and be her caregiver. Elphaba, who loves

Nessarose, is happy to care for her sister, even if she does not fit in with the other students at Shiz herself. In particular, Elphaba immediately finds herself at odds with the popular crowd headed by the bubbly blonde girl named Galinda , with a "Ga." Much to her horror, however, Elphaba learns from Madame Morrible, the headmistress that she will have to room with Galinda instead of her sister. Elphaba gets so upset that she loses control and "something magical occurs."

Morrible immediately recognizes the magical occurrence as a rare talent and informs Elphaba that she should pursue a career in sorcery. Moreover, Morrible feels that she must inform the Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz at once of Elphaba's gift. Having been a social outcast her whole life, Elphaba, for the first time, beams with pride and confidence, singing of glorious day when she will meet the Wizard (the power ballad "The Wizard and I") and how now her, "future is unlimited."[169] Additionally, she foresees a time "when there will be a celebration throughout Oz that is all to do with her" and that she and the Wizard will be a powerful team.

First, though, she has to survive her new roommate, the superficial and overly peppy Galinda. The two voice their distaste for each other in the song "Loathing," where it becomes clear the other students at Shiz favor Galinda over Elphaba, and feel horrible their leader has to room with such a vile person as Elphaba.

The taunting and ostracism of Elphaba carries over into the classroom. Elphaba's only friend seems to be Dr. Dillamond, a goat, who teaches history and politics at the school. Through their conversations, Elphaba learns of the strange and bad things that are starting to happen to the Animals in Oz. He informs her that many of his Animal

friends are losing their ability to speak and that he is also finding recent struggles with language.

Meanwhile, a new student arrives at Shiz. Winkie Prince Fieyro, an attractive young man with a scandalous reputation, causes quite a stir with his "Dancing through Life" number, which leaves Galinda and the other popular girls head-over-heels in love with him. Elphaba, however, is less than impressed. Fieyro plans an outing to the "most swankified place in town," the Ozdust Ballroom. Galinda plans to go as Fieyro's date, but is also asked by the munchkin Boq. Her reputation as the "queen of nice" prohibits her from flat out rejecting Boq. Instead, she pawns him off on Nessarose, telling him it would mean a lot to her if he took the disabled girl out for a night of fun. Nessarose, unaware of this scheme, is smitten with Boq after he asks her out. Also unaware of Galinda's selfish motives, Elphaba starts to soften towards her roommate. Galinda and her friends, however, trick Elphaba into wearing an ugly black "witch" hat to the party, but Galinda regrets this when she learns Elphaba convinced Morrible to grant her entry into the same sorcery class as Elphaba.

Elphaba, in the meantime, has become aware of Galinda's cruel hat trick (everyone is taunting and teasing her when she arrives at the ballroom), but she refuses to be defeated and starts to awkwardly dance by herself. In a show of solidarity, Galinda joins her on the dance floor. The girls return to their dorm room as new friends. Galinda informs Elphie, as she now calls her, that she is going to help her become popular ("Popular"), and proceeds to give her a makeover and tips on how to be someone everyone will like, singing, "And tho' you protest your disinterest I know clandestinedly,

you’re gonna grin and bear it, your new-found popularity….You’ll be popular, just not quite as popular as me!” [170]

Back in Dillamond’s class, Morrible and Ozian officials enter and inform Dillamond that Animals are no longer permitted to teach and that he is to be removed at once. One of the officials takes over the class and shows the class a new cage they have created to keep the Animals in. Inside the cage is a lion cub, who is obviously terrified and in pain. Elphaba gets so upset she involuntarily casts a spell over everyone in the class except Fieyro. She and Fieyro then steal the cage and head out to set the cub free. During the process, Elphaba realizes she has unexpectedly developed romantic feelings for Fieyro. However, she feels he would never fall for someone like her. She also knows he and her new friend Galinda are a now a couple.

Unaware of what Elphaba has done with the cub, Morrible approaches her with the exciting news that the Wizard of Oz wishes to meet her. Elphaba invites Galinda to come with her, and shortly thereafter Galinda and she travel to the Emerald City. While there, exploring the city, the two girls solidify their status as best friends (“One Short Day”). At the end of the day they finally meet the Wizard. He and Morrible offer Elphaba an ancient book called *The Grimmerie*, which contains the lost language of spells. Elphaba, the only one who can read from it, is tricked by the Wizard into casting a spell that causes the monkeys in the room to sprout wings. Horrified, Elphaba grabs *The Grimmerie* and flees the room. Galinda follows after her.

