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Ciara Barrett

Female Performances and Representation in the Hollywood Musical, 1929-1940

Abstract:

This thesis explores the evolution of female performance paradigms and representation in Hollywood musicals from 1929 to 1940. In particular, it considers how the paradigmatic representation of femininity within the musical was influenced by the implementation of film censorship under the Production Code Administration and specifically how the application of Code policy to the regulation of female performance and representation in the Hollywood musical impacted the structural development of the genre more broadly.

This thesis further seeks to redress a perceptible gap in the theorization of female performance and representation in classical Hollywood musicals. It employs Mulveyan textual analysis of performance modes and representational paradigms in the Hollywood musical from the early to the classical era, to the extent that it considers how the deployment of a traditionally gendered – and generic – politics of viewing regulates or contains female performance and representation in the musical. However it goes beyond strictly Mulveyan analysis to recognize that female performance and representation have rarely been treated as "subjects" (as opposed to merely visual "objects," though they are often treated as such simultaneously) in academic discourse on the musical, which has tended to focus largely on deconstructing the image of woman as the object of the male gaze. Further, feminist semiotic analysis of women in early musicals has tended (with some exceptions) to focus on a relatively small, self-contained and formally specific cycle of Busby Berkeley-directed backstage musicals at Warner Bros. in the 1930s as an object of study. This has failed to account for the overall diversity and sometimes subversiveness of performance styles and gendered representations in Hollywood musicals, particularly during their first formative decade. In this thesis, therefore, in addition to exploring the Berkeleyesque backstage musical, I will examine female performance and representation over a range of other musical cycles iterated during the genre's first decade, from the RKO dance musical to the operetta and thence to what I will term the "child narrative musical" associated with juvenile or adolescent female musical stars.

Employing a structuralist approach to genre analysis – which regards film genres as over-lapping matrices of semantic (that is: thematic, narrative and iconographic traits) and syntactic (conceptually meaning-bearing) structures, constantly in dialogue with, and transformative of, each other in order to trace changes over time – and integrated with feminist, semiotic performance analysis regarding certain key sequences, I will show how trends in female performance and representation over the course of the 1930s developed in relation to the concretization of an ideologically conservative, formally integrative syntax, which is associated with post-Code/classical Hollywood cinema. Over this time, I argue, musicals increasingly sought to mitigate the potentially subversive and affective excesses of individuated female musical performance, which had developed to be characteristic of classical musical semantics and syntax, through various processes of containment and fetishization. In many cases, however, instances of female performance may be seen to have escaped or subverted this repressive system, indicating the limits to which representational typing is able to constrain performance. I will show this through detailed textual and historical analysis of the performance and representation of major female musical stars of the 1930s, including Ginger Rogers, Jeanette MacDonald, Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland, thus charting a trend towards the individuation and oftentimes fetishization of female musical performance over the course of the decade. Ultimately, this will be seen to have had both positive/liberating and negative/repressive effects on the individual female performer's potential agency and subversiveness within a generic system of representation.

Female Performances and Representation in the Hollywood Musical, 1929-1940

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies.

Trinity College Dublin
School of Drama, Film and Music
2015

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Summary:

This thesis explores the evolution of female performance paradigms and representation in Hollywood musicals from 1929 to 1940. In particular, it considers how the paradigmatic representation of femininity within the musical was influenced by the implementation of film censorship under the Production Code Administration and specifically how the application of Code policy to the regulation of female performance and representation in the Hollywood musical impacted the structural development of the genre more broadly.

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trends in female performance and representation over the course of the 1930s developed in relation to the concretization of an ideologically conservative, formally integrative syntax, which is associated with post-Code/classical Hollywood cinema. Over this time, I argue, musicals increasingly sought to mitigate the potentially subversive and affective excesses of individuated female musical performance, which had developed to be characteristic of classical musical semantics and syntax, through various processes of containment and fetishization. In many cases, however, instances of female performance may be seen to have escaped or subverted this repressive system, indicating the limits to which representational typing is able to constrain performance. I will show this through detailed textual and historical analysis of the performance and representation of major female musical stars of the 1930s, including Ginger Rogers, Jeanette MacDonald, Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland, thus charting a trend towards the individuation and oftentimes fetishization of female musical performance over the course of the decade. Ultimately, this will be seen to have had both positive/liberating and negative/repressive effects on the individual female performer's potential agency and subversiveness within a generic system of representation.

Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank the following people for their support over the last four years, during the research and writing of this thesis:

Simone Cameron-Coen, Jennifer O'Meara, Heather Browning, Silvia Dibeltulo, Sinéad Moloney, Emma Keaveney, Emma Walker, Niamh agus an clann Firtéar, John agus Frances Ui Chinnéide, Aoife Breathnach, Jennie Rothwell, Rónán Smith, Robert Kearns, Dáire McNab, Katie Mudrick, Eva Forman, Louise Cargin, Neal O'Riain, Kathy Clarke, Catherine Morrissey-Bickerton;

the staff of the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles for their guidance in the completion of my archival research;

the Film Department at TCD and the School of Drama, Film and Music – especially DG Fisher and my supervisor Professor Kevin Rockett; and finally,

Mom, Dad, and Caitie, who make everything possible.

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Introduction

In this thesis, I explore how female star performance and representation were constrained in early Hollywood musicals by the developing structures and representational paradigms of the genre. I seek further to uncover how individual performances by female musical stars resisted or indeed subverted the conservatizing ideological projects of the emergent classical form and narrative. In so doing, I intend to re-integrate discussion of female performance into structuralist genre theory in order to show how the intersection of gendered and generic representational paradigms affected individual instances of female musical star performance – and vice versa – during the genre's first turbulent decade of existence. This will provide an historical overview of female performance and representation in the 1930s alongside the development of the Classical Hollywood Musical.

Despite being a genre commonly associated with frivolity, naiveté, and stylistic excess – qualities themselves stereotypically gendered "feminine" – female performance and the representation of femininity have rarely been treated as "subjects" in academic discourse on the musical. Exceptional studies include Susan Smith's book *The Musical: Race, Gender and Performance*,[1] Patricia Robertson's exploration of "Feminist Camp in *Gold Diggers of 1933*,"[2] and Richard Dyer's extended discussion of Judy Garland as a gay icon in *Heavenly Bodies*.[3] However, following Steven Cohan (who has addressed the problematic nature of male performance and objectification in the musical, as per Laura Mulvey's theory of the gendered politics of film viewing and representation), as well as Lucy Fischer and Patricia Mellencamp (both of whom have written on the objectification of women and the female image in Warner Bros./Busby Berkeley backstage musicals),[4] structuralist and semiotic film theory has tended to articulate female representation in the musical – focusing particularly on evidence from their "spectacular" musical numbers – as imagistic, objective, and largely the function of (male) authorial control and (male or male-oriented) reception. Literature specifically pertaining to the analysis of female performance in the musical therefore reveals a gap in theory on the relationship between gendered paradigms of representation and generic predications from an historical perspective.

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[1] Susan Smith, *The Musical: Race, Gender and Performance* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005).
[2] Patricia Robertson, "Feminist Camp in *Gold Diggers of 1933*," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).
[3] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI, 1986).
[4] Lucy Fischer, "City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space," *Cinema Journal*, 49:5 (Summer, 2010); --, "The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of 'Dames'," *Film Quarterly*, 30:1 (Autumn, 1976), 2-11; Patricia Mellencamp, "Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

After Laura Mulvey's assertion in 1975 that "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female,"[5] several feminist film theorists have turned to the Hollywood musical as a classic manifestation of the traditionally gendered politics of viewing. For the most part, structuralist theorization of the representation of women in musicals has focused on a relatively small cycle of musicals, being the Busby Berkeley-directed backstage musicals at Warner Bros. in the 1930s. United by their narrative focus on socio-economically and sexually disenfranchised communities of women and directed by a male auteur with a predilection for the fetishistic, scopophilic representation of the female form, the Warner Bros. backstage musicals remain in this light a quintessential example of male gaze machinations.[6] In 1976, one year after the publication of Mulvey's essay in *Screen*, Lucy Fischer addressed this issue in discussion of the so-called "optical politics" at work in the Busby Berkeley musical *Dames* (Ray Enright and Busby Berkeley, 1934). Noting Berkeley's tendency to subsume the individual identities of female musical performers into "overall abstract design[s]," Fischer has argued that Berkeley thus "concretiz[ed] the image of women as essentially passive" within the musical representational paradigm.[7] Thus applying Mulvey's apparatus theory to a close reading of a single filmic text, Fischer established a semiotic theorization of gendered spectatorship and the construction of meaning in backstage musicals that would dominate discourse on female representation in the genre for the next two decades.

In his seminal essay on "musicals as entertainment," "Entertainment and Utopia" from 1985, Richard Dyer reinforced Fischer's theory of the objectified nature of women in Berkeley's musicals by analyzing another early musical, *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Mervyn LeRoy and Busby Berkeley, 1933). Juxtaposing the representational (narrative) versus non-representational (non-narrative, spectacular) levels of the musical's diegesis as a means of establishing a structural comprehension of the genre overall (though without the methodological specificity of Altman's structuralist approach, which I will detail later), Dyer has also posited its essential phallogocentricism. Of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, as a paradigmatic text, he concludes,

> much of the representational level [of the film's musical numbers] reprises the lessons of the narrative – above all, that women's only capital is their bodies as objects. The

[5] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 808.

[6] It should be noted that Berkeley's direction was confined to the musical numbers in most of the Warner Bros. backstage musicals (with the exception of *Gold Diggers of 1935*), whereas the narrative portions of these films were helmed by different directors.

[7] Fischer, "The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of 'Dames'," Op, Cit., 3-6.

> abundant scale of the numbers is an abundance of piles of women; the sensuous materialism is the texture of femaleness, the energy of the dancing (when it occurs) is the energy of the choreographic imagination, to which the dancers are subservient. Thus, while the non-representational certainly suggests an alternative to the narrative, the representational merely reinforces the narrative (women as sexual coinage, women – and men – as expressions of the male producer).[8]

However, in applying such a strictly semiotic approach to the "image of woman" as a visual sign and by prioritizing the non-narrative/non-representational sequences of these backstage musicals for analysis, both Fischer and Dyer have elided potential sites of contradiction to the Mulveyan construct of gender representation, both at the level of performance and in the context of musical paradigms of representation more broadly.

Since Dyer, both Patricia Mellencamp and Patricia Robertson have approached a post-Mulveyan redress of the gendered politics of representation in the early Hollywood musical, though they too have limited the scope of their theorization to a close and synchronic textual analysis of *Gold Diggers of 1933*. In her article on the "sexual economics" of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, Mellencamp has succeeded in liberating the female musical protagonist from a strictly passive and objective role under the male gaze at the level of narrative. In that the gold-digging protagonists' "potentially disruptive sexuality [and] threat to the sanctity of marriage and the family" may be read as a possible site of subversion of traditional gender politics,[9] Mellencamp has posited evidence – or at least the potential for – female narrative subjectivity to exist within the classical Hollywood musical ("subjectivity" being comprised of narrative agency, individuation, and autonomy, as ascribed to a single character, by my definition.) In such a way, Mellencamp has opened up the possibility of reading meaning through musicals that may be challenging to the machinations of phallogocentric, or male-directed, gender politics.[10] Nevertheless, in concluding her analysis of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, Mellencamp has conformed to a monolithic-Mulveyan reading of its narrative as repressive, writing that "the film operates to proclaim, then contain, female sexuality." In that each gold-digging protagonist is married off to a socio-economically advantaged man by the end of the film, she has argued that *Gold Diggers of 1933* "equates

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[8] Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movies and Methods, Vol. II,* Bill Nichols, ed. (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1985). 230.

[9] Mellencamp, Op. Cit., 72-73.

[10] I will be taking "phallogocentric" here to connote the male-directed system of representation which Mulvey has ascribed as paradigmatic to Classical Hollywood Cinema; in other words, "phallogocentric" functions as co-incident with "patriarchal order" and "male-ordered logic." Phallogocentricism also encapsulates the hierarchy of gazes, as theorized by Mulvey, by which "active looking" is gendered/assumed to be male/masculinized and "passive" objectivity is gendered female/is feminized.

marriage and the couple – the happy ending – with capitalism," and that its narrative resolution-as-meaning takes precedence over any others.[11] The excessively feminine and spectacular affects of the musical numbers, she argues, which succeed only briefly in suspending the phallogocentric continuity of *Gold Diggers'* narrative, are merely "bracketed" and fetishized within the representational framework of the overall film as a means of containing them.

Robertson, in her own reading of "Feminist Camp in *Gold Diggers of 1933*," has taken issue with Mellencamp's claim that the "film's sexual economy ultimately reasserts masculine authority."[12] She thus provides an alternative semiotic reading of the image of woman represented in the film on two diegetic levels, narrative and musical performance. Robertson criticizes Mellencamp for positing the disjuncture between male and female spectatorial address at various points in the film – with the latter invoking the potential to read the film against the grain of traditionally gendered politics of viewing – but then denying that promise in elevating the significance of closed-narrative resolution via heterosexual union above the narrative-suspending affect or emotional register of female musical performance demonstrated on the non-representational diegetic level. Inverting the meanings and address of the narrative sequences versus musical numbers in *Gold Diggers* posited by Mellencamp, Robertson has suggested a counter-reading that

> "the knowledge that the female spectator gains about men, money, power, and economics in the primary diegesis provides her with a means to read the spectacles from a feminist camp perspective, one which enables her to recognize herself in the fetishized images but from which she Is able to knowingly distance herself."[13]

In such a way, Robertson hypothesizes female spectatorship and subjectivity, making a significant departure from more traditionalist readings of performance and representation in the Hollywood musical after Mulvey. However, she has done so via the strictly synchronic analysis of a single film with the limitation of focusing only on visual signifiers of femininity at the level of film text. In such a way, Robertson has also steered clear of establishing a generic theory of performance and representation in the musical in favour of the systematic deconstruction of a single, male-oriented and male-authored cycle of films.

More recently, however, film theorists and historians Susan Smith and Gaylyn Studlar have begun to shift the methodological paradigm of gender representation analysis

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[11] Mellencamp, Op. Cit., 67.
[12] Robertson, Op. Cit., 134.
[13] Ibid., 134.

(with regard to the Hollywood musical) in the direction of the individual performer/star from a diachronic perspective. In her book *The Musical: Race, Gender and Performance*, Smith theorizes paradigmatically gendered systems of representation at work in the musical from an historical perspective, with the individual performer as the locus/subject of meaning. She has also considered gendered performance and representation over a breadth of musical cycles, establishing that paradigmatic consistencies and inconsistencies have existed within the genre from its earliest days. Crucially, Smith has expanded the semiotic analysis of female representation beyond the strictly visual to consider the potentially powerful aural affects of female performance. Thus in a significant departure from Fischer, Mellencamp, and Robertson, Smith has chosen to highlight Jeanette MacDonald – frequently overlooked and representative of an almost-forgotten sub-genre of musical, the operetta – as a representative of the female subject in the musical, which previous theories had all but negated. In such a way, Smith has established the "disruptive potential of the female singing voice,"[14] by which the female singer of popular song may be seen as "invested with [a] sustained and complex subversive charge in the Hollywood musical" due to "powerful associations of freedom, self-expression and spontaneity" inherent in the non-classically-trained voice.[15]

Studlar has further extrapolated and to some degree redressed Smith's claim that the signifying functions and phenomenological effect of the classically trained female singing voice are more predisposed towards containment within a phallogocentric structure of meaning than the untrained voice. In an analysis of the operatically trained (and also frequently disregarded) pseudo-child star Deanna Durbin in the latter half of the 1930s, Studlar argues that the mismatch of Durbin's freakishly "womanly" voice with her childish body represented an excess of feminine affect that was profoundly de-stabilizing to the phallogocentric coherence of her films.[16] (I will go on to interrogate this assertion, but for now it is enough to say that Studlar, like Smith, has succeeded in considering an instance of female musical performance within the overall meaning-bearing structures of its genre). Thus, Studlar has commuted Smith's claim on behalf of Jeanette MacDonald that "she effect[s] some form of genuine recognition, or even transformation, in her influential male mentor figure" – in Durbin's case, fathers or surrogate fathers – which necessitates "the adoption of even more extreme or elaborate strategies of control," i.e. fetishization and

[14] Smith, Op. Cit., 54.
[15] Ibid., 77.
[16] Gaylyn Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (California: University of California Press, 2013).

containment, in her films.[17] In this case, then, the classically trained female voice may be seen as more disruptive an aural sign than the un-trained female voice of popular song (or, in the case of MacDonald singing "San Francisco," as Smith has shown, the hybrid classically trained voice singing a popular song).

In such a way, both Smith and Studlar have made valuable contributions in semiotic/structural analysis of female performance and representation in classical Hollywood musicals, addressing the female star/performer as both subjective/active and objective/passive in constructing meanings through individual film texts and across bodies of work. In this thesis, I seek then to further this path of research by applying a systematic structural analysis of generic paradigms and systems of representation regarding female performance towards a study of the evolution of the classical Hollywood musical. With the exception of Smith and Studlar, even those studies by Robertson and Dyer which have sought to read female musical performance and representation against the grain of Mulvey's traditionally gendered politics of viewing have taken a synchronic or largely a-historical approach to analyzing genre.[18] As Rick Altman has noted, this may be seen as symptomatic of semiotic analysis. "Far from being sensitive to concerns of history," he has noted, "semiotic genre analysis [is] by definition and from the start devoted to bypassing history."[19] Thus, I have taken Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to analyzing film genre as a guiding theoretical framework in my consideration of the evolution of female performance and representational paradigms in the classical Hollywood musical. This methodology addresses the changeability of generic structures over time, which is suitable to my project to re-historicize female performance and representation as key structuring features in the development of the musical genre in its defining years.

As a feminist study accepting that a (frequently repressive) gendered politics of viewing exists inherent to Classical Hollywood Cinema, this thesis will also be indebted to a Mulveyan form of analysis, at the same time as it recognizes gaps in the application of such theory as practiced by certain feminist critics heretofore. My reliance on Mulveyan criticism will be based not only on my appropriation of terminology commonplace to feminist film theory (concepts of "fetishization," "imaging," "objectivity," and "pleasure in looking" in particular) but on my acceptance of the theory of a fundamental apparatus of cinema, by which the subject (audio)viewer negotiates the filmic object through various processes of identification and distanciation. I also accept, alongside Fischer and Mellencamp, the

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[17] Smith, Op. Cit., 59.

[18] Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Spring, 1984), 9.

[19] "Far from being sensitive to concerns of history," he writes, "semiotic genre analysis was by definition and from the start devoted to bypassing history." Ibid., 8.

premise that "pleasure in looking" is constructed via the Classical Hollywood style from a largely phallogocentric perspective, though I am also in agreement with Robertson that alternative perspectives in viewing and receiving the affective pleasures of Classical Hollywood films – and particularly musicals – are made possible through active processes of subversive reading, performance, and representation. In such a way, I make a departure from a strictly monolithic Mulveyan reading of the Hollywood musical, noting the possibilities of female performance to engage pleasures or experiences in and of cinema not strictly limited to the visual and/or contained within a phallogocentric narrative paradigm.[20]

This thesis will therefore undertake to explore the evolution of female performance paradigms and representation in Hollywood musicals during their nascent period, from 1929 to 1940. I will in particular be looking at how such paradigms of representation were influenced by film censorship, with a view to explicating how institutionalized censorship under the Motion Picture Production Code, formally established in 1930 and more systematically implemented from 1934 onwards under the stewardship of the Production Code Administration or PCA's Joseph Breen, impacted the broader structural development of the genre. In so doing, I will be analyzing performances by female musical film stars from the genre's first decade, showing how paradigmatic shifts in individual performance styles and modes of representation, in keeping with the genre's semantic/syntactic structure, were effected by a more systematic implementation of censorship and the re-conservatization of ideology in Hollywood during the 1930s. Over this time period, and as I will show, musicals sought to re-contain the potentially subversive excesses of female performance – typical of early, pre-Code era musicals – by fetishizing the individuated female musical star, particularly in the form of the "juvenated" or child-like performer. Employing a structuralist

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[20] It should be noted that feminist film critics such as Studlar and Tania Modleski have already posited critiques of Mulvey's central thesis that pleasure in looking is strictly divided between "active male" (as subject of the gaze) and "passive female" (as object), suggesting that however the politics of representation may be gendered in the original construction of the filmic image, reception-by-gender is not necessarily so dichotomized. In *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Film Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1988), Modleski has theorized both male and female spectatorship in relation to the films of Hitchcock, arguing for the possibility of female subjectivity in the cinema. With *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), Studlar has also argued that film viewership may offer masochistic pleasures in identification with the female subject/object to male and female spectators alike. Indeed, Mulvey herself anticipated such concerns in her essay "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," originally published in 1981, and reprinted in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1988), theorizing "transvestism" on behalf of the female viewer, i.e. her ability to "look" from both male and female perspectives. As it is not my project here to enter into a deeper Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis of musical film spectatorship (that is, to speculate on the specific psychic processes of gender identification on behalf of the female performer or male vs. female viewer), I will not be relying on such criticisms in my analysis of the films and performers considered here. However, it must be acknowledged that the possibility of the traditionally gendered politics of viewing and representation in Classical Hollywood Cinema being subverted (and, indeed, always already inherently unstable) has already been posited by a number of other feminist theorists.

approach to genre analysis vis-à-vis Altman, by which I regard film genres as over-lapping matrices of semantic (that is: thematic, narrative and iconographic traits) and syntactic (conceptually meaning-bearing) structures which are constantly in dialogue with, and transformative of, each other,[21] I will elucidate how the conservatively ideological meaning-bearing structures of the Classical Hollywood Musical were established.

Before going on to explore the theoretical implications of such an investigation, however, I wish to provide some background on the early, or pre-Classical, Hollywood musical as it existed during this time, as well as existing scholarship on the subject. As suggested by historian Richard Barrios, the 1930s was a period of intense experimentation, (r)evolution, and diversity in and of musical form and narrative.[22] Indeed, the 1930s musical is remarkable perhaps more for its heterogeneity than its overall consistency of style. Whereas musicals of the 1940s and 1950s – later within the Classical era – generally evince formal integrativeness (by which musical performance is spontaneously "immanent from the [narrative] diegesis"[23]) in the manner of such famed MGM-"Freed Unit" musicals as *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944), *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), and *Silk Stockings* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1957), formal integration was only established as the leading or "classical" paradigm of Hollywood musical cinema over the course of the 1930s and into the 1940s.

Only in February 1929 had the first "All Talking! All Dancing! All Singing!" musical, MGM's *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beamount), been released. Previous "musical" releases including *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), the first "talkie," had included either a limited number of scenes synchronized to music and dialogue, interspersed with more abundant "silent" sequences, or they were fully synchronized with spoken dialogue but had no or few full-scale musical production numbers (such as in *Lights of New York*, directed by Bryan Foy in 1928 and released as the first "all-talking" talkie). *The Broadway Melody*, however, was the first feature-length studio production with fully synchronous sound and music recorded on set to incorporate multiple musical numbers within its diegesis. *The Broadway Melody* thus iterated for the first time onscreen two of the major defining features of the musical genre: the (not necessarily even) distribution of multiple musical numbers throughout, within, or in juxtaposition with its narrative (but nevertheless immanent from its diegesis),[24] and a fully synchronous soundtrack.[25] Yet by many historical

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[21] Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," Op. Cit., 10-11.
[22] Richard Barrios, *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1995)
[23] Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 12.
[24] Rick Altman, Op. Cit., 12.

accounts, *The Broadway Melody* was not a "true" musical in that it did not adhere to the more largely "meaning-bearing" structures [26] and formal tendencies of the Classical Hollywood musical (primarily, narrative focus on a heterosexual couple and formal integration). This introduces certain of the problematics of genre theory and classification with which I will be concerned throughout this thesis, as I look at how variables of performance style and representational tendencies altered generic paradigms – and indeed definitions – over time.

Historically, musicals evinced early formal continuities with the 19th century theatrical "Tradition of Spectacle," marked by tendencies towards formal aggregation (the juxtaposition of straight narrative sequences with musical interludes), stylistic heterogeneity, and an abundance of presented sensations and affects. According to genre theorists Barrios and Jane Feuer, film musicals evolved formally to negotiate (largely through processes of mitigation) their essential formal heterogeneity and aggregation, thus to inhere to the emergent classical Hollywood style predicated on formal seamlessness and stylistic self-effacement.[27] Nevertheless, musicals' unique pleasures in viewing are often credited to their offering sensations of stylistic over-abundance that exist outside the remit and indeed counter to classically realist cinema.[28] Thus, as an early musical (that is, *the* earliest musical) self-consciously *about* stage performance and theatrical presentation, *The Broadway Melody* may be seen as speaking to its textual origins and betraying a consequent preoccupation with maintaining narrative coherence – something with which later musicals of the classical Hollywood period were less concerned. At the same time, prototypical musicals such as *The Broadway Melody* were less intent on effacing their essential formal aggregation, which later, more classically integrated Hollywood musicals often sought to eradicate.[29] The latter's propensity towards the erasure of both narrative and formal sites of conflict may be seen as reflective of ideological conservatism. Though commonly associated with affects of exuberance and spontaneity, which might appear resistant to repressive strictures, the classical Hollywood musical has been characterized largely as utopian (in the

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[25] I am here excluding the non-narrative musical "revue" from consideration as part of the broader genre. Musical revues such as *Fox Movietone Follies of 1929* (David Butler, 1929) and *Paramount on Parade* (1930) were early showcases for musical talent – and outlets for studios' experimentation in/with audiovisual technology – but faded rapidly due to over-exposure in the market and a lack of formal distinction from theatrical traditions of performance and exhibition.

[26] Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," Op. Cit., 10.

[27] David Bordwell, "The Classical Hollywood Style, 1917-1960," in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, eds. David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger (London: Routledge, 1985).

[28] Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 4-19.

[29] As Barrios has argued, *The Broadway Melody*, exemplary of the early musicals made between 1929 and 1933, thus represents a "primitive" iteration of the genre as a whole, "less a musical than an uncommonly baroque hybrid" of the melodrama and backstage musical (Op. Cit., 98).

sense of offering the experience of ultimately conflict-free societies), integrative in sensibility (at the expense of representing lasting ideological dissent), and ultimately ideologically conservative. From such a teleological perspective, film historians and genre theorists therefore have often found early iterations of the genre to be unsatisfyingly "primitive," viewing them as "uncommonly baroque hybrid[s]," [30] unable to be fully reconciled with the more familiar generic paradigm of the Classical Hollywood Musical.

Thus, in order to make sense of certain departures from generic tendency, it is necessary to establish what tenets are indeed commonplace or "classic" within Hollywood musicals as a means of understanding individual films' historical and social significance and specificity. What distinguishes one genre from another – or, more specifically, what excludes one film from a certain category but not from another – has long been debated by genre theorists and historians. Exactly when the first iteration of a given genre may be said to have appeared is a further point of contention. In the case of the musical, for instance, it is clear that the first "movie with music" did not a "musical" make, in that Hollywood movies across the board – from the so-called "silent" era into the talkies – have utilized diegetic music for narrative purposes and atmospheric effect (among other significations) by convention. Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, for instance, have recognized the abundance of films that might qualify as "musical" for having at least one sequence in which music is foregrounded, but for the fact that they do not register narratively "like" other musicals; they have therefore narrowed the genre to include those films that position music as "an integral part of the[ir] narrative," [31] while allowing that such musical "integrity" must be judged subjectively and allowed expansion or contraction of definition, based on a given field of reference. Thus, Marshall and Stilwell have provided a necessary framework for understanding how the genre has evolved past the Classical era to encompass and indeed assimilate idiosyncratic or even deviant approaches to musical filmmaking, as inspired by various productive impulses ranging from the artistic to the crowd-pleasing and the industrially imperative. Nevertheless, Marshall and Stilwell's methodology does not (nor does it set out to) account for the Classical Hollywood Musical's evolution between 1929 and (circa) 1960. "What," then, as Richard Barrios has asked, "constitutes [the] beginning" of the genre?"[32] – for it is only by first defining the genre and establishing its origins that an historical analysis of aspects of its evolution may develop.

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[30] Barrios, Op. Cit., 98.
[31] Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, "Introduction," *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*, eds. Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell (Exeter: Intellect, 2000), 1.
[32] Barrios, Op. Cit., 432.

Since the late 1970s when theorization of the musical may be said to have begun in earnest, methodologies for studying the genre have swung largely from the structuralist and semiotic on the one hand to more recent phenomenological and performance-based approaches on the other. On one end of the spectrum we have the triumvirate of Dyer, Altman and Feuer establishing a heuristic for musical categorization vis-à-vis structuralism, as complemented by feminist scholars Fischer, Mellencamp and Robertson (who have observed the ways in which images of women in particular have been constructed according to a gendered politics of viewing within a patriarchal genre system). On the other end are Marshall and Stilwell, Steve Neale (2000), and Bruce Babington and Peter Evans (1985), all of whom have countered or expanded the limits of Altman's admittedly often generalizing and narrative-based approach in highlighting the uniqueness and/or innovativeness of individual musicals or aspects of musicals – their resistance to generic categorization and generalization – in light of (or in spite of) their adherence to certain generic systems of signification. It is within this methodological approach that more recent analyses of musical performance have been generally located, in that performance, or the expression/(re)presentation of meaning on behalf of the individual performer moving through space and time, resists or exists outside of established modes, codes and systems of representation. However, these methodological approaches – broadly distinguished as structuralist versus phenomenological – may in fact be synthesized in an integrated approach to analyzing musical film performance and representation synchronically (as phenomenological film-by-film analyses tend to be) as well as diachronically (as Altman's approach allows for) over time. This will make possible an investigation of how generic and gendered paradigms of representation impacted, and were impacted by, female star performance in Hollywood musicals over time.

Integrating Methodological Approaches: Structuralism and Performance Analysis

As a means, first and foremost, of identifying and systematically historicizing the birth of the musical as a major Hollywood film genre, I will be borrowing from the structuralist methodology set out by Altman in his "Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Genre," which has provided a bedrock in theory for his works on *The American Film Musical* (1987) and the later *Film/Genre* (1999). While this approach facilitates a neat and methodical analysis of the structural changes within the musical over time, it is however limited by certain generalizing tendencies that I wish to acknowledge. This is a weakness that has been

noted by Babington and Evans,[33] Neale,[34] and later even Feuer[35] and Altman himself, recognizing that attending to films' generic conformity at the expense of noting textual divergence is "descriptively [in]adequate" when analyzing individual films and performances.[36] As Marshall and Stilwell have remarked, Altman's structuralist theories "focus on the general and the narrative;" they provide a framework for "understanding [...] the large-scale workings of the genre" without attending to "the specifics which give such distinction pleasure."[37] It is this attention to the affective pleasures of the musical (how musicals make us feel through received emotion), as borne out in performance, which scholars such as Heather Laing and Smith have turned towards, building on a model for textual analysis developed by Babington and Evans alongside Richard DeCordova (1991), Andrew Klevan (2005), and Christine Cornea (2010). Such scholars have recognized that in addition to containing unifying structural elements that we see and hear – such as the presence of song-and-dance numbers, the recurrence of certain themes and identifiable iconography – musicals also make us feel and experience emotions and ideas less tangible or quantifiable. These meanings, (re)presented to us through musical actors' performance, are received on an immediate and direct level as phenomena, at the same time as they are perceived in relation to other performances and texts. Thus they may be analyzed either in isolation from each other or in context and ideally in both. Therefore, in addition to charting the evolution of gendered paradigms of representation in the musical throughout this thesis, I will be seeking to integrate performance analysis, which is generally approached via synchronic textual analysis, to a diachronically-oriented and historicizing structuralist methodology.

It is generally accepted that performance in Hollywood cinema is to some degree always "circumscribed" by a generic system or systems of representation,[38] such that the "authorship" of an individual performance becomes not only a matter of personal expression on behalf of the individual actor/star (which it is) but is also indicative of certain

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[33] Babington and Evans, *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), observe that Altman, along with Feuer, "tend towards simplification, towards the announcing as universal of what are only partial truths about the musical." Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, *Blue Skies and Silver Linings: Aspects of the Hollywood Musical* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 7.

[34] Neale challenges that "Altman tends to argue that the musical always resolves the contradictions with which it deals," *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), 112.

[35] Feuer critiques the first edition of her own *The Hollywood Musical* according to similar gaps observed in Altman's *The American Film Musical*: an absence of consideration for queer subtexts and meaning in musicals, a lack of attention paid to reception/audience response, and an almost blinkered focus on the Classical period as representative of the genre as a whole: *The Hollywood Musical*, Second Edition (London: MacMillan, 1993), xi-xii.

[36] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), 90.

[37] Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, Op. Cit., 1.

[38] Richard De Cordova, "Genre and Performance: An Overview" (1986), *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*, ed. Jeremy Butler (Detroit; Wayne State University Press, 1991), 117.

external, generic constraints. Thus, while performance is in many ways personal, private, and internally devised on behalf of the individual, it is always in dialogue with external systems of representation: in other words, performance and representation exist in a dialectic with each other. As Cornea has argued, genre creates a "conceptual frame[work]" for understanding performances' meanings. [39] Therefore genre, as a system of representation, does not delimit the meaning or syntactic significance of performance, but rather expands it, just as a single performance within a genre film develops/expands the overall genre's topography of representation.

Before explicating further the various benefits and limitations to an integrated approach to analyzing performance and representation in the Hollywood musical, it will be necessary to first unpack Altman's "semantic/syntactic approach to film genre" and how it has influenced scholarship on the musical's history. According to Altman, various recurring features, aspects, and tendencies of the musical are seen as structural components, either semantic or syntactic, and thereby defined, made analyzable against each other, and assigned certain specific functions to facilitate a methodical analysis of structural changes within the musical over time. Altman defines the semantic features of a genre as its "building blocks," the recurring but not individually prescriptive set of "common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, [and] sets" that are iconographic of a certain set of films.[40] In the case of the musical, this includes features such as the backstage space (associable with the backstage musical) or the Big White Set (associable with the RKO dance musical), top hats and tails (ibid.), and chorus girls – none of which individually is required for a musical to function *as a musical*, but each of which taken by itself is iconic of what musicals – or some musicals – may be said to "look like." In that such features are often associable with a specific type or subgenre of musical, however, a conceptual structure is needed to provide cohesion to those various types and subgenres. Towards this end, Altman has theorized that a given genre also has a "fundamental syntax," which is constituted by its "meaning-bearing structures," reflective of the arrangement of "certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable placeholders." [41] Such constitutive relations include oppositions like the individual versus society, order versus disorder, and morality versus law. In terms of the musical, then, Altman asserts that its syntax – at least as it has developed into the Classical form – is predicated on constructing via narrative a "Platonic ideal of integration," by which the "making [of] music" between two characters of

[39] Christine Cornea, "Editor's Introduction," *Genre and Performance: film and television*, ed. Christine Cornea (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 4.
[40] Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," Op. Cit., 10.
[41] Ibid., 10-11.

the opposite sex may be seen metaphorically to represent their symbolic union.[42] The ideological project of the musical, Altman further suggests, is thereby expressed via the narrative device of "dual-focus," by which each half of the romantic pair represents one side/strand of the story, joined in heterosexual union and ideological conciliation.[43]

While Altman's definition of the Hollywood musical according to semantic and syntactic structural ramifications therefore provides a framework by which distinct cycles and sub-genres of musical – such as the late 1930s backstage musical, Astaire-Rogers RKO dance musicals, operetta and even child-narrative musicals – may be linked together, other scholars have recognized that this approach cannot fully account for the "multifarious nature"[44] and diversity of musical narratives beyond the Classical Hollywood paradigm, which is just one of many subgenres of musical (if the most recognizable). This is a significant oversight for which Neale, Babington/Evans and Marshall/Stilwell have all taken Altman to task.[45] Certain examples of structural divergence noted by Babington and Evans would include *Easter Parade* (Charles Walters, 1948) and *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Mervyn LeRoy and Busby Berkeley, 1933),[46] which do not conform to a dual-focus narrative, while Neale has highlighted *The Wizard of Oz* and the Shirley Temple film *Poor Little Rich Girl* as similarly defying Altman's generic criteria.[47] Neale contends that Altman's heuristic ignores Classical Hollywood musicals that either ironize the idea of Platonic integration by positing their narrative resolutions as unreal (such as *Brigadoon*) or marginalize the thematic centrality of romance (such as *The Wizard of Oz*), thus building on an earlier criticism of Altman by Babington and Evans that musicals do not necessarily always conform to the "dual-focus narrative" that facilitates a reading of the Classical Hollywood Musical as ideologically conservative.[48] It will be my project here to investigate how female performance and representation contribute to a disruption of the very coherence that Altman's critics have already posited as unstable. Nevertheless, I will show that oftentimes individual expressions of performance and/or agency on behalf of female musical performers were "bent" to conform to the phallogocentric representational and narrative paradigm characteristic of Classical Hollywood Cinema. Indeed, where tendencies in female performance and representation were seen to threaten or challenge conformance to a phallogocentric syntax,

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[42] Ibid., 16.
[43] Rick Altman, "The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 42.
[44] Neale, Op. Cit., 112.
[45] Marshall and Stilwell, Op. Cit., 1.
[46] Babington and Evans, Op. Cit., 80.
[47] Neale, Op. Cit., 112.
[48] Ibid.

compensatory strategies of representation (particularly through narrative adjustment, as evidenced by the turn towards character individuation in the backstage musical and the rise of the child narrative musical post-1934) were enacted.

Thus, Altman's attention to the musical's narrative structuration (on which its syntactic meaning, predicated on the Platonic ideal of integration, is dependent) will be seen as helpful in analysis of the function of star performance throughout the individual musical as a whole: that is, throughout both musical and non-musical sequences. While Neale has criticized Altman's semantic/syntactic approach for having a prescriptively narrative focus – with Altman arguing that an individual musical film only enters the generic canon by virtue of its narrative prioritization of heterosexual romance, in such a way delimiting the scope of the genre and problematically blurring its distinction from romantic comedy and melodrama[49] – it nevertheless facilitates attention to significant narrative tendencies within the genre, informative of the evolution of representational performance paradigms therein. It stands that the vast majority of roles performed by female musical stars throughout the 1930s were romantic ones (or they involved to some degree diametric opposition to male performers). Certainly, some cycles of musical films – particularly the earliest Warner Bros. backstage musicals and the child narrative musicals starring Shirley Temple and Deanna Durbin – either deprioritized heterosexual romance as narratively central, sublimated it into alternative male-female relationships, and/or dispensed with it altogether, which significantly affected the syntactic and ideological meaning of their narratives. As will be seen in historical context, such deviation from the classical narrative (and thusly syntactic) paradigm was often the result of adjustments to suit the individuated performance style or image of a given star and/or facilitate the reception of pleasures – through musical narrative – that might be seen as subversive or otherwise transgressive of conservative/phallogocentric ideology. For this reason, in my analysis of the performances and representation of the female musical stars considered here, I will be situating their musical performances (which exist simultaneously as phenomena separable from their generic context) always within a broader syntactic structuration. This necessitates narrative analysis in order to dissect the ideological significances of their conformance to or deviation from the classical paradigm, and therefore supports a reliance on Altman's structuralist approach to genre film analysis.

In response to some of Neale's and others' specific criticisms, I shall seek to prove, for instance, that *Poor Little Rich Girl* may in fact be conceived of in syntactic terms as

[49] Ibid., 105-112.

conforming to the classically integrative syntax Altman theorizes, once the representational paradigm of the musical leading lady is adjusted to accommodate for Temple's performance as an implicitly (if not explicitly) sexualized love interest/object in the narrative. On the other hand, I will consider texts such as *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *The Wizard of Oz* as existing outside the parameters of Altman's definition of musicals, as Neale and Babington and Evans have suggested, by virtue of their various (re)presentations of female performance. Bearing these "exceptional" films in mind, it remains nevertheless that most Hollywood musicals spanning the Classical era from the mid-1930s to the 1950s may be seen to have conformed (at least in part) to a dual-focus narrative and ideologically integrative syntax. Thus Altman's semantic/syntactic definition of the musical may be ascribed most accurately or specifically – albeit with qualification and the acknowledgment of exceptions – to the definition of the Classical Hollywood Musical form.[50]

Altman's reading of the Classical Hollywood Musical as essentially ideologically conservative has been shared by many other genre theorists, including Feuer, Dyer, and Cohan – indicative of the degree to which Altman's approach exactingly explicates what other theorists have deduced from the deconstruction of the musical's integrated narrative and form: the Classical Hollywood Musical (usually) enacts the ritualistic (re)production of "ideal heterosexual couples".[51] Cohan, in his essay "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man,"[52] explicates this in his theorization of the gendering of performance modes and spaces in the Hollywood musical (drawing, of course, on Mulvey's theory of the distinction between an active, male or masculinized mode-of-looking associated with narrativization; and the passive, feminized mode of self-conscious performance which is inherent to musicals and that signifies "to-be-looked-at-ness"). Structuralist and semiotic analyses of performance modes and representational paradigms in the Hollywood musical from the early to the classical era have thereafter tended to reiterate this deployment and invocation of a traditionally gendered politics of viewing.

Feuer has argued that various processes of demystification and remythicization are at work within the inherently self-reflexive musical to preserve the mutually reinforcing myths of spontaneity and integration on which musicals' capacity to bear meaning is

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[50] In Altman's own critique of the "semantic/semantic approach" in *Film/Genre*, he has acknowledged that a transhistorical review may lead to such a "treatment of a single film or group of films as having a special role in defining a genre or expressing its 'essence'" (Op. Cit., 20. With this in mind, it is important to clarify that a treatment of the integrative musical form and narrative as the "quintessential" Classical Hollywood musical paradigm does not negate the existence of alternative/divergent forms and narratives within the genre.

[51] Steven Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the spectacle of masculinity in the Hollywood musical," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader,* eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 2002), 87.

[52] Ibid.

attendant.[53] It is in the disavowal of the constructedness and artificiality of performance – the demystification of its mechanism, concomitant with its being traceable back to a spontaneous impulse towards song and dance – that the phallogocentric ramifications of the musical syntax are partially located. For to individuate female characters according to non-traditional gender roles or representational paradigms would be to expose gender as performative and thusly to mark it as an unstable meaning-bearing structure within narrative. Gender representation is, however, fundamental at both semantic and syntactic structural levels as a defining feature of the musical genre, and a locus for ideological meaning.