In the climatic end of the first act, Galinda begs Elphaba to return to the Wizard’s side and Elphaba begs Galinda to run away with her. In the song “Defying Gravity” the two girls realize that they are at an impasse, and that things cannot go back to the way

they were, with Galinda choosing to maintain her popularity and stay with the Wizard, and Elphaba choosing to rebel and strike out on her own. Elphaba, aware that the Wizard will use Morrible and his public relation skills to vilify her declares the following as the guards burst in on her and Galinda:

> [Speaks as she "flies" to the top of the theatre on her broomstick] It's not her you want it's me! It's meee! [Sings] So if you care to find me look to the western sky. As someone told me lately: "Ev'ryone deserves the chance to fly." And if I'm flying solo at least I'm flying free. To those who'd ground me, take a message back from me: Tell them how I am defying gravity. I'm flying high, defying gravity, and soon I'll match them in renown. And nobody in all of Oz, no Wizard that there is or was, is ever gonna bring me down![171]

The curtain falls as Galinda and the guards watch Elphaba hover above them, preparing to depart with the Wizard's precious *Grimmerie.*

Act II picks up sometime later, with Elphaba's reputation as the Wicked Witch of the West firmly established. She has become infamous throughout Oz for her supposed villainy and evil sorcery. Galinda, meanwhile, has dropped the "Ga" from her name and become "Glinda the Good," an official title bestowed on her by Morrible and the Wizard. Using her as a P.R. tool, Glinda has become the hero to Elphaba's villain. The people of Oz adore her. In the opening scene she addresses an adoring crowd, telling them that today is a day of celebration ("Thank Goodness"). She receives her new title and then informs the crowd that she and Fieyro plan to marry. The joyous event is meant to detract from Elphaba and her attempts to help the Animals of Oz survive the wrath of the

Wizard, who is blaming both them and Elphaba for anything and everything bad that happens in Oz. Glinda seems uncomfortable with her part in this political ruse, but goes along with it. Fieyro, on the other hand becomes disgusted with the whole thing and walks out on Glinda and the celebration.

Over in Munchkinland, the audience witnesses a uniformed Boq waiting on Nessarose, who, because her father has died, is now the Governor of Munchkinland. Terrified of losing Boq, she has used her powerful position to force him to stay with her, even though he has now become cold and detached from her. Because of this Nessarose has become bitter and misuses her power to suppress and torment the people of Munchkinland. She soon becomes known as the Wicked Witch of the East (the familiar character from Baum's novel).

Elphaba, upon learning of their father's death and Nessarose's new position, returns home in hopes that Nessarose will help her out of the mess with the Wizard. She uses *The Grimmerie* to cast a spell on Nessarose's silver shoes, causing them to turn ruby red (again, the same one's made famous in Baum's novel). The new shoes allow Nessarose to walk, which Nessarose thinks will make Boq love her. Boq, however, informs her that he never loved her, that he loves Glinda, and now that she doesn't need his help anymore he is free to leave to pursue Glinda. Nessarose becomes enraged and rashly uses *The Grimmerie* to cast a spell that causes Boq's heart to start to physically shrink. Realizing her error, she begs Elphaba to save Boq's life. Elphaba does what she can, turning Boq into Baum's famous Tin Man, a silver tin creature who can live without a heart. Nessarose ultimately blames Elphaba for everything that just occurred. Elphaba then departs, realizing her sister will never help her now.

She returns, alone, to the Wizard's lair in the Emerald City, hoping to free the winged monkeys, whom she feels responsible for. The Wizard catches her, but instead of calling the guards he tries, once again, to persuade her to join him (through the song "Wonderful"), singing the following when she calls him out as a liar:

> The truth is not a thing of fact or reason. The truth is just what ev'ryone agrees on. Where I'm from, we believe all sorts of things that aren't true. We call it—"history." A man's called a "traitor"—or "liberator," A rich man's a "thief"—or "philanthropist." Is one a "crusader"—or "ruthless invader?" It's all in which label is able to persist. There are precious few at ease with moral ambiguities, so we act as though they don't exist. They call me "wonderful," so I *am* wonderful. In fact, it's so much who I am it's part of my name, and with my help, you can be the same![172]

Elphaba is almost convinced, especially after he agrees to let the monkeys go. However, when he releases the monkeys from their cages, Elphaba discovers among them is her dear friend Dr. Dillamond who is a shell of his former self and who can no longer speak. With renewed vigor, Elphaba promises the Wizard that she will fight him until the day she dies. The Wizard summons the guards. Upon hearing the commotion, Fieyro and Glinda enter. Glinda rushes to embrace her old friend, but stops short as she hears Fieyro declare he plans to leave with Elphaba and that he is in love with her. Fieyro and Elphaba manage to escape, leaving a heartbroken Glinda with the Wizard and Morrible. In her hurt and anger, Glinda reveals to them that the best way to trap Elphaba is through her sister, Nessarose. Morrible then cooks up a terrible storm, which causes a tornado to

lift a house from another land and bring it to Oz (just as Dorothy's house in Kansas was transplanted in Baum's novel).

While on the run, Fieyro and Elphaba finally consummate their love ("As Long as You're Mine"). Shortly after, however, they witness Morrible's storm and the flying house, which is barreling towards Munchkinland. Elphaba and Fieyro rush off to see what has happened. The musical skips past the famous Baum scene where the house kills the Wicked Witch of the East (Nessarose), Dorothy is given the witches' ruby slippers by Glinda, and is then sent off to see the Wizard of Oz. *Wicked*, the musical, picks up immediately after, with Elphaba confronting Glinda. Elphaba blames Glinda for the death of her sister, and Glinda blames Elphaba for stealing Fieyro. Realizing it's a trap; Fieyro protects Elphaba, allowing her to escape while he is captured by a mob led by the Tin Man, Boq. A freed Elphaba frantically tries to think of a way to save Fieyro from the angry mob. She tries different chants from *The Grimmerie*, but in her desperation becomes discouraged and sings "No Good Deed," in which she declares that since she couldn't help anyone by doing good things, she will become the villain the Wizard has made her out to be. Unbeknownst to her, she was able to save Fieyro, who turned into a Scarecrow, thus surviving the brutal beating from the mob.

Glinda, realizing her mistake, goes to Kiamo Ko Castle where Elphaba has been hiding with her monkeys, and attempts to make things right. She too believes Fieyro is dead. Elphaba, realizing her own limitations (the mob is approaching), begs Glinda, through the duet "For Good," to take over her crusade to help the Animals and bring down the Wizard, but to never try to clear her name. She will remain the Wicked Witch of the West, a symbol of what can happen if you do awful things to people and the fate

you face if you do so. Glinda agrees, telling Elphaba how much she has meant to her, and the two embrace. The mob enters, and Glinda hides as she witnesses the mob "melt" her friend. After the mob leaves she rushes to where Elphaba fell, and all she finds is Elphaba's hat and a small green bottle.

Glinda returns to Oz, where she confronts the Wizard with Elphaba's hat and green bottle. The Wizard realizes that the green bottle is the same as the one that contains the green elixir he uses to sleep with women, and then realizes Elphaba was his daughter. He sinks to his knees, heartbroken that he ordered the assassination of his own child. Glinda tells him he is going to take his leave of Oz, and that she is going to have the balloon that brought him here from Kansas readied to take him back home. He doesn't protest. Glinda then orders the guards to arrest Morrible and to take her away.