Another fair generalization regarding musicals is that they often highlight socio-political inequalities and/or ideological conflicts within their narrative diegeses, which are thereafter sublimated into the euphoric ether of their musical numbers and a happy ending. Similar to Thomas Schatz's observation that "film genres [...] are social problem-solving operations,"[54] Dyer has posited that musicals reflect a kind of aspirational utopianism: while they do not (or cannot – as per the remit of entertainment for entertainment's sake) work explicitly to suggest how a utopian society might be constructed, musicals do suggest what utopia(s) might feel like. In so doing, they necessarily "draw attention to the gap between what is and what could be [... and] work through these contradictions at all levels in such a way as to 'manage' them, to make them seem to disappear" – with varying levels of success.[55] Feuer has observed that Hollywood musicals effect cultural synthesis and social integration – the restoration of the status quo and the preservation of order – via traditional narrative closure brought about by/in the heterosexual union of two central characters, whose ideological conflict is represented metaphorically in their gender difference.[56] This bolsters Altman's theory of the "dual-focus narrative" as a metaphor for ideological conciliation and the promise of socio-political stability, operating on both the semantic and syntactic structural levels of a musical text.[57] And in such a way, Feuer summarizes, the

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[53] Jane Feuer, "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," in *Film Genre Reader II,* ed. Barry Keith Grant. Texas: Texas University Press, 1995. As developed in her book *The Hollywood Musical*, Feuer further argues that the musical posits itself as a "folk art," and as such is engaged with the justification of its own spontaneity and "naturalness" of feeling. The backstage musical, she suggests, bears this concern most explicitly within and by its narrative; however, its ritualistic and self-reflexive impulses towards the defense of entertainment are implicitly evident within all Classical Hollywood musicals.

[54] Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formula, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1981), 24.

[55] Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Movies and Methods, Vol. II,* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1985), 229.

[56] Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 68.

[57] Altman, "The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative," Op. Cit., 42.

"formally bold" musical represents "the most culturally conservative of genres."[58] Hollywood musicals may therefore be seen to work through the oppositional processes of acknowledgment and elision of socio-political dissonances in order to achieve narrative closure and, ultimately, obfuscate their internal ideological conflict. In so doing, the representation of gender and gendered symbols is seen as fundamental to the individual musical's – and the overall genre's – structural coherence. Building on Altman's reading of the Classical Hollywood Musical's emergent syntax as dual-focused and metaphorically/formally integrative, then, I shall seek to explore exactly *how* and *why* this generic syntax manifested in relation to the shifting semantics of female performance and representation, which star performances show to be paradigmatic.

However, it bears reiteration that such a teleological approach to studying generic paradigms of gender representation and performance in musicals cannot fully account for the overall diversity and sometimes subversiveness of performance styles and gendered representations in Hollywood musicals, particularly during their first formative decade, from *The Broadway Melody* in 1929 up through and beyond *The Wizard of Oz* in 1939. There are many instances of musicals from this decade that problematize a "straight" semiotic or structural reading, due to certain idiosyncrasies of performance and/or representational style contained therein. In order to read these performances against the grain of established, generic paradigms of representation – as I wish to do with female performance in the Hollywood musical – it will be necessary to perform close textual readings from a synchronic approach before re-situating their meanings trans-historically. To do so, I will therefore be following a methodology of performance analysis by intermittently "attending to sequences" of musical performance in order to capture the phenomenological "presentness of performance" that exists outside the "context of standard critique."[59] This will further highlight the potential disjuncture between performative agency on behalf of the female star-performer and the (often repressive) dictates of representational paradigm, which strictly structuralist genre analysis privileges.

Censorship and the Classical Hollywood Musical

The fact of censorship and the hegemony of phallogocentric ideology in Hollywood will be seen as crucial and determining factors in terms of both the evolution of gendered paradigms of performance and representation in the musical, and of the concretization of

[58] Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, Op. Cit., viii.
[59] Andrew Klevan, Op. Cit., 7.

the classically integrative musical syntax. Indeed, the manifestation of a "Classical Hollywood Cinema" was partially brought to bear in the implementation of censorship under the Production Code Administration, taking into account its demands and ramifications on narrative and style.[60] Despite the relatively low profile kept by musicals during "the storm of '34" – that period of crisis identified by Thomas Doherty, which saw studios scramble to avoid a threatened boycott from the Catholic Legion of Decency and accommodate the conservatizing impulses of new PCA director Joseph Breen[61] – they were no less affected by the systematization of censorship than other genres like the gangster film and female-oriented "sex picture," which had generated considerable controversy on both national and local levels for their frequently explicit depictions of sex, crime, violence and other manifestations of social transgression. Indeed, as shown by Lea Jacobs in her examination of the so-called "fallen woman film" of the early classical era, "censorship became coextensive with the development of [...] plot,"[62] such that the very texture, tone and sensibility of Hollywood cinema post-1934 was brought into line more fully with conservative, phallogocentric ideology. Where once implicitly subversive meanings had been expressed through the "indirect means of representation" – such as the pointed fade-out, gestural or tonal implication, and the insertion of a mitigating "voice of morality" within the narrative, such codings were "virtually eliminated" from post-Code texts, smoothed over and sublimated into even more oblique and unobtrusive systems of signification or strategies of subversion.[63] This complemented perfectly Hollywood cinema's driving impulses towards conceptual unity, effacement of formal discontinuity, and the solicitation of universal appeal, which David Bordwell has identified as primary characteristics of the Classical Hollywood style.

This dual effacement of representational and ideological incongruities inherent to the Classical Hollywood style may be seen as directed away from conceptual fragmentation towards the fundamental guiding principle of "utopianism." Not coincidentally, Dyer attributes utopianism to the overall project of the classical Hollywood musical: to express what "utopia" might "feel like", if not how utopia - i.e. a conflict-free society – might

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[60] The following historians have all detailed the systemic and comprehensive nature of industrial self-regulation, with an eye to Joseph Breen's singling out of certain genres (gangster/crime films and "women's films"/"sex pictures" particularly among them) that tended to pose problems for the PCA and local censorship boards: Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Gregory Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[61] Thomas Doherty, Op. Cit., 325.

[62] Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*, Op. Cit., 122.

[63] Lea Jacobs, "Industry Self-Regulation and the Problem of Textual Determination," in *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio* Era, ed. Matthew Bernstein (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 97.

practicably be achieved. (In such a way, Dyer defines the musical according to its transferrable affect, or the feeling it evokes in audiences, rather than by its structural traits).[64] Instead of addressing the *process* by which social problems may be solved, the Classical Hollywood Musical celebrates the *idea* of their solution through ritualistic means (in this case, the elicitation of euphoric moments through musical performance). In such a way, the Classical Hollywood Musical may be seen as engaged in a conservative project of escapism. On the other hand, as Dyer notes, the musical, which posits utopia as an aspirational affective state – again, achieved through performative/ritualistic means and moments – always already speaks to the *reality* of conflict within society, both within and without the musical film text, and to the transient nature of "escape". This constantly threatens to undermine and even subvert the utopian project of the musical, for which reason the genre form takes repetitious recourse to the staging of musical numbers: the musical presents the feeling of utopia again and again in compensation for its lack of representational realism or validity; put differently, the musical number could be seen as a fetish of Classical Hollywood cinema, replacing/standing in for a lost sense of narrative and representational control.

Overall, the Classical Hollywood Musical is implicitly self-effacing and self-censorious, and its formal and narrative tendencies throughout history may be seen as a barometer, of sorts, for the working out of contemporary ideological conflicts. Musical historian Richard Barrios has identified the year 1934 as a "line of demarcation where earlier musical ideas [were] finally put to rest,"[65] and from whence the Classical Hollywood Musical evolved, predicated on the standardization and concretization of their generic formulae and distinguished from their earlier stage of innovation and experimentation. Barrios has been particularly critical of the influence of censorship on the Hollywood musical, positing that Joseph Breen's systematic approach to the regulation of film content "channel[ed] much of [the musical's] earlier potential into a province of fail-safe conventionality [...] [T]here was an unmistakable diminution, a petrification of formula and theme that the musical would rigidly observe for much of the rest of its existence."[66] In agreement with Barrios, it is evident that over the course of the 1930s, musicals were increasingly formally streamlined and consistent in terms of their narrative tropes and ideological project, which borrowing from Altman and Feuer may be summarized as the remythicization of Platonic

[64] Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," Op. Cit.
[65] Richard Barrios, Op. Cit., 9.
[66] Ibid., 408.

integrativeness.[67] This is seen immediately by the decline of the revue-format musical and the progressive syntactic integrativeness of the backstage musical, which I shall explicate in Chapter 1. And as I shall also seek to prove throughout this thesis, the quality of "integrativeness" inherent to classical style and narrative within Hollywood musical filmmaking – at both the semantic and syntactic levels – was attendant on the containment of female performance and representation within certain determinedly phallogocentric structures of narrative and signification.

However, when it comes to treating 1934 as "a line of demarcation" or watershed moment for the musical, I will be making a departure from Barrios, in that I acknowledge that a directly causational relationship between the establishment of the PCA in 1934 and the formal integrativeness-cum-ideological petrification of the Hollywood musical cannot be proven. First of all, as a number of historians including Jacobs and Richard Maltby have pointed out, the self-censorious regulation of narrative content in movies on behalf of the Hollywood studios was not so much suddenly effected in 1934 as it was continuous and building from 1930 onwards, under the aegis of the Studio Relations Committee, or SRC. The establishment of the PCA in 1934 was largely a public relations move on the part of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), which acknowledged America's increased moral conservatism during the Great Depression, moving to placate hostilities from interest groups such as the Catholic Legion of Decency and the Payne Fund and nullify the threat of federal regulation. In such a way, as Maltby argues, the PCA brought about "no fundamental shift of Code policy."[68] It was, essentially, a re-brand of the SRC, whose practices had been found wanting, but whose policies had ostensibly been the same since publication of the Code in 1930. Nevertheless, Hollywood's self-regulatory policies were enforced under Joseph Breen's administration to an unprecedented degree and with a sophisticated attention to textual detail and nuance. As Thomas Doherty and Gregory Black have shown, fewer instances of explicitly Code-subversive content were allowed to pass through film scripts into the shooting stage of production, post-1934.[69] Further, as will be borne out through my analysis of PCA files, many films – including musicals – which had been released pre-1934 were deemed unsuitable for re-issue under Breen's administration, telling of the degree to which the sensibility and ideological meaning of "post-Code" musicals would thereafter be constrained. Thus, to some extent the very idea of a "pre-Code

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[67] Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Op. Cit.; Feuer, "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," Op. Cit.

[68] Richard Maltby, "More Sinned Against than Sinning: The Fabrications of 'Pre-Code Cinema'," Issue 29 (December 2003), http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/feature-articles/pre_code_cinema/.

[69] Doherty, Op. Cit.; Black, Op. Cit.

Hollywood Cinema," whose narrative and style was fundamentally different to that which existed post-1934, is a myth; however, the circumstances of musicals' production and exhibition were nevertheless altered under the PCA, reinforcing – if not instigating – certain conservatizing ideological impulses already present within their system of production. This will be seen to have impacted the development of female performance and representational paradigms in the musical "coextensive" (to borrow from Jacobs) with the classical-ization of its form and narrative.

Identifying the Affective Pleasures of Female Performance and Representation in the Musical

For a genre commonly associated with themes of camp, masquerade and stylistic excess – correlatives stereotypical of the "feminine" and/or the "to-be-looked-at" – whose formative years spanned the transitional (and arguably generically transformative) pre- to post-Code eras, I have already suggested that an historical analysis of the changing paradigms of female performance and the representation of femininity in the musical is particularly lacking in film theory. In addressing this gap in theory, it becomes apparent that a consideration of female performance (which is commonly analyzed a-historically) is integral to the comprehensive structural analysis of the musical's generic evolution over time. However, before proceeding in this analysis, it will be necessary first to define a few of the terms which I use to describe and qualify performance and representation, specifically the terms "camp," "excess" and "affect."

Whilst "camp" as a descriptor of performance/representational mode notoriously eludes strict definition, I will be using it here to refer largely to instances and/or allusions to self-conscious performativity, performances that speak of/to themselves *as performance*, and/or performances that either highlight their own artifice in some way or strain against the parameters of believability or narrative necessity according to a film's internal logic. This follows Susan Sontag's association of camp as a performance mode with tendencies towards emotional affectation, perceptible "artifice," "extravagance," "theatricalization," or a general sense of "too much"-ness.[70] Taken altogether, this expresses a crucial intersection

[70] In her seminal work on "Notes on Camp," published first in *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1964), Sontag ascribes the various qualities of "unnaturalness," "artificiality," "exaggeration," and "extravagance," which may or may not be self-consciously performed, to the camp mode. Its overall sensibility of "too-much-ness" unites camp's further, frequent association "femininity" or effeminacy. Though not synonymous, these terms are mutually defined by their inherent performativity: their ability to be "put on" and "taken off," particularly via aesthetic manipulation, or the ascription of superfluous, decorative, or otherwise "non-functional" physical attributes.

between camp as a performative, representational mode and the expression of affective "excess," or overtly expressed (on behalf of the performer) and transferrable (in the sense of being able to affect an audience) emotion beyond that which could be labeled as "realistic" or "believable." Thusly, "excess" and/or "excessive" here will be taken to refer to an instance of representation that expresses signified meanings that cannot necessarily be fully or efficiently contained within or accommodated by the narrative syntax of a film: meanings that subvert or run counter to phallogocentric paradigms of representation and/or the traditionally gendered politics of viewing. In such a way, for example, the affective pathos of Judy Garland's performance of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" in *The Wizard of Oz* exceeds its narrative function to convey Dorothy Gale's ennui (which I shall go on to explicate in Chapter 5), whereas the affect of Shirley Temple's cuteness, which is spectacularized during her rendition of "When I'm With You" in *Poor Little Rich Girl*, does not ultimately exceed phallogocentric representational limits in that her performance locates vulnerable femininity in diametric opposition to paternal authority, thus preserving gender binaries according to a classically integrative musical syntax.

As used above, I will be defining "performative" here according to Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender, established in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.[71] In such a light, gender, like juvenation (which I shall define below), is understood to be constructed through various series of performed acts, as opposed to being an innate characteristic or even constantly/consistently defined in/by a single person/body. I will use "performative" then as an adjective to connote conditions of constructedness in the individuation of character and star persona via ritualistic performance. Moreover, the performative is diametrically opposed to the "inherent," the "innate," and the "natural," despite representations of femininity (always already performative) in the musical often seeming to be predicated on association with naturalness, spontaneity, and the absence-of-work. Not coincidentally, I would argue, this correlates with the integrative impulses of the classical Hollywood musical towards the "remythicization" of performance as spontaneous (a theory put forward by Feuer in her article on the "The Self-Reflexive Musical and the Myth of Entertainment").[72] Performative excess may then in fact be ascribed to any spectacular(ized) performance – and further to any instance of *musical* performance – by virtue of that fact that all musical numbers, as Rubin and Krogh Hansen have suggested, function to some degree as "spectacles" to stop

[71] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006).
[72] Jane Feuer, "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," Op. Cit..

the strictly linear flow of narrative.[73] Performance is therefore brought into line, or effectively syntactically "contained" within a film, in being brought to bear narrative significance. Thus we may speak of camp or excessive affects that break the bounds of narrative or syntactic function as often nevertheless contained within and by certain representational modes or narrativizing techniques (such as how Temple's spectacular talents as a freakishly young musical star are contained by her characters' being placed in peril and/or dressed in such a way as to highlight her childishness and vulnerability).

Further, I borrow from Caroline Bainbridge to define "affect" as an "observable expression of emotion,"[74] both performed and performative, significant-of-meaning and express-able on behalf of the performer. Affect may, however, also be conceived of in terms of audience experience, as transferrable: frequently referenced in regard to reception studies of melodrama, "affect" can describe subjective, responsive (or "received") emotion on the part of the audio-viewer. Therefore, performative affect (which may or may not have a camp sensibility) may threaten to exceed certain established systems of representation in providing or making accessible certain subversive affective pleasures to an audience. Female performance and the performance of femininity therefore often prove to be potential sites of representational conflict and regulation due to the inherent instability of gender as a signifier of meaning. This is particularly true of female performance and representation in the musical.

From the mercenary heroines of *Gold Diggers of 1933* to the angelic daughters Shirley Temple and Deanna Durbin of 1936-1939, the 1930s saw a dramatic development – devolution, perhaps – in terms of representations of women and performances of femininity in musical films. Cohan has argued that musicals derive their generic coherence partially (and particularly strongly amongst Hollywood genres) from the recurrence of certain players in leading roles,[75] such that they become iconographic of the genre and, thereafter, semantic features. The changing frequency with which certain stars and/or types of roles featured in musicals throughout the decade, as well as the marked evolution of (some of) their individual personas and performance styles, thus may be seen to have elicited significant changes within the musical's generic structure – initially semantic, eventually syntactic – over a relatively short period of time. I have therefore approached the

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[73] Martin Rubin, Op. Cit.; Per Krogh Hansen, "Flow-Stoppers and Frame-Breakers: The Cognitive Complexities of the Film Musical Exemplified by Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark*," in *Beyond Classical Narration: Transmedial and Unnatural Challenges*, eds. Jan Alber and Per Krogh Hansen (Denmark: De Gruyter Press, 2014).

[74] Caroline Bainbridge, *The Cinema of Lars von Trier: Authenticity and Artifice* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 92.

[75] Steven Cohan, "Introduction," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 12.

performance and representation of femininity in Hollywood musicals of the 1930s diachronically in order to study changes in certain generic/gendered character types, charting the performance trajectories of the major female musical film stars across a single decade. Drawing on the evidence of censorship files, film reviews and other contemporaneous discourses relating to female performance in musicals, I note the increasing conservatism of critical responses towards musicals over the course of the 1930s. This will be seen both as a cause and effect of the regulation of female performance and representation in musicals under the Production Code Administration from the middle of 1934. Via close textual analysis of the major performances and representations of femininity by female musical film stars, from 1929 to 1940, I observe that resulting representational paradigm shifts altered the overall syntax or meaning-bearing structures of the Hollywood musical. Over the course of one decade, musicals shifted their early (arguably more experimental) predication on the establishment of non-traditional (and often anti-patriarchal) utopian societies to being, as Altman has shown, (most frequently) predicated on the re-establishment or affirmation of patriarchal/heteronormative societies. The development of this latter syntactic structure was catalyzed and facilitated by the containment or repression of femininity/the feminine in musical narratives and performances through various processes of character and star individuation, talent fetishization, and ultimately the juvenation of the feminine ideal represented in/by the musical text.

I will be considering "individuation" here as the process by which a single character in a film – or a star image-persona extra-textually – may be (re)presented as a distinct personality and talent. The construction of the "star image-persona," as Dyer has shown in two studies, *Stars* and *Heavenly Bodies*, is the semiotic product of negotiation between intertexts. Both the performer-as-character at the presentational level of film text, and the character-as-played-by-the-performer at the narrative/representational level of film text, invoke/signify the various extra-textual media surrounding that same performer – fan magazines, film reviews, publicity stills, et cetera – by virtue of sharing the same performer's image (which is both physical/tangible and intangible/conceptual) as referent. Following Dyer's pronouncement that "star images are always [therefore] extensive, multimedia, [and] intertextual,"[76] Studlar has established that star performance analysis is also attendant on the analysis of historical and popular "reference[s] to [popular performers'] off-screen,

[76] Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI, 1986), 3.

personal lives."[77] Furthermore, Andrew Britton has provided a useful framework for understanding how character individuation at the narrative level is always already bound up and in negotiation with generic structures of signification, writing on the development of the "star vehicle" as a sub-generic cycle of film. Britton defines the star vehicle as a film that bears the "recurrent thematic and stylistic features" of a given genre but "whose particular operation and development are [nevertheless] determined by the presence of [a] star." Interestingly, Britton has also noted that a star will tend to be cast in roles in which his/her established extra-textual star persona is in some way initially withheld, and that one of the pleasures in watching stars is in seeing them "live up to" or otherwise negotiate that established persona at the level of film-textual narrative.[78] Consideration of star performance and representation is therefore inextricable from extra-textual discourse and analysis; just as character individuation necessitates discussion of star performance and representation, star performance and representation must be considered at the level of text and in social context.

In the case of both the male and female star, their developing star persona-image is individuated/commoditized for packaging purposes and to interpellate a mass viewership. As such a marketing strategy, individuation may first be seen as negatively/repressively impacting upon performance and representational freedoms on behalf of various representing bodies: directors, studios/agents, press, film scripts, etc. Indeed, since the silent era in Hollywood, star-performer's actions and expressions – both onscreen and off, their composite "images" – have been regulated by such mediating bodies for the purpose of monitoring their signifying power and associations as "products" of a studio system. However, individuation of star image – as a result either of external/textual manipulation or as a consciously performed act on behalf of the star-performer – can also function in a positive way by establishing an individual star's particular talents as distinct or unusual, thereby highlighting the performer's participation or agency in the creation of his/her own image. I wish to highlight both functionalities of individuation in relation to female musical star performance in order to ascertain ultimately whether the drive towards representational individuation of the female star in Hollywood became more or less repressive over the course of the 1930s.

A particular manifestation of star-individuation which I wish to highlight is the process of fetishization, or the representational paradigm by which a star's unusual talent –

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[77] Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 3.
[78] Andrew Britton, "Stars and Genre," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: Routledge, 1991), 199.

that which grants him or her iconic distinction – is spectacularized, objectified, and contained within a film as a means of delimiting its affective pleasures and effectively mitigating evidence of the star-performer's agency. I define "fetishization" thusly according to the Mulveyan concept of fetishistic scopophilia, whereby the threat of female difference from a male-directed gaze[79] is effaced via over-indulgence in the glorified image of woman: a re-creation and reproduction of the image of woman as "pure image" that is paradigmatic of the Classical Hollywood representational style. The signifying power of woman is thus contained by and/or limited to its visual affects, theoretically circumscribing the female star-performer's agency over her performance and representation (though not necessarily practicably so, as I shall go on to discuss). Fetishization, as a means of star-image individuation – and by my definition here – is therefore uniquely applicable to the female musical star in the genre's nascent period, despite the fact that (some) male musical stars' talents – with Fred Astaire as perhaps the most famous example – may be seen as having been spectacularized and indeed visually objectified towards the incitement of audience pleasures.[80] However, as Feuer has shown in relation to the paradigmatic representation of the "song and dance man," agency tends to be re-inscribed within spectacularized male performance via its framing as spontaneous and seemingly un-self-consciously "to-be-looked-at."[81]

The project of fetishization as representational device - to delimit the affective pleasures of individuated female performance – is to preserve the traditionally gendered politics of viewing and representation, by which active female-to-female identification (that is, identification of the female viewer with the female star-performer) threatens the phallogocentric apparatus of Classical Hollywood Cinema. As I will show, particularly in the cases of Jeanette MacDonald, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland, attempts to mitigate the affective pleasures of highly individuated vocal performance are frequently expressed through fetishistic scopophilic means. Vocal performance, which extends beyond the strictly visual plane of representation, thus becomes a key site for the negotiation of performance and representational strategy on behalf of the female musical star-performer. Following a number of other scholars who have considered the significance of the female voice as a

[79] I reference the "male-directed gaze" here as opposed to the "male gaze" or "male perspective" in acknowledgment that male and female viewers alike are often directed via the apparatus of Classical Hollywood Cinema to view films from a masculinized perspective, as shown by Mulvey in her analysis of the over-abundance of investigatory and fetishistic images of women in classic films. This does not, however, preclude the ability to view a film – and find pleasure in doing so – from an alternative gendered (or a-gendered) perspective.

[80] In making this assertion, I am confining myself to a discussion of star individuation during the Classical Hollywood period only.

[81] C.f. Steven Cohan, "Feminizing the Song and Dance Man," Op. Cit.; Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, Op. Cit.

subversive agent within a traditionally gendered system of representation – which is also crucially predicated on the visual – I will be looking in particular at how certain spectacular, individuated female performances interact with repressive and fetishistic imaging techniques either to contain performative affect or subvert the phallogocentric gaze. Each star considered here – Ginger Rogers, Jeanette MacDonald, Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland – will be seen to have exercised some degree of agency or resistance to imagistic repression in terms of their performance and extra-textual representation, thereby exercising their individuation in a positive and powerful way. However, I will also show those ways in which their filmic representation and surrounding star discourses sought to contain that individuation within a fetishistic star discourse, thus to constrain their signifying power and agency as star-signs.

Further to the processes of star and character individuation I chart throughout my analysis of 1930s Hollywood musicals, I will identify the process of performative juvenation as a specific manifestation of this trend in the wake of the concretization of generic paradigms of representation in the latter half of the decade. I define "juvenation" according to Studlar's term for the process(es) by which certain classical Hollywood film stars have been represented on film and in extra-textual discourses as youthful and sexually innocent (often past the point of physical pre-adolescence) as a means of containing and/or disavowing their – and their characters' – agency as females. Studlar has shown, beginning with the early film star Mary Pickford, that juvenation may be both self-consciously and willfully performed by the individual star and promoted as an aspect of her image-persona on behalf of her studio in order to attract the widest possible audience from amongst a diversely aged and gendered population. Studlar has therefore theorized several different gender-specific forms of pleasure to be had in viewing the juvenated star: first, she may represent a possible point of identification for female audience members; second, she may be the object of desire for heterosexual male spectators under the "paedophilic gaze;" and thirdly, in the case of the physically juvenile (as opposed to the performatively juvenated) star like Shirley Temple, she may be the object of maternal and/or paternal love and desire as the archetypal "priceless child [...] valued for [...] her emotional rather than economic value."[82] I will return to Studlar's theory on the juvenated star in relation to the female musical performers Shirley Temple and Deanna Durbin, in discussion of the interplay between their performance of sexually innocent youth-as-fetish as a means of integration

[82] Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit.

within the conservatively phallogocentric, integrative syntax of the classical Hollywood musical.

Aligning Stars Within Genre History

By way of illustrating the various processes of representation in relation/opposition to female performance in the Hollywood musical over the course of the 1930s, I have chosen to make case studies of five individual female performers, following my analysis of female performance and representation in the backstage musical (which will include an extended discussion of Eleanor Powell).[83] Before going on to outline my arguments in the following chapters, I would like to make a note on the selection of performers considered here, and acknowledge how this selection process has been informed by an adherence to Altman's structuralist methodology. The five star-performers to whom I have devoted individual chapters or significant chapter sections – Ginger Rogers, Jeanette MacDonald, Shirley Temple, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland – established, first and foremost, significantly powerful and individuated enough star images over the course of the decade to be considered in isolation from each other. Two of these, Rogers and MacDonald, were furthermore notable for having their star images iconically established (at least initially) in diametric relationship to one or more male "partners" (Fred Astaire in the case of Rogers, Maurice Chevalier and Nelson Eddy in the case of MacDonald), thus embodying the "dual-focus" in star discourse. While, strictly speaking, Shirley Temple was not attached to any other star in terms of the establishment of her star image, nevertheless her film roles (in which she was consistently matched with an idealized father figure) tended to reflect a certain syntactic coherence with the "dual-focus narrative." Finally, in comparing and contrasting Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland's performative affects as adolescent musical stars, I have invoked a conscious "dual-focus analysis" in order to more reliably extrapolate conclusions concerning their negotiation of the tension between performance and the representational paradigm of female juvenation.

In balancing my address of female performance and representation in musicals of the 1930s thusly, I have left out extended consideration of two other major female stars of the decade: Grace Moore and Sonja Henie. Moore I have omitted in recognition of the fact that most of the operettas in which she appeared bear little narrative distinction from

[83] I have chosen not to devote a full chapter to Powell as an individual case study, in that her rise to stardom within MGM backstage musicals at the end of the decade more usefully serves discussion of the evolution of gendered representational paradigms in the context of this cycle. Furthermore, Powell's output of films up through 1940 was considerably lower than that of any of the other stars considered here.

MacDonald's, and therefore do little to facilitate rich textual analysis or elucidate broader generic observation. Furthermore, in terms of her popularity as a star of operetta, she lagged considerably behind MacDonald by the middle of the decade and maintained a negligible profile within the industry. Meanwhile, Henie, like Eleanor Powell (whose performance and representation I consider in relation to the backstage musical cycle) starred in confirmedly "musical" films but was arguably individuated more in terms of her athletic than musical prowess (a distinction made by Greg Faller in his study of *The Function of Star-Image and Performance in the Hollywood Musical*).[84] It should be noted that Henie and Powell had relatively few major starring roles date prior to 1940, though both had established star profiles by the end of the decade.[85] Nevertheless, I have included analysis of Powell in relation to my discussion of the developing backstage musical syntax in Chapter 1, in recognition of the fact that her few star vehicles pre-1940 tended to "off-centre" a dual-focus narrative in a negotiation of her spectacular athletic talent and performative affect. Nevertheless, her considerable subjectivity as a solo performer was effectively re-contained within a phallogocentric representational system, consistent with the turn towards individuation-cum-fetishization of female talent in the backstage musical.

Thus, in the first chapter on "The Girls Backstage," I will establish how female representation in the backstage musical shifted from predication on a paradigm of homosociality to paradigmatic individuation over the course of the 1930s. This is indicative of a more general trend towards individuation in female musical performance and representation from 1929 to 1940 (and which I will explore in greater detail in the proceeding chapters by focusing on specifically individuated female musical stars). Close examination of the backstage musical subgenre – and particularly the "Berkeleyesque" cycle associated with Warner Bros. from 1933 to 1940 – reveals how the progressive regulation or "sophistication" of musicals under the influence of censorship circa 1934 contributed to a paradigmatic shift away from representing female homosociality – with all its concomitant "excesses" of femininity – towards the individuated female character/star whose femininity is both contained by/within the male-driven or male-directed narrative and objectified within musical numbers. In so doing, I hope to re-establish a generic continuity between "primitive" or pre-1930 backstage melodramas and early Berkeleyesque iterations based on their shared structures of female performance and representational trends. This will amount

[84] Greg S. Faller, *The Function of Star-Image and Performance in the Hollywood Musical: Sonja Henie, Esther Williams and Eleanor Powell* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Library, 1987), 4.
[85] Powell had starred (as opposed to featured minorly) in three films prior to 1940, and Henie, six.

to a re-adjustment of Altman's syntactic distinction between early and classical Hollywood musicals.

In the second chapter, I will illustrate this paradigmatic trend by shifting my focus to the specific processes of individuating the single female star, using Ginger Rogers's performance and representation of femininity in the Astaire-Rogers cycle of dance musicals at RKO between 1933 and 1939 as a particular case study. In keeping with the musical's syntactic impulse towards narrative and formal integration post-1933, Rogers's characters are increasingly individuated and granted narrative agency across two distinct sub-cycles of film (which I identify as Astaire and Roger's "secondary lead" films versus their "classical" or "primary lead" cycle). This will be seen as evidence of the increasing centrality of individuated femininity as a signifying construct to both the semantic and syntactic structuring of the musical, as well as representative of the increased visibility of individuated female performance within the musical over the course of the decade. I will prove this with recourse to the film texts themselves, and by drawing on contemporary reviews of, and star discourses on, Rogers's performance. I will also be referencing the production files of the Astaire-Rogers cycle of dance musicals, demonstrating how modes of female performance and representation in the musical were regulated by the Production Code Administration, which further contributed to the concretization of the integrative syntax of the genre in the mid-1930s. Nevertheless, as will be seen, a byproduct of such syntactic development was the almost excessive individuation of the female star towards the end of this musical cycle, by which Rogers's narrative subjectivity in later films could be seen as outstripping Astaire's, thus transgressing the phallogocentric parameters of classical narrative and forcing an end to the cycle.

Following on from this study of Ginger Rogers, I will consider how, in the case of Jeanette MacDonald, fetishization of individuated female talent emerged as a means of containing the potential excesses of femininity inherent to the classically integrated Hollywood musical. Similar to Ginger Rogers, a teleology of Jeanette MacDonald's performance in musicals throughout the 1930s may be sketched via consideration of two distinct sub-cycles of operetta: her mostly pre-Code films with Maurice Chevalier at Paramount between 1929 and 1934 versus her post-Code films at MGM (most of which co-starred Nelson Eddy) after 1935. As I will show, the imposition of stricter censorship after 1934 profoundly affected Maurice Chevalier's viability as a male lead and his association with operetta, in that his entire star persona and performance style had been predicated on a pre-Code sensibility of overt sexuality. Censorship under the PCA thus imposed a thematic

shift within operetta away from the sophisticated sex comedy[86] towards a more melodramatic mode (while remaining syntactically integrative in the musical sense). This was exemplified in MacDonald's films with Nelson Eddy, in which MacDonald may be seen as owning greater character individuation and narrative agency and centrality than was available to her previously in pre-Code operettas opposite Maurice Chevalier. At the same time, within these conservatized, post-Code narratives, a tension may be perceived between the desire to present MacDonald's singular vocal talent as phenomenologically spectacular – in being affectively overwhelming, it exceeds representational/narrative functionality and reflects MacDonald's potential subjective/subversive authority – and the need to re-inscribe her musical performance within the integrative, narrative confines of a melodramatic love story. As I shall prove, post-Code operetta therefore tended to compartmentalize or fetishize MacDonald's individuated vocal performance in extended set pieces as a means of re-containing the otherwise non-integrative excesses of her performative feminine affect within the by-now established-as-classical musical syntax.

In the fourth chapter, then, I will further develop this idea of the fetishization of individuated female talent in the musical in relation to the child star Shirley Temple. As theorized by Karen Lury and Lori Merish, the fetishization of Temple's juvenility – or the process by which she is made to perform and be seen as "cute" by virtue of her extreme youth combined with extreme talent – may be seen as a means of disavowing her threatening Otherness or affective excesses within the narratives in which she appears. As I will show, Temple's physical pre-sexuality in these films marks her out both as "safely" feminine (in the context of the post-Code, classically integrated Hollywood) but also as uncontainable within the syntactically-dictated musical narrative of heterosexual conciliation and, as a female performer, spectacularly excessive. Thus within this "child narrative" cycle of Shirley Temple musicals there resides a perceptible tension between the impulse to objectify Temple sexually – to re-inscribe her within the traditional gender dichotomy of the integrated musical syntax, thus posing censorship problems and critical backlash – and to sanitize her characters of their sexuality, necessitating the displacement of a romantic narrative onto secondary characters. Again, fetishization of Temple's individuated star talent – in this case, the specific intersection of her youth and her

[86] It should be noted that this is also associable with the style of Ernst Lubitsch, who directed four of the films in which Jeanette MacDonald appeared with Maurice Chevalier: *The Love Parade* (1929), *Monte Carlo* (1930), *One Hour With You* (1932, directed with George Cukor); and *The Merry Widow* (1934). It should be further noted that *The Merry Widow* was produced at MGM, as opposed to Paramount, and that MacDonald and Chevalier appeared in a fifth film together at Paramount in 1932, *Love Me Tonight*, directed by Rouben Mamoulian.

performance abilities – via musical performance will be seen as a means of disavowing the excessive Otherness of her femininity.

However, in that Temple was maturing physically into adolescence by the end of the decade, the sexual implications of Temple's performance could no longer be denied, and Temple's stardom in musicals became unsustainable. In my fifth and final chapter, therefore, I will consider the rise to prominence of Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland as juvenated – but crucially post-pubescent – female musical performer-stars in the late 1930s as symptomatic of the modification of an idealized paradigm of female performance and representation in musicals established vis-à-vis Shirley Temple earlier in the decade. In performing a comparative analysis of the two stars' individuated performance styles, however, I will show how Deanna Durbin's musical performance was successfully integrated into the overall narrative and form of her musicals according to a traditionally gendered politics of viewing, while Judy Garland – who would go on to become the most successful and enduring icon of female musical performance out of all the stars here considered – may be seen to have transgressed and exceeded those same constraints.

In each chapter, I will review the relevant critical theory pertaining to each performer in the context of the musical genre, and will proceed to apply such theory to my analysis of individual iterations of female performance and representation in Hollywood musicals of the 1930s. I will refer to contemporaneous extra-textual discourses such as fan magazine articles and reviews to provide historical context to the construction of their various star images/personas, and I will reference their films' PCA files as evidence of how those same images were actively regulated by the film industry. Overall, this will show how paradigms of female performance and representation in the Hollywood musical evolved rapidly over the course of the genre's first decade of existence.

Chapter 1

The Girls Backstage: women in the backstage musical, from a paradigm of homosociality to integration and individuation

As the first "All Talking! All Dancing! All Singing!" film to come out of Hollywood, *The Broadway Melody* set a partial semantic blueprint for the backstage musical, the first significant cycle of narrative-based Hollywood musicals (as distinguished from the non-narrative revue cycle) to survive the first five years of talking pictures.[87] On the level of narrative, which follows the gradual dissolution of a small family unit under the pressures of the performing lifestyle, Altman argues that *The Broadway Melody* conforms to a melodramatic – rather than classically "musical" – syntax.[88] Nevertheless, using Altman's own method of classification, *The Broadway Melody* contains certain semantic features (in terms of its iconography and thematic and narrative tropes) that *are* commonly associated with a classic form of musical – the 1930s backstage musical – if not *the* Classical (i.e. integrated) Hollywood Musical. As Altman has suggested, this may account for its exclusion, along with the musical-maternal melodrama *Applause* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1929), from the canon.[89] Yet *The Broadway Melody* contains (and indeed established) two of the primary semantic components of the 1930s backstage musical: the depiction of homosocial communities of women and, as a corollary, representations of femininity that contradict or subvert heteronormative paradigms of gender performance. It was this arguably excessively feminine sensibility, manifest in certain aspects of the backstage musical, that intensified censorship and which a rising tendency towards the fetishization of individuated female star

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[87] Film historians such as Barrios and Altman have established that the years 1931-1932 saw a marked decline in the production of musical films. Barrios (Op. Cit., 341) notes that as early as August 1930, *Billboard* had declared "Musical Films Are Taboo," and that other genre films had largely done away with theme songs and musical scores. Up until 1931, revues were the dominant musical form. In "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre", Altman has suggested that this is largely due to the fact that early musicals such as the revue and the musical melodrama (to which syntactic structure *The Broadway Melody* arguably conforms) had not established a coherent or definable syntax. Altman explains, "After the slack years of 1931-32, however, the musical began to grow in a new direction; while maintaining substantially the same semantic materials, the genre increasingly related the energy of music- making to the joy of coupling, the strength of the community, and the pleasures of entertainment. Far from being exiled from history, the musical's characteristic syntax can be shown by the generic historian to grow out of the linking of specific semantic elements at identifiable points." Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," Op. Cit., 6-18.

[88] Altman makes this comparison in "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre" (Op. Cit., 12). I would thus loosely define "melodrama" here as a film that is narratively predicated on the redefinition of interpersonal relationships in the aftermath of loss; melodrama is further associated with by a tendency towards situation within the domestic/familial sphere, often with a female protagonist and marked by "over-the-top," "affected" (i.e. non-naturalistic) performance styles.

[89] Altman argues that the earliest, non-revue-format musicals of 1927-1932 "attempted to build a backstage or night club semantics into a melodramatic syntax" (Ibid., 13).

talent sought to mitigate over the course of the decade. As will be seen, this functioned as a means of re-containing the excessive and unruly femininity (re)presented in/by the early, female-oriented backstage musicals.

In this chapter, I will explore the evolution of female representation in backstage musicals from the original *Broadway Melody* (1929) to *The Broadway Melody of 1940* with recourse both to the canonical, "Berkeleyesque" musicals of Warner Bros., such as *42nd Street* and the *Gold Digger* series, and to the later *Broadway Melody* series at MGM, thus tracing continuities and changes within the subgenre over time. Generally speaking, the backstage musical is concerned with the defense of entertainment (through corollary processes of demystification and remythicization, as Feuer has argued) as a pastime amongst musical performers, either individually or in groups.[90] This may be ascribed to both the earlier Warner Bros. cycle and the successive/revisionist cycle at MGM later in the decade. As I will show, however, in its initial iterations the backstage musical was specifically concerned with representing transgressive femininity within female homosocial communities and performance collectives. The ideological implications of such ultimately problematized the longevity of the cycle in the context of the conservatization of American art and culture in the depressed socioeconomic climate of the mid-1930s.[91] Seen as transgressive of traditionally phallogo-/hetero-centric paradigms of representation, the female homosocial subtext of the Warner Bros. backstage musical was particularly challenged by the implementation of stricter censorship under the Production Code Administration.

Tracing the performance trajectories of certain female stars of backstage musicals – Joan Blondell, Ginger Rogers and Eleanor Powell, among them – it may be seen that this paradigm shift resulted in the greater individuation of female performance by/within the genre, at the same time as backstage musicals became increasingly formally integrated and phallogocentric in terms of their representational tendencies and perspective at the narrative level. From 1934 onwards, the backstage musical increasingly foregrounded the explicit narrative resolution of a central, straight love story, thus containing and recuperating within a phallogocentric narrative the excessive femininity or gendered-

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[90] Feuer, "The Self-Reflexive Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," Op. Cit.

[91] I am defining the "homosocial" according to Eve Sedgwick's term denoting close social bonds (not mutually exclusive of the sexual, but in my understanding of the word, often latently connotative of such) between members of the same sex, as explored in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Sedgwick observes from literature that homosociality between men has tended to be characterized differently to that between women, portrayed as "relatively smooth and palpable" (23) an observation which goes beyond the film-historical scope of my research to address much more deeply in relation to the backstage musicals at hand, but which represents an intriguing avenue of future analysis.

feminine sensibility which had come to be associated with sub-generic form. However, in sublimating the subversive narrative potential of female homosociality into the fetishization of individuated female stars in later backstage musicals, Hollywood nevertheless elevated the single, individuated female star to a new level of signifying power both within the industry and the musical film text (a consequence I explore in the proceeding chapters, each of which centers on an individual, female musical star).

In the Closet, Behind a Curtain: female homosociality in *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beaumont, MGM, 1929)

First I would like to re-situate *The Broadway Melody* in the formal context of musicals, and particularly in terms of the backstage and/or "Berkeleyesque" cycle of musicals (although I hope ultimately to show that the "Berkeleyesque" as a descriptor for early backstage Hollywood musicals is at best a generalization and at worst obfuscates the great diversity of generic syntax within this cycle of films). Despite having been largely excluded from the canon of classical or even "early" Hollywood musicals, I want to propose that *The Broadway Melody* bears greater semantic and syntactic resemblance to later backstage musicals, and particularly to the "Berkeleyesque" cycle (such as *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*) which are associated with the rebirth of the Hollywood musical in 1933. Upon closer examination of performances of femininity and representations of female (homo)societies within its text, *The Broadway Melody*'s overriding, meaning-bearing structure may be seen as predicated on the testing of social bonds between women, or female homosociality. As I will go on to show, this syntax is very much present in the texts of the canonical "Berkeleyesque" backstagers.