The flashbacks end, and the audience returns to the beginning of the show with the celebration of the death of the Wicked Witch, and Glinda arriving in her bubble. However, the audience now has an understanding of the story that the Ozians are never privy too. Glinda tells them that the frightening time is over, but keeps her promise to Elphaba not to attempt to clear her name, thus leaving her a symbol of what happens when one succumbs to wickedness. Glinda begins to sing a reprise of "For Good," and the audience witnesses something she and the other Ozians do not, that Elphaba did not melt. Elphaba faked her own death, and is in fact alive and well. She and Fieyro reunite and leave Oz forever, never letting anyone know they survived, not even there old friend Glinda. The show ends with Glinda and Elphaba separately singing the line, "Because of you I have been changed for good," and the people of Oz singing, "No one mourns the wicked…Wicked…Wicked!"[173]

Although the show stemmed from a classic tale, it did not meet with immediate critical success. In fact, most critics initially detested the musical itself, while still praising the charms of the musicals two leading ladies, Kristin Chenoweth and Idina Menzel (Figures 3.17 and 3.18). Critics' negative reviews ranged from, "*Wicked* does not, alas, speak hopefully for the future of the Broadway musical" in *The New York Times* to, "Overproduced, overblown, confusingly dark and laboriously ambitious jumble" in *Newsday*.[174] On the flip side, *New York Times* reviewer Ben Brantley raved about Chenoweth and Menzel saying, "She [Chenoweth] provides the essential helium in a bloated production that might otherwise spend close to three hours flapping its oversized wings without taking," and, "Idina Menzel, the vulpine powerhouse…here brings her larynx of steel to the role of Glinda's dearest rival, Elphaba…"[175]

Even with the mixed reviews, *Wicked*, Chenoweth, and Menzel quickly became the biggest hits on Broadway. Today the show, though its original two stars have long since moved on, is the third highest grossing Broadway musical of all time (behind Disney's *The Lion King* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera)* and continues to pack houses ten years into its run on the Great White Way.[176] Since opening on Broadway in the fall of 2003, *Wicked* has been viewed by more than five million people at the George Gershwin Theatre in New York City and has grossed over $500 million domestically.[177] In *Wicked: The Grimmerie*, Marc Platt, the show's producer, developed the following hypothesis as to why *Wicked* has been so popular with its audiences*:*

> This witty, engrossing fantasy upset ideas about the world created by L. Frank Baum [*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz]* in 1900. In its sensibility and

> moral seriousness, the book [*Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West,* the 1995 novel by Gregory Maguire], an untold history of the Wicked Witch, was both playful and firmly intellectual….*Wicked* explores the nature of good and evil and allows for us to understand how politics, history, and circumstances conspire to create misplaced labels – how those labels distort the way we view the past and inform the way we approach the future.[178]

Platt's observations about the "moral seriousness" and "the nature of good and evil" within the musical seem most intriguing, especially considering the musical takes one of the most well-known villains in western pop-culture, the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*, and turns her into not only a sympathetic character, but also into the heroine of the entire story.

What changed, then, between *The Wizard of Oz* and *Wicked* that allowed for audience members to find love and sympathy for the witch they had once so loathed? The answer, perhaps, lies in the different ways in which the two versions of the story are framed, and therefore in the way the audiences' cognitively process the two distinctive semiotic representations of what is fundamentally the same character. In *The Wizard of Oz,* the 1900 novel, the 1904 musical based upon Baum's novel, and the famous 1939 film starring Judy Garland, no back-story and very little personal information is given about the Wicked Witch of the West. In fact, in neither version does she sing, let alone have her own solo song; a sharp contrast to the multiple musical solos she has in *Wicked*. Audiences aren't even given her name in the earlier versions. The only information given about her in non-*Wicked* versions appears to be the following: 1) Her sister, the

Wicked Witch of the East, was killed by a young girl named Dorothy from the unknown land of Kansas, who's house fell out of the sky during a freak tornado and flattened this notorious villain, a fact that the native Munchkinlanders are more than happy about (in fact they devote a six minute song medley (film version) to expressing their abundant glee over the death, though not once do they mention what it this woman did them that made them hate her so); 2) that she and Glinda the "Good Witch" of the North have a long, contentious, yet unexplained relationship; 3) that she is willing to do anything to get her dead sister's ruby slippers away from Glinda and Dorothy; 4) that she lives in a castle with a bunch of flying monkeys and soldiers called "winkies" who follow her every command without question; 6) she seems to have a fatal allergy to water; and 7) she is, above all else, completely "wicked" (though what wickedness she has done before Dorothy arrives and accidentally kills her sister is never revealed to Dorothy or to the audience).

In both the stage and film version, audiences are asked to have no sympathy for this "wicked" witch. For instance, in the famous 1939 film version actress Margaret Hamilton created arguably the most iconic version of "The Wicked Witch of the West," one that strikes fear in the hearts of children even to this day (Figure 3.19). Paul Driscoll, in his article "The Witching Hour" reiterates this sentiment, "…[the] idea of sheer, galloping terror was watching Margaret Hamilton cackle her way through *The Wizard of Oz* on television, her bony fingers, hatchet-faced profile and spectacular black hat setting forever in my mind what a wicked witch was supposed to look like."[179] As Driscoll points out, not only is Hamilton's wicked witch evil and ugly on the inside, she is physically

unattractive on the outside as well, with crooked teeth, giant warts, a pointy nose and pasty green skin.

This is a stark contrast to Idina Menzel's portrayal of the same character in *Wicked* (Figure 3.20). In *Wicked*, Elphaba (aka The Wicked Witch of the West) is still green, yet beautifully so, with flawless contoured skin in differing emerald shades, big doe eyes, a rosy glow on her cheeks, and perfectly straight teeth. Additionally, Menzel's witch costume is given more depth and glamour than Hamilton and other previous inceptions. Once morphing into the "Wicked Witch of the West" in Act II Elphaba still dons the signature black dress and hat, but with a high fashion, detailed and tailored look to it (and just a hint of sparkle) (Figure 3.22). Even Menzel's broom is more stylish than Hamilton's.

Furthermore, Hamilton's witch has a scratchy and "scary" voice, and does not sing during the duration of the film, which is the mode by which the other characters express themselves and garner audience sympathy and understanding. Menzel's Elphaba on the other hand has a powerful and elegant voice, and sings not one, but several songs (three solos, and four duets). In short, *Wicked* is not just Elphaba's story, it truly is her *musical*. This is the exact opposite of *The Wizard of Oz*, where the story belongs to Dorothy, the sweet farm girl from Kansas.

In Baum's novel, the 1939 film, and countless stage productions of *The Wizard of* Oz, the story is framed around Dorothy, with little known about the villainous wicked witch (if she is even included in the story at all), other than she wants vengeance for the death of her sister and the theft of her ruby slippers (not wholly unreasonable things to seek vengeance for). Audiences, at the beginning of the story, have no knowledge of

what makes her so "wicked," other than she's physically unattractive and the Munchkins are terrified of her. However, perhaps it is because of how the Baum story is framed, audiences do seem willing to accept her "wickedness" without question. In fact, many audience members tend to rejoice with much the same merriment as the munchkins and Glinda when each Wicked Witch meets their untimely demise. The narrative framework of Baum's novel and later stage and film versions of *The Wizard of Oz* do not leave room for questioning the witch's wickedness, thus removing any moral ambiguity from the story. Most audiences seem more than okay with this, never questioning where the Wicked Witch came from or what makes her wicked.

Gregory Maguire, author of *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, however, never felt comfortable with accepting the witches (both The Wicked Witch of the West and her deceased sister, The Wicked Witch of the East) in *The Wizard of Oz* as evil without knowing how and why they were this way:

> Gregory Maguire always had a problem with *The Wizard of Oz.* While most children joyfully (and unquestioningly) followed the adventures of Dorothy, Toto, and their peculiar straw, tin and leonine protectors through the magical realm of Oz, the future novelist dwelled on the tale's moral implications. Why did the Wizard command Dorothy to kill the Wicked Witch? Merely because she was wicked, with a capital W?....By age 39, Maguire—then a successful author of a dozen children's novels—knew that the time had come to pen a book that explored the darker corners of Oz, to find out if that infamous black-clad crone on the broomstick was actually misunderstood. [180]

Maguire's novel, as with the musical, does not attempt to change the plot of Baum's novel, but rather seeks to reframe the narrative, focusing on events that happen before and concurrently to those in the original tale, elaborating on and redefining the relationships within it.

In the novel and the musical *Wicked*, the audience is privy to the Wicked Witch of the West's back-story, relationships, and personal motives for doing the things she does. Not only does the audience learn her name isn't actually just "The Wicked Witch of the West," rather it is Elphaba (a fact that humanizes her), they also discover she was not always this "wicked" person, nor is she completely unjustified in becoming less "good" just prior to Dorothy's arrival in Oz.