On first glance, of course, *The Broadway Melody* may be seen to employ a syntactically melodramatic structure on the basis of its narrative and consequent ideological function. The film follows two sisters, Hannah ("Hank") and Queenie Mahoney, as they negotiate love and financial hardship on their way to making it big on Broadway. The film is perhaps only "musical" in form in that the two sisters are frequently represented performing in various spectacles or shows-within-the-show along the way to becoming chorus girls. The film thus juxtaposes its straight-forward and linear narrative with staged musical numbers that are, for the most part, unrelated or extraneous to the narrative trajectory of the film, and un-integrated into the story. *The Broadway Melody*, just like more retrospectively recognizable iterations of the backstage musical – *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* –

among them, thus represents a non-integrative form of "aggregate entertainment;" it negotiates the "tension and interplay" between narrative and spectacle in its overall form without seeking to efface completely or resolve their distinction.[92] Yet on the spectacular level, *The Broadway Melody* looks and feels very different to that famous cycle-within-a-cycle of musicals which Martin Rubin has dubbed the "Berkeleyesque" backstage musical.[93] As Rubin explains, the "Berkeleyesque" form/aesthetic is not the exclusive province of those films which Busby Berkeley directed or (for the most part) helped direct; it rather describes a non-integrated backstage musical in which the space of the diegetically staged musical numbers – the spectacular numbers that interrupt the narrative portion of the film (and are often "stacked" at the end of the film, after the narrative has been played out) is strongly demarcated – and crucially not subordinated – to the offstage space of the narrative.

Due to the abundance and recognizability of such texts, the "Berkeleyesque" – or more specifically the Busby Berkeley-directed – musical has come to stand metonymically for the 1930s cycle of backstage musicals. Thus discourse on the Hollywood backstage musical has been dominated by auteurist theory at the expense of analyzing those films like *The Broadway Melody* and later iterations that fall outside the category of the so-called "Berkeleyesque". Even feminist theorist Lucy Fischer, who has deconstructed Berkeley's representation of women on film in order to expose its inherently misogynistic aesthetic,[94] has nevertheless conceptualized "his" films in terms of a singly-authored ontology, rather than targeting them as an evolved myth. In such a way, critical analysis of the "Berkeleyesque" – or rather a Berkeley-centric analysis of the backstage musical – has tended to take the existence of a male "auteur" or authorial influence as a given, and has therefore proved to be conceptually androcentric, if not essentially misogynous in and of itself.

I do not contest that, taken all together, a "Berkeleyesque" cycle of backstage musicals exists within the canon of Hollywood movies and warrants further examination. However, as my project here is to analyze performances of femininity in Hollywood musicals of the 1930s from a diachronic and feminist perspective, it would be misleading to treat the Berkeleyesque "image of woman" in its "purest, most distillate form"[95] as the leading representational paradigm in backstage musicals. For one thing, doing so would be to ignore the fact that Berkeley's literal "image-ing" or directorial representation of women, the

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[92] Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 13-19.
[93] Ibid., 36.
[94] Lucy Fischer, "City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space," Op. Cit., 2-11.
[95] Ibid., 3.

female form, and/or the "feminine" onscreen accounts for only a fraction of the images of/performances by women that appear in the body of films on which he worked. With the exception of a few films like *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935), which he directed entirely, Berkeley directed only the musical sequences in such "Busby Berkeley" films as *42nd Street* (from 1933, largely directed by Lloyd Bacon) and *Dames* (Ray Enright, 1934). Of course, a distinguishing – indeed qualifying – feature of any musical film is the fact that it has musical numbers, and for this reason, theorists of the musical have tended to prioritize the textual analysis of its actually "musical" sequences; at least partially for this reason moreover, the Berkeley-influenced musical has been dubbed the "Berkeleyesque". Arguably such a prioritization has amounted to the effective disavowal of aggregation in the musical as so-called "aggregate entertainment," elevating spectacle in the Hollywood musical to a level of textual significance above that of narrative. But to neglect female performances outside musical numbers and/or outside the parameters of the "Berkeleyesque," as Lucy Fischer has done, is to miss how fully integral the establishment of "femininity" as a signifying concept has been to both the narrative and formal development of the individual backstage musical and to the formal and narrative development of the subgenre as a whole.[96]

Genre theorists Richard Barrios and Martin Rubin have tended to separate the rash of early all-talking musicals that appeared in the first three years of the genre's establishment (1929-1932)[97] as a film cycle distinct from the "Berkeleyesque" backstage musical. In histories of early talking pictures and musicals, the Berkeleyesque picture has been widely credited with the effective revival and re-popularization of the musical genre, beginning with *42nd Street* in 1933, after a downturn in production between 1931 and 1932. However, I would like to posit that a first cycle of backstage musicals existed not to the exclusion of, but rather alongside, the development of the Berkeleyesque as a cycle or sub-genre of musical. The cycle I am theorizing is distinguished by its tendency towards the

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[96] In their discussion of *Gold Diggers of 1933* and the Warners-Berkeley canon in *Blue Skies and Silver Linings* (Op. Cit., 46-72), Babington and Evans have similarly noted feminist criticism's tendency to reduce analysis of the Berkeleyesque backstage musical to deconstruction of the oppressive, imagistic representation of women "at the expense of asking whether any further play of meaning takes place." At the same time they acknowledge that Fischer in particular recognizes in the films a certain knowingness of the gendered politics of viewing that they employ, Berkeley's more outwardly misogynistic representation of the "image of woman as image" is prioritized over consideration of narrative meanings. (This is something both Mellencamp and Robertson, as reviewed in the Introduction, have addressed at more length.) Babington and Evans go on to suggest that, taking narrative into account more fully, the Warner Bros. backstage musicals need not be seen as so dis-integrative as suggested by Barrios, in that their stories (centred on women) pass "knowing and witty" comment (explicitly or otherwise) on the themes of sexuality, economics, and spectacle presented/referenced in the musical numbers. In such a way, the Berkeleyesque backstage musical may be seen as perhaps more "intersectional" than "aggregate" or "non-integrative."

[97] That is, "all-talking, all-dancing, all-singing" films like *The Broadway Melody* and *Sunny Side Up* (David Butler, 1929) which are distinct from first-wave pictures-with-music such as *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland and Gordon Hollingshead, 1927) and *The Singing Fool* (Lloyd Bacon, 1928), which merely incorporated "talking" sequences into the overall silent film form.

homosocial representation of females and femininity in society. This will be seen on a continuum from *The Broadway Melody* in 1929 up through the two Berkeleyesque musicals from 1933, *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*. On the level of conflict, each of these films is "about" a unit of women (two or more, and spanning the archetypal spectrum from ingénue to fast-talking dame) trying to "make it" on Broadway; the primary narrative focus of each film is how this pursuit affects the close-knit social and emotional bond between the women concerned, in some way isolated from the influence of men. Of course, each of these three films may be seen otherwise as narratively and formally unique. For this reason, I would not call the "woman's homosocial backstage musical," represented by *The Broadway Melody, 42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*, a subgenre so much as a cycle of musical films in which female-oriented themes and conflicts and "feminine" sensibilities are played out vis-a-vis a close-knit society of women, though these sensibilities may be addressed and resolved in different narrative ways.

It bears mentioning that *The Broadway Melody* is particularly generically conflicted, in that it belongs to two distinct genres of film simultaneously: the backstage musical, most obviously, and secondly the "women's film" or melodrama. As Richard Barrios has shown, this and other early musicals (like many early talking pictures) are marked by their distinct generic hybridity; this is indicative perhaps of the degree to which the musical genre had yet to establish itself in terms of its narrative and formal parameters and identify a target audience in the first few years of talking pictures. This may account for why the theme of female homosociality was shared across otherwise dramatically different forms of musical and even between other genre films in the early sound era. Tellingly, promotional material for *The Broadway Melody* variably included allusions to musicals and revues as well as to women's pictures, sex dramas, and other media events.[98] Notwithstanding its generic ambivalence, however, the film as a whole may be conceived of first and formally as a musical and second, narratively, as a melodrama.

The central conflict of *The Broadway Melody* is a domestic one, regarding the schism of Hank and Queenie's sister-act as a direct result of the return of their shared love interest, Hank's fiancé Eddie. The focus on changing family dynamics immediately places *Broadway* in the context of a melodramatic syntax. Hank's ultimate "release" of Queenie into the arms of Eddie parallels a narrative trope of the maternal melodrama by which a mother or mother figure (represented by the older sister Hank) self-sacrificially relinquishes her "child"

[98] Barrios, Op. Cit., 66.

(Queenie) to the Symbolic order of paternal care (embodied by Eddie), wherein the child marries and/or finds an alternative home from which the mother is exiled (just as Hank ultimately refuses to live with Queenie and Eddie). This melodramatic storyline is nevertheless transposed onto the milieu and iconography of Broadway performers, which justifies the presence of musical numbers and spectacle within/in juxtaposition with its narrative. *The Broadway Melody* thus indulges in the semantics of the backstage "folk" musical, as discussed by Jane Feuer, in which a "myth of spontaneity" is developed around contrived set pieces in order simultaneously to obfuscate its essential formal artificiality and to heighten (falsely) the "naturalness" of its self-consciously performing community.[99]

Indeed, contained in *The Broadway Melody*'s very first scene is a summary representation of Hollywood's early struggles to negotiate musical spectacles into talking-picture narratives, and moreover, to establish the musical among Hollywood's repertoire of film genres. *The Broadway Melody* opens onto a tableau of various musicians and singers struggling to be heard over the din of a Broadway rehearsal studio. The first few seconds of sound in this first all-talking musical are thus loud, discordant and de-individuated, effecting an excess of aural stimuli. After these first few moments of visual confusion and aural dissonance, the camera – with its microphone – settles on a single character, the songwriter Eddie (Charles King), who suggests that everybody gather round to listen to his song. "Naturally", the bystanders/chorus spontaneously gather round and sing. In such a way, *The Broadway Melody* establishes that its linear narrative and structure will impose a seemingly "natural" (that is, psychologically realistic and character-motivated) coherence to the excess of stimuli, which is necessarily present(ed) in/by by the all-talking musical film form. *The Broadway Melody* thus bends itself into its musical genre, borrowing certain tropes from the woman's film to cover up a perhaps under-developed narrative framework as an early backstage musical.

I have already noted that a pivotal, melodramatic – and, as I shall argue, even romantic – relationship exists between the performing "Mahoney Sisters," Hank and Queenie, in *The Broadway Melody*. The relationship between the traditionally heterosexual lovers Queenie and Eddie is, unusually, secondary to the narrative importance of the sororal or homosocial relationship. Queenie and Eddie's heterosexual union is established/resolved at the end of the film at the expense of the Queenie and Hank's contrastive homosocial bond, and the significance of this rupture is emphasized by the film's narrative denouement. I would like to suggest that the paradigmatic representation of such female-female

[99] Feuer, "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," Op. Cit., 443-447.

relationships, or the homosociality of women, is a distinguishing feature of the early backstage musical. [100] Crucially subversive of traditional gender stereotypes and heteronormative relationships even in the context of a comparatively liberal pre-Code cinema, this homosocial paradigm of femininity was threatening enough to necessitate a narrative un-doing or re-assimilation of female protagonists into patriarchal society at the end of each film. However, as Lea Jacobs has shown, such a lasting memory of gender-role transgression survives the imposition of heterocentric meaning – indeed, it survives narrative closure – so that we may consider performances of femininity in films like *The Broadway Melody* in isolation to, and in excess of, the limitations of a "tacked-on" ending.[101]

Female homosociality, or the close bond between a group or unit of women, so permeates the text of *The Broadway Melody* that it may be seen even as an implicitly lesbian love story-musical. This is first hinted at via the representation of the sisters' physical relationship. Throughout the film, Hank and Queenie share several kisses on the lips,[102] and are frequently shown in poses of physical intimacy with their arms wrapped round each other; they also spoon each other whilst performing their stage act, mimicking a typical lovers' pose. In one of the film's most poignant scenes, Hank waits up for Queenie in their shared bed, worrying over whether she has spent the night with her excessively macho boyfriend "Jock." If the film were not so explicitly insistent on establishing Hank and Queenie as sisters, it would be easy to read their relationship as one between a stereotypically "butch" female (the masculine-ly monickered Hank) and a stereotypically counterpart "femme" (the overtly feminine Queenie). Hank is consistently characterized as leaning towards an authoritative-male gender orientation, being the "brains" and "action" behind their act. Queenie, on the other hand, is a pure attraction, a pretty and passive body to gaze upon, whose job is only – in her words - to "go out without any clothes on," compounded by the fact that Hank frequently remarks on Queenie's looks and relative lack of ability (the inverse, ostensibly, of Hank's own virtues): "Honey," she declares, "they sure were smart when they made you beautiful." In that Hank consistently characterizes Queenie

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[100] This is in recognition of the fact that homosociality has been a representational paradigm of femininity in domestic melodramas since the silent era, and pre-dating that in 19th-century literature (for instance, in Alcott and Austen). My argument is therefore not that the early backstage musical established female homosociality as a representational paradigm on film, but rather that it is a distinguishing narrative feature of the early cycle of backstage musicals, and further that later iterations effected a conscious semantic shift away from that paradigm.

[101] Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*, Op. Cit., 106-131.

[102] Accepting that kissing on the lips may have remained a socially acceptable form of greeting for and between both sexes, and devoid of sexual significance, well into the twentieth century, this act is nevertheless presented as a problematic sign within the love triangle comprised of Hank, Queenie and Eddie. When Eddie kisses Queenie on the lips late in the film – in much the same way as the three have been shown to kiss each other (supposedly) platonically before – Queenie tells him that he should not kiss her in that way. Thus, the physical act of kissing is shown to have an ambiguous, or shifting, meaning even within the text of the film.

as "passive" and "to be looked at" – an objectification Queenie wittingly invites – Hank is correspondingly gendered masculine and Queenie contrastively feminine throughout the film. As such, it is in fact debatable whether their ostensibly platonic/filial love relationship is indeed more a homosocial one (that is, between two gendered "females") than it is a heterosocial or even heterosexual one (between a female who is in fact gendered – effectively made – male and a more gender-normatively "feminine" female). Nevertheless, Hank and Queenie are sexually female – as well as ostensibly heterosexual, being in love with the same man – and their relationship is a homosocial one.

Queenie, the "femme", is re-assimilated into the domestic, private sphere which is the stereotypical domain of the wife-woman by her marriage to Eddie, both removing her from Hank's ambiguously gendered authority and away from the (literal and figurative) public stage/gaze. But where Queenie is "scared straight" from the gender-deviant lifestyle of female homosociality, which for the Mahoney sisters exists in the public and eschews permanent heterosexual attachment, Hank embraces it. In the moment in which Hank makes the decision to lie to Queenie that she never really considered marrying Eddie – thus freeing her sister from the homosocial bond and releasing her to phallogocentric/patriarchal society and control – she experiences a neurotic episode, veering from tears to hysterical laughter as she smears greasepaint on her face backstage. This may be seen as the outward expression of an inner gender-sexual identity crisis, catalyzed by the fact that she has proved neither butch (that is, gendered-masculine) enough to put aside completely her romantic feelings for Eddie, nor stereotypically feminine enough to be satisfied with the confines of heterosexual marriage. Instead, Hank opts to go on the road with a new female partner, Flo, who replaces Queenie in the homosocial (and possibly homosexual) relationship. (And while Flo's brief flirtation with Eddie during the sisters' reunion scene ostensibly underscores the characters' general heterosexuality, it may also be read as an indication of the essential instability of Eddie and Queenie's domestic union – the inadequacies of the heteronormative lifestyle). Hank thus defies the trappings of heteronormativity to embrace the nomadic lifestyle of a Broadway performer. As her uncle-manager (himself coded as a gay man) declares, Hank is "just like a trouper [and] troupers are all tramps. Here today and gone tomorrow. No home, no nothing." In such a way, Hank is shown to be – and furthermore glorified for being – a gender nomad, a performer of myriad genders, sexual orientations and inclinations. Tellingly, the film's final shot is not of the "happy" couple Eddie and Queenie, nor even Hank in the back seat of a car to Atlantic City, but the bustling

street of Broadway, with all the many delights and diversions a self-consciously chosen life of performance – such as Hank's – can promise.

The Broadway Melody thus throws into relief Hank's gender-role identity crisis as a result of the break-up of her homosocial (if not incestuously homosexual) relationship with her sister. The film's crucial meaning-bearing relationship/structure is the homosocial one between Queenie and Hank, as opposed to that between either heterosexual coupling (first Hank/Eddie, then Queenie/Eddie). Counter to the project of classical Hollywood musicals, *Broadway*'s backstage musical syntax is predicated on *dis*integration, on the reorganization of traditional social groups and the redistribution of power and sexual authority counter to the heteronormative social paradigm. And while certain characteristics and structures of the backstage musical would change radically over the next five years – notably shifting from the primitive, melodramatic semantics of *The Broadway Melody* to the "aggregate entertainment"[103] of the "Berkeleyesque" musical and the more classically integrated musical – the syntactic structure of female homosociality would continue to be iterated through backstage musical texts.

Female Homosociality in the Early Backstage Musicals:

42nd Street (Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1933)

Gold Diggers of 1933 (Mervyn LeRoy and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1933)

Musical performance in and of the society of women was been built upon the semantic paradigm of female homosociality established in *The Broadway Melody* and carried through the earliest iterations of the "Berkeleyesque" backstage musical: *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Leonard Leff has noted a homosexual subtext to the female homosocial bond in his queer reading of *42nd Street*. He observes that a certain "show of femininity" in *42nd Street* (which I would argue is equal to or even surpassed by that of *Gold Diggers of 1933*) may be seen to "excite rumour, innuendo" and raise a "pointed question" regarding the sexuality of two particular characters, "Anytime" Annie (played by Ginger Rogers) and Lorraine (Una Merkel), due to their marked "preference for the company of other women."[104] However, such a lesbian subtext to female homosocial relationships is not as strongly present in *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* as it is in *The Broadway Melody*, explicated in the previous section. By Leff's argument, lesbianism is only evident in these

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[103] Rubin, Op. Cit., 19.

[104] Leonard Leff, "'Come on Home with Me': *42nd Street* and the Gay Male World of the 1930s," *Cinema Journal*, 39:1 (Fall 1999), 16-17.

women's suggested "contempt for men," which is itself a code for, and a stereotype of, female homosexuality. Also, unlike in *The Broadway Melody*, there are few examples of female-to-female physical intimacy in either film,[105] nor is there a love triangle in which two women desire the same man, thus establishing a sort of love relationship by proxy between the female sides. Nevertheless, both *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* are based on the narrative premise of fiscal conflict or other socio-economic obstacle threatening a central community of female performers. Thus much of each film's humour and ostensible entertainment value derives from spectacularizing female performers *en masse* and from the consequent de-centering of traditional/heteronormative society and relationships within the films. Female homosociality, a semantic characteristic of these early backstage musicals, combines with the structuring element of intermittent musical numbers to build a generic syntax predicated on the destabilization of traditional, linear and phallogo-/heterocentric – that is, "straight" in both senses of the word – narrative.

After the drought years of 1931 to 1932, *42nd Street* has been credited with reviving the musical form in 1933, initiating the backstage and specifically Berkeleyesque cycle of musicals, which would dominate the generic form until 1935. Well-received by audiences, critics and censors alike,[106] it was swiftly followed by *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *Footlight Parade* by the same studio the same year. Within this trilogy of sorts, I would argue that *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers* follow on from the narrative paradigm (stories focused on groups of women) associated with primitive/melodramatic backstage musicals like *The Broadway Melody*. At the same time, they incorporate the formal – and disruptive – semantics of the Berkeleyesque musical, promulgating a generic syntax that iterates female homosociality and addresses its relationship to patriarchal society. For a brief time in 1933, the backstage musical may be seen to have defended and rather delighted in representations and performances of female (homo)society as independent of and indeed counter to the heteronormative and phallogocentric systems of representation and performance which are aligned with traditionally patriarchal society. By late 1933 and the release of *Footlight*

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[105] Excepting the arms-around-each other pose between Anne and Lorraine that Leff remarks upon, and a shot of Ruby Keeler, Joan Blondell and Aline MacMahon sharing a bed in *Gold Diggers of 1933*.

[106] James Wingate, reporting back to Will Hays on the film's development, approved of it early, describing the film as "another [look] backstage, giving a realistic view of the preparations for staging a musical show." James Wingate to Will Hays, memorandum (December 30 1932, *42nd Street*, PCA file). The film version of a novella, *42nd Street* abided by the Code's general stipulations against excessive nudity/sexuality, profanity, and the representation of "sex perversion," with which the literary text was rife. While *42nd Street* was not exactly ideal filmic material for censors, it was nevertheless deemed "realistic" – tempering sensationalism – enough to be acceptable entertainment. That was prior to the formation of the Production Code Administration, of course: in 1936, Joseph Breen turned down Warners' request to reissue *42nd Street*. Joseph Breen to Jack Warner, memorandum (August 26 1936, *42nd Street*, PCA file).

Parade, however, the syntactic structures of the backstage musical had already begun shifting back to a more traditionalist and conservative paradigm.