It is not until midway through the second act that the pivotal moment where Elphaba transforms from "good" to "wicked" even occurs. Before that moment she is a sweet, compassionate and awkward girl who wants nothing more than to help others, but is never quite able to. It is after facing a lifetime of rejection, misconception, and loss that Elphaba finally snaps (her lover Fieyro being tortured by former friends and classmates is the final straw). Upon succumbing to her wickedness she sings the pivotal song "No Good Deed:"

> One question haunts and hurts. Too much, too much to mention…Was I really seeking good, or just seeking attention? Is that all good deeds are when looked at with an ice-cold eye? If that's the reason why…let all Oz be agreed: I'm wicked through and through. Since I can't succeed Fieyro, in saving you, I promise no good deed will I attempt to do again, ever again. No good deed will I do again![181]

In short, after attempting, then failing to help those she loves (i.e. going to a school where everyone mocks and ridicules her because her unloving father wants her to take care of her sister, Nessarose, later the Wicked Witch of the East; then giving that same handicapped sister magic shoes so she can walk again only to have that sister spurn and reject her; then attempting to help keep the Animals of Oz from being oppressed and enslaved only to accidentally cause them more harm; and finally, befriending her roommate Galinda only to have Galinda betray her when the boy they both love, Fieyro, chooses to be with Elphaba over her), Elphaba feels forced to become the villain everyone in Oz already believes her to be. From this point forward, the character embarks on the same dark path as the original Baum villain, seeking vengeance for the death of her ungrateful sister and the return of the ruby slippers from the strange foreign girl Dorothy.

In summation, instead of rejecting Elphaba, however, audiences of *Wicked* have learned to sympathize with the bad deeds she commits against Dorothy, Glinda, the munchkins, and all the others who have wronged her. Why? Because after being voyeurs, watching her life, from birth forward, unfold on stage, audiences have come to know who she really is, and in short, are able to find justification for her villainy. In other words, audiences of *Wicked* may find themselves relating to Elphaba's feelings of not belonging, of always trying to do the right thing but failing, or to being shunned for being different, things that were not asked or expected of them in when viewing Baum version. In *Wicked* the villain becomes the hero, and audiences love it.

VI. Summary, Conclusions, and Where to Go from Here

To conclude, this thesis sought to join the emerging scholarly discourse on American musical theatre, and more specifically to begin a discourse on sympathetic villainy within the context of the American musical. Furthermore, the fundamental question posed within the proceeding chapters was: What are the defining characteristics of American musicals that contain sympathetic villainous characters? To answer this question, I examined six specific American musicals that spanned from the birth of the traditional book musical in the 1920s through contemporary explorations in the genre, each which contained varying degrees of sympathetic villainy. From Gaylord Ravenal in *Showboat* (1927) to Jud Fry in *Oklahoma!* (1943)*;* from various Sharks and Jets gang members in *West Side Story* (1957) to six merry murderesses in *Chicago* (1975); and from the vengeful barber Sweeney in *Sweeney Todd* (1979) to the misunderstood wicked witch Elphaba in *Wicked* (2003), this thesis analyzed each "villain" from a critical literary standpoint and offered evidence that indicated each musical contained sympathetic villainy, at least to some degree.

It should be noted, however, that these six musicals are by no means the only musicals to contain complex and morally ambiguous villains and anti-heroes. In the future, I hope to expand my literary analysis to include additional Broadway musicals, both American and British, as well as Off-Broadway musical hits. Broadway musicals would likely include Cole Porter, Guy Bolton, and P.G. Wodehouse's *Anything Goes* (1934), Richard Rodger, Lorenz Hart, and John O'Hara's *Pal Joey* (1940), John Kander, Fred Ebb, and Christopher Isherwood's *Cabaret* (1966), Alan Menken and Howard Ashman's *Little Shop of Horrors* (Off-Broadway 1982; Broadway, 2003) , Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's *Assassins* (Off-Broadway 1990; Broadway, 2004), Andrew Lloyd Webber and Charles Hart's *The Phantom of the Opera* (West End 1986; Broadway 1988), and Michael Friedman and Alex Timber's *Bloody, Bloody Andrew Jackson* (Off-Broadway 2009; Broadway 2010).