In light of the fact that, just three years after its initial opening in 1933, Joseph Breen blocked 42nd Street for re-release,[107] it was welcomed relatively enthusiastically by its pre-Code censors. Of course, the film is a notably tamer version of the backstage-on-Broadway story Bradford Ropes originally depicted in his novel, in that homosexuality is a major theme of the source text. The film version, however, in deference to the Code's stipulation against so-called "sex perversion," i.e. homosexual relationships,[108] opts to foreground developing relationships between two heterosexual stage couples. The washed-up love affair between Broadway star Dorothy Brock (Bebe Daniels) and out-of-work Pat Denning (George Brent) on the one hand, complemented by the blossoming love relationship between ingénue Peggy Sawyer (Ruby Keeler) and juvenile lead Billy Lawler (Dick Powell) on the other, function as narrative structuring devices. Yet the syntactic structure of the film is developed around the representation of implicitly "queerer" – that is, not explicitly homosexual, but rather blatantly homosocial – relationships between women within the backstage society of showgirls: their performances are the dominant source of spectacle and amusement in the film. Also, judging from the future film trajectories of then-starlets Ruby Keeler, Ginger Rogers, and Una Merkel – as well as their re-casting in *Gold Diggers of 1933*[109] – audiences responded most positively to their performances, above all others, in *42nd Street* (reporting back on a preview of the film, even Studio Relations Committee censor James Fisher remarked, "Ginger Rogers and Una Merkel as a pair of hard-boiled chorines furnish some very good comedy.")[110] Thus, while the film's narrative is traditionally structured according to the linear trajectory of a typical love story, its overall "meaning" as a backstage musical is constructed from the performances and representations of female homosociality within its text.

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[107] Joseph Breen to Jack Warner, memorandum (August 26 1936, *42nd Street*, PCA file).

[108] Daniel Lord and Martin Quigley, "The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930," reprinted in Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[109] Ruby Keeler and Ginger Rogers both re-appeared in *Gold Diggers*, with the former playing a similarly naive, ingénue part to Peggy Sawyer, and the latter a similarly wacky and wisecracking part to Anytime Annie. However, Una Merkel's place as a fast-talking dame would go to Joan Blondell in *Gold Diggers of 1933*, a part Blondell continued to play throughout the 1930s cycle of *Gold Diggers* films, often opposite Glenda Farrell. By 1934, Farrell had replaced Rogers's role after the latter had moved on to partnering Fred Astaire in their famous RKO dance musicals (see Chapter 3).

[110] James B. Fisher, memorandum (January 13 1933, *42nd Street*, PCA file).

Mark Roth has suggested that the Warner Bros. backstage musical, of which *42nd Street* was first representative and which established the so-called "Berkeleyesque" form,[111] is predicated on the establishment and glorification of community in alignment with populist, New Deal ideologies.[112] In both *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers*, such "community" is represented by a predominantly female society of performers, thrown into relief by an autonomous male authority figure (in *42nd Street*, the director Julian Marsh, played by Warner Baxter; in *Gold Diggers of 1933*, the songwriter/society scion Brad Roberts, played by Dick Powell). Roth has argued that the cumulative effect of this juxtaposition shows that "cooperation, planning and the guidance of a single leader [were] necessary for success" during the Depression according to the Warner Bros.' ethos.[113] Lyn Phelan has further argued that, in the case of *42nd Street*, the backstage society/community, which is gendered female and posed under the direction of an autonomous male leader, is represented as almost monstrously machinic. In that the female machine is kept in check by an authoritarian male leader, this relationship of bodies to each other, writes Phelan, is representative of heteronormative marriage between a dominant male and subordinate female. Thus, *42nd Street* preserves a representational paradigm of male-to-female relationships (which are almost always already implicitly sexualized in classical Hollywood movies) that is traditionally gendered according to the active male/passive female and simultaneously organic male/manufactured female dichotomy.[114] Phelan further suggests that one of the primary ideological (i.e. syntactic) functions of this semantic juxtaposition of male leader vs. female machine in *42nd Street* is to reconcile (albeit uneasily) New Deal politics with capitalist ideology:

> On the one hand, the film attempts to soothe anxiety that capitalism is fundamentally 'inhuman' by linking New Deal government intervention to fully rationalized industrial production processes, an ethos of collective endeavour, jobs creation and consumption. Simultaneously, Busby Berkeley's spectacle of conveyor-belt femininity while aligning capitalist processes with sheer, albeit deferred, pleasure, constantly threatens to tip the

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[111] Rubin, Op. Cit., 36, defines the "Berkeleyesque" as a backstage musical in which the space of the numbers is strongly demarcated – and not subordinated – to the offstage narrative space. In such a way, the "Berkeleyesque" is not limited only to those films that were directed (wholly or in part) by Busby Berkeley himself.

[112] Mark Roth, "Some Warner Musicals and the Spirit of the New Deal," in *Genre: The Musical*, ed. Rick Altman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

[113] Ibid., 44-45.

[114] Lyn Phelan, "Artificial Women and Male subjectivity in *42nd Street* and *Bride of Frankenstein*," *Screen*. 41:2 (Summer, 2000), 163-165.

> balance in favour of a reversion to pure abstraction that delights in the body's reduction to a formal unit in an apparently infinite and shifting circuit of change.[115]

In such a way, according to both Roth's and Phelan's understanding of *42nd Street*, the Berkeleyesque backstage musical reflects an inherently conservative – indeed more traditionally "Hollywood" – ideology than the liberalist politics ascribed to the Warner Bros. studio during the Depression. *42nd Street* would appear to posit responsible governance by an autonomous leader – gendered male – as necessary to the benefit (and control) of the populace, a community whose plasticity and tendency towards unruliness is also traditionally gendered female.

While this accounts for one possible reading of the Berkeleyesque syntax, in relation to the specific text of *42nd Street*, I would argue it fails to accommodate a broader understanding of the syntactic structures and evolution of the backstage musical. *Gold Diggers of 1933* was released a few months after *42nd Street* in direct response to its predecessor's enthusiastic reception, incorporating almost all of its primary semantic (narrative, thematic, and formal) components. Both films follow a plot by which a society of female performers, represented by a core group of three (Ruby Keeler, Ginger Rogers and Una Merkel in *42nd Street*; Ruby Keeler, Joan Blondell and Aline MacMahon in *Gold Diggers of 1933*) are faced with the challenge of putting on a Broadway production in order to stay afloat. In both films, there is a female outlier of sorts who threatens one or more of the women's personal/financial success (and by extension, the rest of the group's): in *42nd Street*, Dorothy Brock must relinquish her star status to Peggy Sawyer before the show goes on, and in *Gold Diggers*, Ginger Rogers's Faye Fortune vies (comically) for sugar daddy Fanuel Peabody's affections with Trixie Lorraine (MacMahon). In both cases, she highlights – by contrast – the collectivist virtues of the central female homosocial unit. In the end, the three women at the center of each narrative are partnered with a male of superior socio-economic status (excepting, perhaps, Peggy Sawyer's union with Billy Lawlor). This is arguably in deference to the typical trajectory of classical Hollywood narrative (and particularly musical narrative), which is predicated on the union of two heterosexual partners according to the logic of phallogocentricism. Nevertheless, these heterosexual partnerships serve the purpose of preserving the integrity of the backstage homosociety: the women will continue to perform as a unit, though now crucially more financially stable – on Broadway. In such a way, these films represent a female homosociety's subversive

[115] Ibid., 167.

harnessing of capital – traditionally the property of a patriarchal authority, as represented by their "romantic" partners – to serve a collective interest. Both films end with elaborate production numbers, directed by Busby Berkeley, that literally image the fruits of their (physical and sexual) united labour. If these women are "married" to anything, they are most practically married to the idea and execution of performance.

Admittedly, and as Roth has suggested, *42nd Street* is less ideologically committed to the ethos of female and feminized collectivism than the later *Gold Diggers of 1933*. (I am using the term "female" here to denote a community physically populated by women, and "feminine" to connote the gendering of a non-patriarchal society). Working under the theory that conciliation amongst a collective symbolized by the community of Broadway performers under a single authoritarian leader forms the generic syntax of the Warner Bros. backstage musical, as exemplified by *42nd Street*, Roth argues that *Gold Diggers of 1933* is a relatively unsuccessful iteration of the backstage musical.[116] Whereas *42nd Street* portrays Broadway director Julian Marsh tirelessly working his (mostly female) performers to put on a hit show (though it is debatable whether the ultimate success of *Pretty Lady*, the show-within-the-show, is due to Marsh's obsessive direction or the individual talents of his female starlets – Peggy Sawyer in particular), at no point in *Gold Diggers* does a single male character exercise effective direction over the female collective.[117] In that it fails to portray effective leadership by a single male authority, *Gold Diggers* thus falls short in Roth's view of conforming to the phallogocentric generic syntax he has identified in relation to the Berkeleyesque musical.

Roth's reading of these early backstage musicals is, of course, auteurist and heavily androcentric – in terms both of his focus on the male director within the texts as a determining semantic feature of early 1930s Warner Bros. musicals, and indeed his grouping of the films under a single (patriarchal) studio system (with a particular focus on Busby Berkeley as their common denominator). While his analysis is illuminating of certain syntactic/ideological commonalities of Warner Bros. musicals during the Depression, it is not so usefully applied to a broader generic reading of the Hollywood backstage musical (which was, of course, dominated by the Berkeleyesque form associated with Warner Bros. production). Following Roth, *Gold Diggers of 1933* deviates more exaggeratedly from the backstage musical syntax established in the early (and crucially pre-Code) 1930s, than is

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[116] Roth, Op. Cit., 44-45.

[117] I have already mentioned that the female collective in *Gold Diggers* is juxtaposed with the singular "authority" of both Broadway producer Barney Hopkins, who comes up with the idea for their show, and the songwriter/singer Brad Roberts, who saves the show financially by dipping into his familial inheritance.

seen in reading *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* against the syntax of female homosociality I have posited here.

In that its politics of viewing – suggested both within the text on behalf of its characters and without the film on the part of its viewer – are directed away from a phallogocentric perspective, *Gold Diggers of 1933* is perhaps more thoroughly feminine in sensibility than *42nd Street*. Following on from the semantic and syntactic model established by primitive backstage musicals like *The Broadway Melody*, both films are structured according to the defense of a homosocial female unit. The latter film, however, may be seen to be more thoroughly shot through with subversive ideology: where *42nd Street* (like *The Broadway Melody*) hints at the possibility of female existence at the fringes of or indeed outside heteronormative, patriarchal society, *Gold Diggers* consistently reaffirms its divergence from traditional narrativity and form, whereby its central female homosociety is not only posited and challenged but ultimately reconstructed and preserved in a more sustainable form. As Babington and Evans have suggested, it is further remarkable for its making reference to "precise historical events" – i.e. the fact of women's (and society's, more broadly) socio-economic disenfranchisement during the Depression – which were implicit in *42nd Street*.[118] *Gold Diggers* thus takes certain of *42nd Street*'s more subversive narrative elements to an extreme and in so doing exemplifies the generic syntax of the backstage musical as developed through 1933.

Both *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* employ narratively conventional female character archetypes to represent opposing social groups and factions; but where *42nd Street* resorts to the heightening of conflict between (female) individuals to effect narrative climax (reminiscent of *The Broadway Melody*), *Gold Diggers of 1933* eschews such a melodramatic convention. Each of the following archetypes are represented in *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*: the ingénue (played by Ruby Keeler in both instances) whom the primary love story concerns; two wisecracking dames, whose close friendship is strongly homosocial, if not homosexual in its overtones (Ginger Rogers and Una Merkel in the earlier film, Joan Blondell and Aline MacMahon in the latter); and finally an outlier to the female group, who poses a personal and/or professional threat to one of the girls and the rest of the group by extension (Bebe Daniels in a melodramatic role as Dorothy Brock in *42nd Street*; Ginger Rogers, playing a comedic role, in *Gold Diggers*). Of course, Keeler's Peggy Sawyer is herself an initial outlier to the society of female performers represented by Rogers and Merkel at the start of *42nd Street*, but the narrative follows her gradual absorption into

[118] Babington and Evans, Op. Cit., 46.

performing society by entering into a romantic relationship with the juvenile lead (who represents an appropriate alternative to Pat Dennings, antisocial and disaffected by contrast) and secondly by proving that her individual talent equals and even surpasses the original leading lady Dorothy Brock's (Peggy "goes out a youngster, but [she comes] back a star!").[119] By aligning herself with the hard-scrabble society of performers, Peggy thus gains the respect and support of her female peers (Rogers's Anytime Annie declines to replace Brock onstage because Peggy has earned the role), and, in that her stardom reflects glory on the group, preserves their society.

Admittedly, *42nd Street* also problematizes stardom in relation to the greater good. The closing scene shows an exhausted Julian Marsh eavesdropping on the reactions of the departing audience members. They praise the collective and individual efforts of the cast, remarking with disdain that their director is likely to be given the majority of credit. The irony is, of course, that Marsh has been shown throughout the film to have pushed the cast to perform at their highest level; thus, the ideology of collectivism and cooperation which has been associated with *Pretty Lady* and with the larger "show" *42nd Street* is self-reflexively subverted from within the text itself. *42nd Street*'s ethos of collectivism is consistently undercut in that characters' collaborative successes are traced back to individual sources of inspiration or talent: either Marsh's (male, subjective) direction or Peggy Sawyer's (female, objective) talent. And tellingly, relationships between women in the society of performers, prior to the introduction – or rather imposition – of Marsh and Peggy in/onto the group, are fraught with tension: Dorothy Brock is suspicious of Peggy Sawyer (both a potential rival for Pat Dennings's affections and a threat to Brock's supremacy as a performer); Anytime Annie is initially vilified for taking on a false persona and accent in order to stand out, and the female performers are constantly vying for the attention of directors and producers in order to score leading roles. Thematically, the film traces a female group's movement away from a capitalist ethos of competition towards an ideology founded on populist collaboration. At the same time, assertions of individual authority within the group dynamic are shown to be absolutely necessary to their collective success. Thus *42nd Street*'s syntax as a backstage musical is predicated on the establishment and protection of a female homosociety, but only to the extent that it is made "manageable" according to the narrativizing logic of a hegemonic patriarchy. Consequently, female-to-female relationships within the text are

[119] It is interesting to note that Brock's castration as a woman is re-affirmed and compounded by her breaking an ankle and losing the ability to perform. She is thus rendered more physically vulnerable than her economically humbled (and metaphorically castrated) lover Pat Dennings, whom she marries, and thus her character trajectory is re-subsumed into classical narrative, heteronormative society, and phallogocentric ideology.

tinged with a certain melodramatic excess of emotion and competitiveness, which mitigates the subversive potential of their homosocial bonds and attractions.

This imposed conservatism – the narrative residue, perhaps, of *42nd Street* – does not, however, impinge on its visual or aural pleasures. These remain the province of its female performers, even if they do not effect a thoroughly feminized or de-heterocentricized mode of viewing (due to certain narrative contingencies). Setting aside its melodramatic tendencies, the film's primary amusement derives from dialogue between and performances by women: they are its central attraction. Much of the "good comedy" to which James Fisher alluded in his memo comes in the form of throwaway lines and double entendres, such as Rogers's remark that a kept woman on Park Avenue must have "tough homework," and Una Merkel's declaration, perched on the lap of a chorus boy, that she is sitting "on a flagpole, dearie, on a flagpole." The spoken word thus belongs to women on *42nd Street*. Women are also, as Lucy Fischer has discussed at length in her analysis of Berkeleysque "optical politics,"[120] the central, visual focus of musical numbers. The "Young and Healthy" number sung by Dick Powell at the end of the film is particularly sexual and overtly sexualizing of female chorines in terms of its (minimal) costuming and suggestive camera placement (such as the by-now clichéd tracking shot through chorines' legs).[121] Beginning with *42nd Street*, a scopophilic perspective on the female body is established as a crucial, visual semantic element of backstage musicals' musical numbers in deference to the phallogocentric paradigm of visual representation, which is nevertheless predicated on the female body.

Gold Diggers of 1933, released a few months after *42nd Street* in 1933, embraces even more fully the female-oriented semantics and indeed feminine syntax of the backstage musical. On a basic narrative level, the film rejects a phallogocentric trajectory, in that narrative agency within *Gold Diggers of 1933* belongs to a homosocial group of three primary female protagonists (Keeler, Blondell and MacMahon). Women dominate the visual and aural landscape of the musical and non-musical sequences, such that the construction of meaning according to certain visual and aural signs (female-oriented semantics) within its text is determined by a feminine (i.e. non-phallogocentric) syntax. Ultimately, pleasure in looking – both within and at the film – is not strictly identifiable with a "determining male

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[120] Fischer, "The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of 'Dames'," Op. Cit.

[121] It bears mentioning that Powell's oration represents a significant shift in the functioning of the film's aural gender politics: contrary to the non-musical or narrative portion of the film, in which female voices commentate on events, thus dominating the narrative and functioning as pseudo-narrators, a male voice now commentates on visual images of women. Semantically speaking, aural signs shift from conforming to a feminine logic in the first part to a phallogocentric logic in the second (musical) part.

gaze,"[122] despite Lucy Fischer and Nadine Wills's ascription of such to the Berkeleyesque. *Gold Diggers of 1933*, though Berkeleyesque in form, does not follow the traditionally phallogocentric narrative logic that has come to be associated with later iterations of the subgenre; it rather represents the culmination of the film cycle's evolution up until late 1933 according to a female-oriented/feminine generic syntax, particularly associated with the establishment and promulgation of female homosociality.

On one level, the narrative of *Gold Diggers of 1933* would appear to conform to a traditionally linear and phallogocentric trajectory, in that the fate of its central female group is to some extent determined by the achievements of a single male hero. Ingénue Polly Parker (Keeler), torch singer Carol King (Blondell) and comedienne Trixie Lorraine (MacMahon) form a tight-knit social and performing unit who struggle to get by living and working together on Broadway (the predatory and opportunistic Fay Fortune, played by Ginger Rogers, is a peripheral figure). The girls have an opportunity to appear in a hit show, as produced by Barney Hopkins (Ned Sparks), though no one has the means to fund it until Polly's boyfriend, songwriter Brad Roberts (Powell) reveals that as an heir to the Bradford fortune of Boston, he is willing to finance the project. His older brother (Warren William) and the family lawyer (Guy Kibbee) step in to prevent the benefaction, but not before Carol and Trixie are able to con the men into relationships; they retreat from their intervention, and the show is saved. Thus, Brad provides the initial means by which the women's aims gain traction, yet as a group they provide narrative initiative and set their own goals to attain: capital primarily, and love secondarily. Indeed, the love relationships that develop between Polly and Brad, Carol and Lawrence, and Trixie and "Fannie" are rather a convenient and socially acceptable by-product of the close relationship that is established and re-affirmed between the three women throughout the narrative. Affecting the degree to which conventional heterosexual romance is *not* prioritized in the film, the final version ends not with a love scene between Carol and Lawrence, but abruptly after the last musical number.[123]

The, in a sense, closed-off narrative and traditional structure of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, which conforms to a phallogocentric logic, belies that it is rather excessively preoccupied with the imaging and aural depiction of female-oriented society - even beyond the traditional remit of Hollywood cinema. The "image of woman", which Laura Mulvey

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[122] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Op. Cit., 808.

[123] Mark Vieira, in *Sin in Soft Focus: Pre-Code Hollywood* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 117, points out that this is one of several different endings, cut to cater to local censorship board sensitivities. While the final scene between Carol and Lawrence may have been cut from prints to avoid recalling the sexually charged nature of their relationship throughout the film, the overall effect on the film, from a formalist perspective, is to mitigate the narrative importance of their love relationship.

established is a recurring visual motif of classical Hollywood cinema, and which Fischer and Wills have further identified as the central iconographic component of the (particularly Berkeleyesque) musical,[124] is no less prevalent in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Indeed, the first image we see in the film is a close-up of Ginger Rogers's face in singing "We're in the Money," which presages the "parade of faces" iconographic of Berkeley's directorial style. This, Fischer argues, evidences a fetishistic and scopophilic treatment of women as bodily disjointed and ultimately de-individuated, representing an abstract "image of woman as image" itself.[125] Further, in this number, Rogers and the chorus girls wear costumes designed out of oversized coins to cover their breasts and crotches, literally imaging the phallogocentric equation of female sexuality with monetary value and cultural currency. Like the later "Pettin' in the Park" sequence, in which women are released from their metallic costumes-cum-chastity-belts by men with can-openers, the number is constructed from a phallogocentric point of view, establishing viewership from the same (masculinized) perspective. However, when viewed against the film's narrative sequences – and even in juxtaposition with the final "Remember My Forgotten Man" number (which I will argue is constructed from a feminine perspective) – and taking into account the aural images of women throughout the film (as opposed to their visual representation in isolation), *Gold Diggers of 1933* is revealed as a relatively female-oriented film. That is to say, performances and representations of femininity within its text are active and knowing – as opposed to strictly fetishized or objectified – just as a feminized perspective of active viewership is constructed from without.

Throughout *Gold Diggers of 1933*, women exercise the voice – both in spoken word and in song – as a representative extension of their sexuality and to exert control over narrative events, thus assuming a position of narrative agency from which to represent femininity as performatively active. This may be seen in the very first number. I have already discussed how the close-up visual rendering of Rogers's body may be read as an instance of objectification, indeed fetishization, of the female form. However, Rogers's aural

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[124] In her essay on "The Image of Woman as Image," Fischer argues that Berkeley's films present a distilled image of woman as a pure abstraction, a sort of hyperreal image of an image. Nadine Wills, in "'110 per cent woman': the crotch shot in the Hollywood musical," *Screen*, 42.2 (Summer 2001), takes a broader view of Hollywood musicals by looking at how the imaging of women's genitals (or the allusion to such) specifically is a crucial iconographic component to musical numbers. She cites in particular how in the "I'm Young and Healthy" number of *42nd Street*, exuberant sexuality is signified by the posed crotch shot in which the camera tracks through chorus girls' legs (Op. Cit., 127). In both Fischer and Wills's readings, the visual representation of female bodies is seen as a unifying feature of the classical Hollywood musical.