Additional Off-Broadway musicals would likely include *Ruthless!* (1992) by Marvin Laird and Joel Paley, and *Thrill Me: The Leopold and Loeb Story* (2005) by Stephen Dolginoff.

In addition to in-depth literary analysis, I would also like to deepen my study into musical theatre villainy by exploring *why* specific musicals are successful (or unsuccessful as the case may be) at eliciting sympathy and/or empathy for morally ambiguous or villainous characters. Given the explosion of cognitive research being done in the soft sciences, this additional research would explore current cognitive data and evolutionary theory on human morality, as well as current Audience Response Theory as it pertains to villainy in musical theatre. Furthermore, I would like to develop more of my own ethnographic studies concerning sympathetic villainy by directing my own productions of some of the musicals listed above. I have already completed one such study, producing and directing, as well as conducting an IRB approved study on audience response using audience surveys and observation of *Thrill Me: The Leopold and Loeb Story* during the Studio Season at the University of Kentucky in 2011. The findings from this study, which are still under examination, indicated that contemporary audiences, given the right parameters, can and will sympathize with musical characters that are traditionally considered villainous or immoral.

However, one small study and production does not seem adequate for such a large research question. Therefore, future explorations into sympathetic musical villainy, in my opinion, would have to include a combination of both traditional and ethnographic research methods. Together, both types of research may help outline what characteristics are effective and which are not when it comes to eliciting audience sympathy/empathy for morally questionable characters, such as the villain and/or the anti-hero in musical theatre pieces. In uncovering what works and what doesn't in this regard, perhaps

musical theatre practitioners (producers, lyricists, composers, librettists, directors, actors, etc.) can have a better understanding of how to approach creating musical productions that are successful at finding both critical and commercial success, while simultaneously offering up rich, complex, and flawed characters, something many musical theatre detractors feel our genre lacks. In short, I hope, through my work as both a scholar and a practitioner, to add to the growing discourse on musical theatre, and to contribute, in some small way, to the validation of musical theatre's worth as an art form and as an area of academic interest and study.

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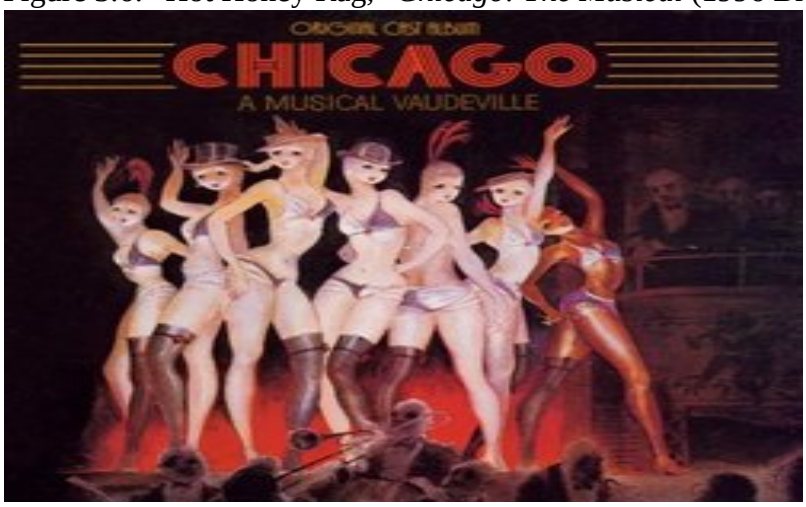

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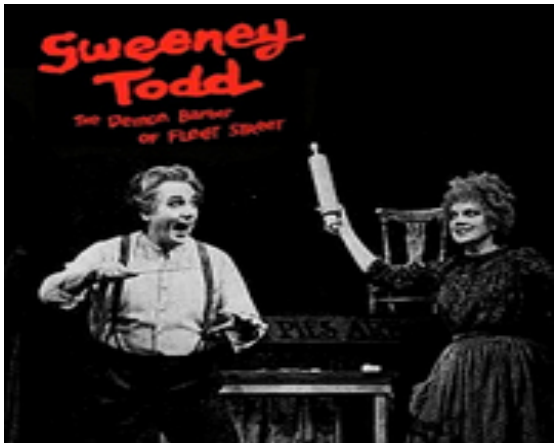

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