[125] Fischer, "The Image of Woman as Image," Op. Cit., 4-5. An alternative reading of this extreme close-up might be that Ginger Rogers is in fact constructed as highly individuated, distinguished as a singular female talent against the chorus in the background, but it remains that her face and indeed her entire form are swiftly subsumed into the larger geometric pattern of the performing ensemble.

performance must also be considered. The irony of "We're in the Money" is of course that the showgirls are immediately after shunted offstage, as the show has no funds to continue; the lyrics are reliably sarcastic:

> We're in the money,
> We're in the money;
> We've got a lot of what it takes to get along!
> We're in the money,
> The sky is sunny;
> Old Man Depression, you are through,
> You done us wrong!

This sets the tone for the rest of the film, represented via the collective personality of the women who populate it, light-hearted yet knowing. The number also establishes a female performer, both in abstraction and in the form of Ginger Rogers, as the primary symbol of entertainment and talent within the film. It is significant that Rogers sings the final verse in Pig Latin ("Ereway in the oneymay..."), for it requires considerable verbal gymnastics and evidences her confirmed mastery over the material – as well as the spirit of misrule to follow. Within the first few minutes of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, a female performer disrupts the logic of verbal communication and literally confuses the structure of language, thus foreshadowing the deconstruction of the patriarchal system (embodied by Lawrence Bradford and Faneuil Peabody) that seeks to contain female social/sexual agency.

Throughout the narrative and otherwise non-musical portion of the film, female verbosity consistently confounds men, railroading them into unexpected situations and relationships to suit the purposes of the female homosocial unit. (This represents, theoretically, the appropriation of a phallogocentric language system or *langue*, which is expressed through a feminized syntax into specific speech acts or *parole*.)[126] The most significant instance of this occurs when Lawrence and Peabody show up at the girls' apartment seeking to talk Polly out of marrying Brad. Their first misstep is to mistake Carole for Polly, an error on which Carole and Trixie capitalize for personal gain and to throw Lawrence off the scent of the true Polly. Significantly, their masquerade is instigated by Lawrence, who addresses Carole directly as Polly; while she does not seek to correct him nominally, she does answer his questions honestly from her own personal perspective (a

[126] Ferdinand de Sausurre, *Course in General Linguistics*, transl. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel and Hann Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

perspective and history of experience which is conveniently also shared by Polly). When Carole nearly falters and threatens to reveal her true identity, Trixie strikes up a conversation with Faneuil Peabody (whom she calls "Fannie," a clear infantilization-cum-feminization of his given name) and redirects the conversation away from the false "Polly". In such a way, the women do not so much bend the truth of the situation at hand as they manipulate, using rapid-fire speech, men's understanding of the language that they themselves have used.

Later on in the film, when Lawrence finally meets the "real" Polly, he remarks that she appears to be "refined...not like the other girls" who are comparatively "cheap and vulgar"; she, he declares, is the girl his brother really should marry. On one level, his analysis of Polly is correct: she is *not* like the other girls, in that she has been shown to be relatively innocent and retiring. However, in explaining to Lawrence how she became a showgirl, Polly spins a tragic tale about a once-wealthy father and sickly mother, lies which are thrown into relief by Carole and Trixie's asides ("Her mother was strong as an ox!"). Instead of re-ordering the syntax and meaning of Lawrence's words (as previously accomplished by Carole and Trixie), Polly assumes his phallogocentric semantics and syntax, using words and meanings constructed from allusions to female virtuosity and suffering, to converse with Lawrence on his own level. The utter falseness of this discourse is thereby offset by Carole and Trixie's sideline discussion.

In such a way, the *Gold Diggers* women communicate with each other through modified speech acts and structures of meaning that alternately confound and manipulate male-ordered logic, thought and language. In their own words, they drive the narrative action and the development of male and female characterization. In the simple act of "naming" Peabody "Fannie," for instance, Trixie transforms the curmudgeonly lawyer into a puppy dog-like lover (a metaphor made visually manifest by Peabody's holding her shih tzu up to a mirror and mimicking its tongue movements). In repeating the words "cheap and vulgar" over and over to Lawrence as she kisses him, using phrase by which he had originally disparaged the showgirls, Carole manages to transform its allusive meaning from something negatively sexual to positively romantic (and still sexual). Speech is thus a performative act for these women, a means by which they "dress up" their real female sexuality, which is bodily and "cheap and vulgar", as desirably "feminine" and attractive to the (heterosexual) men who will help them get to where they want to go. Recalling how Rogers's tune at the beginning of the film does not change though her words become meaningless, a profound instability between verbal/aural designations, significations and physical actuality remains

within the feminized discourse of *Gold Diggers of 1933*: Carole, Trixie and Polly are as they ever were amongst themselves, but they have altered the qualitative meaning of words which are used, by and for men, to describe them. In such a way, they re-route phallogocentric logic, discourse and linguistics to construct a more actively feminized system of communication amongst their female-oriented homosociety.

In terms of visual signification, the "politics of viewing" within *Gold Diggers of 1933* are largely directed from and towards a feminized perspective, confirmation that its syntactic structure is generally female-oriented. On a very basic level, this is evident in the visual representation of male performers. Certain shots and sequences are admittedly constructed from a male point of view or phallogocentric perspective: the optical, if not aural, politics of the "We're in the Money" and "Pettin' in the Park" numbers, for instance, are particularly associable with Mulvey's paradigm of masculinized viewership and further comply with Fischer and Wills's readings of Busby Berkeley-directed musicals. However, subjective viewing, or performances/instances of "looking," and the concomitant positioning of desire are just as often if not more frequently gendered as female acts throughout the film. This may be seen especially in regard to Polly's desire for Brad, whom we see first framed through a window from Polly's perspective. In the company of other women, she gazes upon Brad singing at the piano; thus we view his subsequent performance (of a love song) from a subjective audience position aligned with Polly – and from a position of desire explicitly gendered female, active and looking. It bears mentioning that while Polly's explicit desire for Brad is ostensibly heterosexual, her act of looking is physically associated with a group of women thus represents a (homo)socially oriented performance. As directed by the camera pan towards Brad, we follow her sightline but remain physically connected by proxy (through Polly) to the homosocial group of women. In such a way, *Gold Diggers of 1933* constructs female sexual desire and the "gaze" as a fundamentally social act that originates amongst women; a strictly heteronormative reading of Polly's relationship with Brad (or any of the other women's relationships with men for that matter) is implicitly problematized within (and by) the text.

In the closing musical number of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, its feminized and de-heterocentrized perspective is finally fully realized through the disambiguation of its optical politics. Flouting the established visual conventions of the musical extravaganza, "Remember My Forgotten Man" seeks to image, indeed to spectacularize, the male body instead of the female. This challenges the representational paradigm put forward by Wills and Fischer, and confirms the feminized positioning of spectatorship from both within and

without the film. The number is sung/narrated by Carole/Blondell as a streetwalker lamenting the fate of her "forgotten man," an army veteran who has been abandoned by his government and whose ruin has left her disenfranchised and destitute. Blondell wears this "forgotten man's" figurative castration on her body – doubly, even, as a prostitute, devoid of sexual agency; she also functions to expose a truth of Depression-era American society, that a generation of similarly "forgotten men" were also effectively castrated by the regime of economic austerity and conservatism associated with post-war American politics. Walking up to a tramp, Blondell pulls aside his lapel to reveal an army medal; in this subtle act of undressing/revelation, our subjective identification as viewers is switched from a voyeuristic (that is, masculinized) perspective to align with Blondell as the female narrator of the musical story. In this case, vocal narration – as an example of female aural agency, a semantic component of the early backstage musical that I have explored above – comes from a place of lack and wanting/desire, or a feminized perspective.

This is drawn out further in "Remember My Forgotten Man" as Blondell's speech-singing is replaced by a musical score, and the naturalistic imagery dissolves into a lyrical montage of marching men and a parade of male faces. Instead of the kaleidoscopic patterning of female bodies, which has usually been associated with the Berkeleyesque musical number, we perceive (again, from a feminized perspective) the geometric patterning of male bodies as a spectacular object. Steven Cohan has suggested, following on from Mulvey's theory on the gendered politics of visual representation, that the imaged male body in self-conscious performance is "feminized" in becoming the object of a determining gaze, which is always already gendered male or masculinized.[127] I would argue, however, that in the final moment of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, the traditionally gendered politics of viewing are more radically flipped than they are challenged and ultimately re-instated (as Cohan's theory of the "feminization of the song-and-dance man" would have it, subscribing, as he does, to the conservative paradigm of active/male versus passive/female). "Remember My Forgotten Man" is framed from the perspective of a female narrator whose own iconic representation onscreen (through the body of Joan Blondell) initially mitigates the subversive potential of her narrative and narrational agency, in that her image is objectifiable. However, once her icon drops away, we are left only with a stream of images of men viewed from the feminized perspective that she has established. In such a way, *Gold Diggers of 1933* is concretized as a "feminine" text.

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[127] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the spectacle of masculinity in the Hollywood musical," Op. Cit.

Thus the film culminates a pattern of increased feminization in terms of the semantic and syntactic structuring of the backstage musical before 1934. Revivalist backstage musicals like *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*, building upon the iconographic and narrative tendencies of early backstage musical-melodramas like *The Broadway Melody*, established a generic syntax predicated on the establishment and protection of homosocial relationships between women. *Gold Diggers of 1933* even further transgresses a classical Hollywood paradigm of representation to suggest a feminized mode of spectatorship within and of its text. In that such a perspective disrupts the traditional politics of viewing which have come to be associated with classical Hollywood cinema (and particularly the musical), these early examples of the backstage musical subgenre represent a syntactically distinct cycle to the later, more conservatively structured iterations of the genre. Beginning with *Footlight Parade* in 1933 and continuing through the post-Code era, these films employ the familiar semantics of the backstage musical according to an increasingly re-phallogocentricized syntax, effectively re-containing the excesses of femininity and female agency which were produced and represented in earlier iterations of the genre.

In the Company of Men: Re-containing Femininity in the Censored Backstage Musical

Footlight Parade (Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1933)

Gold Diggers of 1935 (Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1934)

Dames (Ray Enright and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1934)

Gold Diggers of 1937 (Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1936)

Following the successes of *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* at Warner Bros. during the first half of 1933 (*42nd Street* was released in February, *Gold Diggers* in May), other Hollywood studios scrambled to capitalize on the public's renewed interest in musical films. Paramount, which had had some rare success with musicals during the lean years 1931-1932, turning out several operettic sex comedies directed by Ernst Lubitsch and starring Maurice Chevalier (see Chapter 4), attempted to recreate that formula by casting Chevalier in the lightly musical *A Bedtime Story* (Norman Taurog, April 1933). The film, unfortunately, was lightly received, as was a melodramatic-musical vehicle for Claudette Colbert, *Torch Singer* (Alexander Hall and George Somnes, September 1933). Later that month, Warners released its last musical for 1933, *Footlight Parade* (discussed below), with MGM offering *Dancing Lady* (Robert Z. Leonard) in November and *Going Hollywood* (Raoul

Walsh) in December.[128] Studios also produced semi-musicals such as the Marx Brothers vehicle *Duck Soup* (Leo McCarey, Paramount, 1933) and the revue-format *Broadway to Hollywood* (Willard Mack, MGM, 1933). Overall, the most successful musicals Hollywood released during the second half of 1933 incorporated certain structural semantics associated with the popular Warners backstage musicals – namely a "let's-put-on-a-show" narrative set amongst a chorus-girl milieu – at the same time as they moved away from the Berkeleyesque musical format towards a more thorough integration of narrative and musical spectacle.

As previously mentioned, Richard Barrios refers to 1933 as a "buffer year" for musicals, in which "the new and old coexist[ed] and [...] intermingle[ed]":[129] a "line of demarcation where earlier ideas [concerning the musical were] finally put to rest." Barrios has shown that the economy's gradual emergence out of the Depression, combined with increased censorship under the Production Code Administration, contributed to the concretization of Classical Hollywood style and ideology during the 1930s.[130] By way of illustration, Barrios uses RKO's release from 1933 *Flying Down to Rio* (Thornton Freeland) as an example of an integrated-backstage musical hybrid in which the "old" formal traditions of the Berkeleyesque musical (with its plot at the forefront and its musical sequences stacked at the end) are finally put to rest. *Flying Down to Rio* (which is also the first pairing of Ginger Rogers with Fred Astaire, whose nine films together I discuss in Chapter 3) is a backstage musical in terms of its narrative content and premise, however it is integrated in form. *Rio* conforms to a classical musical syntax predicated on conciliation between heterosexual lovers and the ideological affirmation of heteronormativity. For this reason, *Flying Down to Rio* does not belong to the earlier cycle of Berkeleyesque backstage musicals that I have argued culminated with *Gold Diggers of 1933* in the first half of that year; it is the product of a syntactic shift that occurred within the backstage musical as early as September 1933, and which is also readable through Warner Bros.' own *Footlight Parade* (Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley).

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[128] True to the MGM style, the latter films were designed to show off their studio's high production values and star power. *Dancing Lady* featured Joan Crawford and Clark Gable, with the first screen appearances by Fred Astaire and Nelson Eddy; *Going Hollywood* starred Marion Davies and Bing Crosby. The more popular *Dancing Lady* borrowed the backstage iconography and semantics established in *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*: a female protagonist played by Crawford in an economically oppressive, patriarchal society raises herself up by her bootstraps and talent to become a star; missing, however, is the emphasis on female collectivism, homosociality, and a feminine sensibility). At the very end of the year, United Artists released *Roman Scandals* (Frank Tuttle) and RKO released *Flying Down to Rio* (Thornton Freeland; see Chapter 3).

[129] Barrios, Op. Cit., 407.

[130] Ibid., 9.

Footlight Parade is usually seen as the third film in a cycle of traditional backstage musicals initiated by *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*, all produced and released in the same year by Warner Bros. and sharing the same stars: Joan Blondell, Ruby Keeler, Dick Powell, Guy Kibbee (formerly "Fannie" in *Gold Diggers*) and Billy Barty (who appeared as the lecherous baby in "Pettin' in the Park") all appear in two or more films. I would argue, however, that *Footlight Parade* belongs to a separate cycle of backstage musicals, which is divorced from the comparatively feminized and female-oriented backstage musicals gone before. Telling of the social context within which it was made, *Footlight Parade* represents the backstage musical's reincorporation within phallogocentric narrative and the traditional politics of viewing. This is evident in the repression of excessive performative femininity on behalf of individual female stars and in the sublimation of femininity and the female form into "pure images" within Berkeleyesque musical sequences (as Lucy Fischer has examined in the later backstage musicals *Gold Diggers of 1935* and *Dames*). In such a way, I would posit that a newly configured cycle of backstage musicals was established via the release of *Footlight Parade*, its generic syntax predicated on the re-containment of femininity within a re-phallogocentricized narrative and representational paradigm. This cycle includes *Footlight Parade*, *Gold Diggers of 1935* and *Dames*, all of which have already been analyzed at length by theorists in exploration of a "Berkeleyesque" style and form. I, however, will be looking at these films as individual texts within a broader generic framework, and specifically at how their classification as backstage musicals has been informed by the evolution of certain gendered performance paradigms. I will go on to suggest that the re-phallogocentricization of the backstage musical syntax in the mid-1930s was influenced by the conservatization of Hollywood filmmaking practices and ideology, especially after the implementation of the Production Code in 1934.

The first way in which this cycle of backstage musicals may be seen to have been re-contained within a phallogocentric system of representation is through their narrative and characterization. Instead of centering on a close-knit society of female performers, conflict and action in each of these films revolves around a central male protagonist. The hero is tasked with putting on a successful show – thus the musical numbers are literally or figuratively directed by him – and his success is rewarded in being paired off with the "good girl" of the story. In such a way, the cycle returns to a phallogocentric paradigm of narrative and form. *Footlight Parade* is perhaps the most "masculine" in this regard, in that it departs abruptly from the female-oriented narrative of *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*. Of

course, as Roth has astutely noted, *Footlight Parade* bears a crucial narrative similarity to *42nd Street* in that it poses the necessity of an authoritarian male leader (James Cagney as Chester Kent, creator of "musical prologues," in *Footlight Parade*) amongst the largely female collective of backstage performers. But while in the earlier film female performers claimed the majority of screen time and the lion's share of comedic dialogue, women in *Footlight Parade* are relative acolytes to Cagney/Kent's starring role.

By the time of *Footlight Parade*'s release, Cagney was generally regarded as a serious dramatic actor, associated with gritty Warner Bros. releases like *The Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931) *The Crowd Roars* (Howard Hawks, 1932) and *Taxi!* (Roy Del Ruth, 1932). In his role as Chester Kent, Cagney performs a similar kind of eccentric masculinity to that which he had shown in earlier roles. He frequently pulls faces otherwise unmotivated by close-up camera placement (such that his gestures are superfluous visual signifiers) and delivers rapid-fire dialogue in a naturalistic manner; Cagney, as an actor, thus draws attention at all times to his own performance, and at the expense of his female co-stars. At the same time, the objective physicality of his character, Chester Kent – seemingly so exuberantly expressed in narrative and musical sequences (Kent climactically replaces the male lead in the "Shanghai Lil" prologue) – is mitigated by the circumstances of his performance-within-the-performance: he performs unwillingly only because the show must go on. Similarly, his dancing style, when he *does* self-consciously perform in "Shanghai Lil", is practiced and precise (evidenced by his mincing steps and carefully arched back): it is the opposite of excessive, functioning rather as a self-denying, self-effacing spectacle. In such a way, Cagney is the primary attraction of the narrative and musical sequences (those in which he appears) of *Footlight Parade*. Nevertheless, despite his self-conscious "actorly-ness", Cagney's performance is re-contained within a phallogocentric paradigm of representation that denies Chester Kent's complicity in the spectacularization of his male body.

The semantics of female homosociality and overall feminine sensibility that had permeated previous iterations of the backstage musical and provided a basis for their syntactic grouping are effectively denied by *Footlight Parade*'s narrative. The two main female characters, Nan Prescott (Joan Blondell as Kent's secretary, the good girl) and Vivian Rich (Claire Dodd as the bad girl with delusions of grandeur, recalling Ginger Rogers's roles in *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* but without their comic sensibility), are rivals for Chester Kent's affections (Vivian for his money, Nan for his love); they are not, as earlier backstage musicals would have their female protagonists, of the same social grouping, nor are they actively working towards a collective advancement. Further, the narrative is

investigative from Kent's perspective: the male protagonist must find out the women's "true" identities (that Nan is actually in love with him, and that Vivian is a gold digger) in order for the film to culminate in an appropriately traditional happy ending, effecting conflict resolution through romantic – and crucially heterosexual – conciliation. As performed/embodied by Blondell and Dodd, "the feminine" is thus split via the archetypal dichotomy of virginal good girl (Nan) versus sexual bad girl (Vivian). In such a way, an objectification/investigation of/into femininity forms the generic syntax of *Footlight Parade* – despite the film's many iconographic similarities to its sister films *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933*.

Subsequent backstage musicals *Gold Diggers of 1935* and *Dames* solidified the altered generic syntax of the backstage musical, displaying a similar phallogocentricism or male-directed perspective (they were, of course, literally directed by men) evident even at the semantic level. Significantly, *Gold Diggers of 1935* (which Busby Berkeley directed in its entirety) was the first Warner Bros. backstage musical to break completely with the previously established narrative convention whereby a group of female performers represent a fiscally/sexually predatory (i.e. "gold-digging") faction. In *Gold Diggers of 1935*, the gender roles are switched: the "sugar daddy" to be bought off or wooed is rather a "sugar mama," the penny-pinching Mrs. Prentiss (Alice Brady), and the down-on-his-luck performer who stands to benefit most from her benefaction is a man, Dick Curtis (Dick Powell), who is in love with her heiress daughter Ann (played by Gloria Stuart). The rich boy/poor girl dichotomy prevalent amongst earlier backstage musicals, which tended to posit female characters in underdog roles, is thus flipped. The eponymous gold-diggers, then, are a motley crew of men and women, comprised of Nicolai Nicoleff (an imposter Russian dance director played by Adolph Menjou), his set designer (Joseph Crawthorn), a hotel manager (Grant Mitchell) and the blackmailing stenographer Betty Hawes (Glenda Farrell). This shift in semantics works towards the phallogocentricization of syntax in *Gold Diggers of 1935*, as its narrative text is stripped further of the traces of female homosociality and collectivism.

The film presents a collection of individuated performances and personalities, a then-unique aspect of the backstage musical, which was noted in several contemporary reviews. Identifying a subtle shift in the dominant performance paradigm by which male stars assumed narrative centrality, *Motion Picture Herald* praised their comedic prowess.[131] *The Hollywood Reporter*, however, remarked,

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[131] *Motion Picture Herald*, March 23 1935 (*Gold Diggers of 1935*, PCA file).

> The chief difficulty of bringing such a story to the screen must have been in dividing interest in the many characters involved. This Busby Berkeley accomplishes neatly. The only error that may be pointed in his story direction is the over-playing of a few of the actors.[132]

Indeed, male individuation may be seen as taking precedence over the articulation of female homosociality and collectivism that formed the early backstage musical syntax. In later films, gender roles increasingly conform to archetype – more often in the case of female characters, divided between Virgin and Whore (Nan and Virginia in *Footlight Parade*, or Ann Prentiss versus Dick Curtis's loose and money-hungry ex-girlfriend Arline, played by Dorothy Dare, and Farrell's wisecracking dame stenographer) – or they conform to stereotypes, as in the case of many of the films' supporting male characters (there are many flamboyant foreigners like Menjou's Russian and prissy/"pansy" types such as *Footlight Parade*'s dressmaker and *Gold Diggers of 1935*'s T. Mosley Thorpe, played by Hugh Herbert, who would also feature in *Dames*). While the male romantic lead is increasingly "butched up" or re-masculinized according to traditionally gendered performance paradigms and politics of viewing (a tendency I explore further in Chapter 3), female performers – such as Joan Blondell and Ruby Keeler (in narrative roles) and myriad, nameless chorus girls (in musical numbers) – bear the burden of signifying, as Lucy Fischer has put it, the mere "image of woman as image."

In a recent article on "Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space," Fischer has explored how the modernist technique of "effacement" (practiced in architecture) may be applied to an understanding of Busby Berkeley's representation of women and the female form in the "Lullaby of Broadway" sequence of *Gold Diggers of 1935*. Analyzing in particular how the image of singer Winifred Shaw's is obliterated by the image of a skyscraper at the beginning of the number, Fischer concludes that "modern architecture and design conspire to erase or expel the female element from the metropolitan scene" and Busby Berkeley's screen.[133] I would like to suggest that such "effacement" may be understood as the dominant representational paradigm for women in such Berkeleyesque musical numbers, particularly post-1934. Under the evolving generic syntax of the backstage musical, this may be seen as concomitant with female leads' increasing individuation in the non-musical/narrative portions of backstage musicals – so as to effect the overall de-

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[132] *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 18 1935 (*Gold Diggers of 1935*, PCA file).
[133] Fischer, "City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space," Op. Cit., 130.

collectivization of the image of woman – and to have performed a mitigating function against the representation of "active femininity"[134] within each text.

The three backstage musicals Warner Bros. released after *Gold Diggers of 1933* – *Footlight Parade*, *Gold Diggers of 1935* and *Dames* – all work towards a representational paradigm of femininity whereby the narrative female leads (those women who feature prominently in the narrative portion of each film, usually as romantic interests) are individuated according to their inherent "goodness": their virginity and individuality is thus defined starkly against the sexuality of a contrastively "loose" woman. At the same time, musical female leads (those women who feature prominently in the musical numbers that are usually stacked at the end, and may or may not have also acted in the narrative portion of the film) are radically "effaced," stripped entirely of psychologically and even physically identifiable features. Thus, as Fischer has suggested, the composite "image of woman" in backstage musicals of the mid-1930s is abstract: female leads are psychologically un-complex, yet individuated according to their sexual function (or lack thereof), while female musical performers are almost literally anonymous and "effaced".

I have already mentioned how the archetypal Virgin/Whore dichotomy is employed in *Footlight Parade* and *Gold Diggers of 1935* to remove any residual signification of homosociality or female-oriented collectivism from their female protagonists. This is no less the case in *Dames*, though it is in many ways a more self-consciously political and subversive film than its predecessors (parodying, as it does, Joseph Breen and the institution of the PCA), it conforms to a strictly traditionalist and phallogocentric paradigm of gender representation. Dick Powell and Ruby Keeler return as innocent sweethearts with a passion for performance; Powell's Jimmy Higgens is prevented from pursuing either love due to the fact that his wealthy relative (a relative shared with Keeler's Barbara) hates show business and refuses to have any connection to it, discouraging Barbara's family from condoning her relationship with Jimmy. In a parallel storyline, Barbara's father, (Guy Kibbee, another familiar face in Warner Bros. backstage musicals), is blackmailed by showgirl Mabel (Joan Blondell), who has false proof that they have slept together several times.[135] Unlike in *Footlight Parade*, the Whore (Mabel) does not pose a real sexual threat to the Virgin (Barbara), though Barbara mistakes Mabel's professional partnership with Jimmy for a

[134] This is playing again on Laura Mulvey's assertion that the politics of viewing traditionally have been split between active/male and passive/female, in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Op. Cit., 808.

[135] I would postulate that they are not suggested to have actually slept together as a result of the Code proviso against depicting illicit and adulterous sexual relationships for comedy purposes alone. Were Blondell's Mabel shown to have actually initiated an premarital (for her), extramarital (for him) affair, her character would, under Joseph Breen's management of the PCA, not have been allowed under any circumstances to come to a happy end.

romantic one. This attempt at posing conflict between Jimmy and Barbara serves not to develop either of their characters, but rather to confirm Barbara and Mabel's already established distinction from each other as diametrically opposed images of women. Barbara's prerogative is to love Jimmy unconditionally, while Mabel's is to use her sexuality for financial gain: romance is thus reserved for sexually un-initiated women. In such a way, women in *Dames*, as in *Footlight Parade* and *Gold Diggers of 1935*, are identified/individuated according to their sexual value. They are reduced to a physical function, an "image of woman" that is in fact reflected and compounded in Berkeley's representation of (literally or figuratively) faceless women in musical numbers.

Dames has a relatively high percentage of elaborate production numbers, including "When You Were a Smile on Your Mother's Lips and a Twinkle in Your Daddy's Eye" (performed by Powell and Keeler and chorus), "The Girl at the Ironing Board" (Blondell and chorus), "Try to See It My Way" (Blondell and chorus), "I Only Have Eyes for You" (Powell and Keeler and chorus), and the title number, "Dames" (Powell and chorus). This is considerably more than *Gold Diggers of 1935* which, in the later classical fashion, has the three major numbers – "I'm Going Shopping With You" (Powell to Stuart), "The Words Are in My Heart" (Powell and chorus), and "Lullaby of Broadway" (Winifred Shaw and chorus) – relatively interspersed/integrated throughout the narrative. Five musical numbers is, however, slightly less than *Footlight Parade*'s six, three of which – "Honeymoon Hotel" (Powell and Keeler and chorus), "By a Waterfall" (Powell and Keeler and chorus), and "Shanghai Lil" (Cagney and Keeler and chorus) – are stacked at the very end in a definitively Berkeleyesque fashion. Such structural variety attests to the rapidity with which the formal semantics of the backstage musical were then evolving, with two significant constants: narratively central female characters/performers (with the notable exception of Joan Blondell) rarely lead musical numbers, and a chorus of female "dancers" (who actually do very little dancing, more often posing in geometric arrangements) appear in every single number (with the exception only of "I'm Going Shopping With You").

The effective "de-skilling" of female performers in such backstage musicals functions to subsume or re-contain female agency and the feminine excesses of performance within a phallogocentric logic or paradigm of viewing. In that women do not exercise vocal agency within these performances (as effected by Ginger Rogers and Joan Blondell in *Gold Diggers of 1933*), they are relegated, as Lucy Fischer has argued, to a purely imagistic function as physical/sexual objects.[136] Where Ruby Keeler, for instance, sings with Dick Powell (as in

[136] Fischer, "City of Women: Busby Berkeley, Architecture, and Urban Space," Op. Cit., 5.

"Honeymoon Hotel" and "By a Waterfall"; she also speak-sings to James Cagney in "Shanghai Lil"), it is in a call-and-response fashion, always answering to/performing for him.[137] Otherwise, her role is a purely physical one: she performs a few tap-dancing steps and retreats into the background as anonymously as the other chorus girls. Indeed her face, when individuated as the object of Powell's affection, as in the famous "I Only Have Eyes for You" number (*Dames*), is little more than a sign of his abstract and fetishistic desire: the symbol of an ideal, or Fischer's "image of woman as image."

Joan Blondell is similarly de-skilled or de-authorized as a musical performer. Singing two solos ("The Girl at the Ironing Board" and "Try To See It My Way") in *Dames*, her subjective talent and narrative agency are nevertheless undermined by her performing through the objectively sexualized character/figure of Mabel, whose very sexuality (the primary sign of her individuation) is mocked/denied in her costuming. As the "The Girl at the Ironing Board," Mabel/Blondell sings about a fetishistic love for men's underwear while dressed in a flouncy, high-necked frock (a visual motif that would follow Blondell thereafter). In "Try To See It My Way," Blondell then dons a tutu-like costume that recalls the "babysex" aesthetic which became associable with Shirley Temple and a de-authorized brand of female sexuality in the 1930s (I explore this further in Chapter 5). The exaggerated conservatism/infantilization of her dress, combined with a re-directed or de-authorized expression of sexuality, function to contain her performances within a phallogocentric system of representation whereby performative femininity is incompatible with active desire. In such a way, Keeler and Blondell's performative agency in *Footlight Parade* and *Dames* is denied/rescinded by/in their musical numbers – a negotiation of representation that *Gold Diggers of 1935* has not even to address, in that its female lead/love interest (Gloria Stuart) is narratively insignificant and, in the musical numbers, all but unseen.

This inclination towards effacing female talent in the mid-1930s cycle of backstage musicals represents a syntactic reversal from preceding films' tendency to portray women, especially within female homosocieties, as actively self-reliant (if not completely financially or sexually independent of men). It is also reflective of Hollywood's increasing bent towards reactionary ideology in the run-up to the creation of the Production Code Administration in

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[137] Roth in "Some Warner Musicals and the Spirit of the New Deal," Op. Cit., 47, has argued that early Warners stars were, in contrast to their classical-era counterparts like Fred Astaire, necessarily seemingly unskilled as a reflection of the studio ethos of collectivism and cooperation: "With Astaire we sit back and marvel at his grace and sophistication; with Keeler and Powell we say to ourselves, 'If they can make it, anyone can.'" To some degree this is true, but more practicably in the case of female stars like Ruby Keeler and Joan Blondell, who for all intensive purposes cannot sing. Dick Powell, on the other hand, sings numerous solos in these films, frequently shot in close-up via a traditional talent-framing technique. Increasingly, this distinguishes the male musical star image from a female one according to a dichotomy between active/male/talent versus passive/female/abstraction.

June 1934. As Jacobs has shown in her seminal study, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film*, the PCA became particularly invested in regulating representations of female sexuality and desire on film as a means of re-containing or re-subsuming Hollywood film texts within a traditionalist and conservative – that is, phallogocentric – syntax.[138] Like the Fallen Woman films of the pre-Code era, early backstage musicals from *The Broadway Melody* in 1929 to *Gold Diggers of 1933*, had tended to represent femininity and female performance as existing outside or in opposition to patriarchal social paradigms prior to implementation of the Code, and as incompatible with phallogocentric discourse. Indeed, and as I have sought to prove, their syntax is constructed from and according to a feminized and homosocially-oriented perspective, counter to or unbound by the traditionally gendered politics of viewing. Early backstage musicals do not represent female desire as constructed necessarily according to an Oedipal framework, thus female desire in such films need not be characterized by the essential lack or wanting that is paradigmatically ascribed to women in post-Code Hollywood cinema. In such a way the early, female-oriented backstage musicals represent a socially and politically subversive genre of filmmaking, which PCA censors worked to re-contain within a traditionally phallogocentric system of representation by enforcing certain Code delimitations on content and, even more subtly, influencing the syntactic evolution of the genre, tempering its generally feminized sensibility.

Exemplifying the effect of censorship on the evolving generic syntax of the backstage musical is Warner Bros.' final film in the *Gold Diggers* series, *Gold Diggers of 1937*. As evidenced in its PCA file, Joseph Breen, acting chief of the PCA, took a vested interest in regulating representations of female sexuality within its text. In a lengthy memo to Jack Warner reviewing its script during pre-production, Breen cautions several times that the chorus girls in the story – secondary or background characters at most – should not be made to seem like "loose or kept women." Breen mentions that special care must be taken with chorus girls' "costume and appearance," and that a specific scene between two of the leads playing a heterosexual couple is "open to unacceptable and objectionable interpretation."[139] Upon reviewing several versions of the script within weeks of his initial memo, Breen was still not satisfied that all suggestions of illicit sex relationships within the script had been removed and threatened future cuts[140] (a few of which Warner Bros. eventually had to make in order for the film to be granted its PCA seal).[141] Such a record speaks to the minute detail with which PCA censors examined individual backstage musicals for signs of transgressive

[138] Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*, Op. Cit.
[139] Joseph Breen to Jack Warner, memorandum (July 10 1936, *Gold Diggers of 1937*, PCA file).
[140] Joseph Breen to Jack Warner, memorandum (July 30 1936, *Gold Diggers of 1937*, PCA file).
[141] Joseph Breen to Jack Warner, memorandum (October 10 1936, *Gold Diggers of 1937*, PCA file).

femininity/sexuality, anticipating their translation into meaning onscreen. It further speaks to the degree to which the basic semantics of the backstage musical – particularly pertaining to the iconography of scantily clad chorus girls and the representation of groups of women – were altered under censorship.

On a broader narrative level, *Gold Diggers of 1937* bears the traditional tonal hallmarks of the censored post-Code musical, its meaning effectively closed-off by certain delimitations of representational scope. The female leads, played by Joan Blondell and Glenda Farrell, conform to the respective archetypes of Virgin and Whore (a semantic tendency of contemporaneous backstage musicals that I have reviewed above). As the former chorus girl Norma Perry, Blondell again appears in dowdy clothing, her voluminous patterned dresses and Peter Pan collars signifying a kind of pre-sexual femininity which is complemented by her acquired aversion to the show business lifestyle; her denial of her own physicality marks her out as the ideal image of femininity. This is in stark contrast to Farrell's gold-digging Genevieve Larkin, whose close-fitting dresses accentuate her body, thus highlighting her concomitant sexuality and employability/manipulability. While Norma falls happily in love at the very beginning of the film, Genevieve embarks on the seduction of a wealthy producer J.J. Hobart (Victor Moore), and winds up falling in love with him just when he is about to die. As per PCA practice, by which sexually transgressive women are punished for their crimes against heteronormativity,[142] Genevieve must be depicted suffering at length, renouncing her past lifestyle before it is revealed that J.J. has recovered and they are married. Thus the traditional happy ending of the integrated musical is effected, while the film's subversive tone is neutralized alongside the re-containment of Genevieve's transgressive sexuality within a phallogocentric logic.

In such a way censorship under the Production Code Administration worked towards the regulation of visual and aural signs of female sexuality and transgressiveness in musicals, scouring film scripts and initial cuts for costume infractions and suggestive dialogue. Consequently, semantic aspects of the early backstage musical relating to the paradigmatic representation of femininity and female-oriented homosocieties as sexually independent or transgressive, were denied and replaced by the de-skilling of individual female characters and/or the effacement of groups of women in post-Code iterations of the Berkeleyesque backstage musical. This represents a more insidious form of censorship pertaining to the overall tone and meaning – indeed to the very syntactic or meaning-bearing structures – of

[142] Jacobs has shown in *The Wages if Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*, Op. Cit., that censorship post-1934 under Joseph Breen was increasingly subtle and systematic, and incorporated at the most fundamental levels of narrative.

this popular early cycle of Hollywood musicals. Indeed, the cycle may be seen to have peaked with *Gold Diggers of 1933* in terms of its subversiveness and originality. As borne out by analysis of gendered representations within *Gold Diggers of 1937*, female characters and performers in Warner Bros. musicals were increasingly de-authorized within and without the text of the censored backstage musical as a reflection of the reactionary conservatization and phallogocentricization of the politics of viewing films in the mid-1930s.

MGM, integration and the individuated female lead: Eleanor Powell, 1935-1940

Broadway Melody of 1936 (Roy Del Ruth, MGM, 1935)

Born to Dance (Roy Del Ruth, MGM, 1936)

Broadway Melody of 1938 (Roy Del Ruth, MGM, 1937)

Broadway Melody of 1940 (Norman Taurog, MGM, 1939)

Following the release of *Gold Diggers of 1937* in 1936, Warner Bros. produced one more film in the series, *Gold Diggers in Paris* (Ray Enright and Busby Berkeley, 1938). Repeating the Berkeleyesque formula by which major musical numbers were stacked in the final quarter and essentially non-integrative with narrative, *Gold Diggers in Paris* harked back to a (by-then) perceptibly staid form of backstage musical filmmaking. At the same time, it featured none of the leading players familiar to previous iterations of the genre – such as Dick Powell, Joan Blondell or Glenda Farrell – who might have lent the film a degree of nostalgic credibility.[143] Thus sanitized of the pre-Code associations these stars would have held, *Gold Diggers of Paris* appears emptied of certain significant visual and auditory pleasures for which the Warner Bros. cycle had originally become famous (notwithstanding *Paris*'s musical sequences' kaleidoscopic choreography and visual spectacularity).[144] *Gold Diggers in Paris*'s mediocre release effectively put an end to the cycle, demonstrating that Warner Bros.' particular vision of social-collectivist utopia had diminished in relevancy. Indeed, it could no longer be represented satisfyingly onscreen, due to the exhaustion of its formal and narrative tropes, combined with the delimitation-cum-conservatization of its

[143] *Gold Diggers of Paris* was headlined by Rudy Vallee (who would not become a major film star until the 1940s) partnered by Rosemary Lane. Only Hugh Herbert, as supporting comedy relief, represented the old cohort of stars.

[144] It should be noted that in 1937 Busby Berkeley directed *Hollywood Hotel* at Warner Bros., which echoes significant semantic tendencies of the *Gold Digger* cycle: narratively, it follows the struggle of a performing collective to put on a show, with a triumphant closing musical sequence stacked at its end. In such a way, it conforms to the Berkeleyesque backstage musical form, yet it is significantly more self-reflexive and satirical in its tone than previous films in that vein. It takes its title from a popular radio series hosted by then-gossip columnist Louella Parsons (who also features in the film) and knowingly references many of the by-now familiar narrative tropes and iconographic features of Warner Bros. musicals. In a way, it is more a spoof of musicals, in terms of its overall meaning-bearing structure, than a musical *per se*.

representational tendencies (as per adherence to implicitly phallogocentric PCA guidelines). These effectively limited the extent to which women could be (re)presented as focal points both of narrative and spectacle within the same film.

Associated with tendencies towards the subversive representation of female homosociality and/or transgressive female sexuality (which certain films of the cycle after *Gold Diggers of 1933* attempted to mitigate or compensate for through narrative means) the Berkeleyesque backstage musical was of dubious value to Warner Bros. in 1937. Thus, between 1937 and 1940, the studio turned away from producing musical spectaculars, and Busby Berkeley himself began directing "straight" comedies and dramas (such as *Men Are Such Fools* [1938] and *They Made Me a Criminal* [1939]) before moving to MGM in 1939. There, Berkeley resumed work in the musical genre, operating under Arthur Freed's unit of production and becoming tied to the Judy Garland/Mickey Rooney cycle of musical-teen vehicles. However, the backstage musical cycle that had been so closely associated with his name and re-ignited production within the genre – indeed, helping to establish "the musical" as a genre form in and of itself – ground to a halt at Warner Bros.

At the same time, the backstage musical was enjoying something of a renaissance at MGM. The format (despite its past issues at Warners) provided narrative access to the exhibition of musical talent – a sector in which MGM had recently heavily invested. Part of MGM's strategy to compete with the other studios in an era of declining box office sales was to sign as many musical stars as it could without doubling up on performers of similarly established images (thereby preserving the studio's overall image as comprised of diverse and abundant talent).[145] By 1939, MGM's roster had grown to include Jeanette MacDonald (signed from Paramount in 1934), Fred Astaire (from RKO), ingénues Eleanor Powell and Judy Garland (signed in 1935 and 1936 respectively), and a host of seasoned musical comedians from the stage. Armed thusly, MGM only lacked a tested narrative formula of its own, by which to show off its arsenal of talent to profitable effect.

In contrast to Warner Bros.' signature presentation of "aggregate entertainment," MGM had favoured a relatively streamlined, pseudo-integrative approach to musical filmmaking since 1930, though more by happenstance than business design. As MGM tended to prioritize spectacularization of individuated star talent over the representation of

[145] As I go on to address in Chapter 5, MGM held both adolescent singing stars Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin on provisional contract in 1935. They appeared together in the short *Every Sunday* (Felix E. Feist) before Durbin's contract expired, and she was signed by Universal. The studio's hesitancy to use either star in a significant role prior to 1936 speaks to the degree to which MGM was unsure of their comparative values as young female singers, as well as to how each individual star was held as a commodity with discreet potential. Repetition of talent effectively devalued the individual, which explains why *Every Sunday* goes to great lengths to posit the two young stars' singing styles as contrastive.

performance collectives – the prerogative, initially, of the Warner Bros. musical – its musical films, pre-1935, were thus semantically distinct from Warner Bros.' popular backstagers. They were not, however, effectively "branded" as such. MGM's formally integrative approach manifested itself in musicals through narratives that, (much like the original *Broadway Melody* of 1929) for the most part hovered between comedy and melodrama (such as *Madame Satan* [Cecile B. DeMille, 1930] and *Dancing Lady* [Robert Z. Leonard, 1933]) or adhered to the style and narrative of operetta (as borne out in the various star vehicles of Lance Tibbett, Grace Moore and Jeanette MacDonald [discussed in Chapter 3).[146] In such a way, the meaning-bearing structure of early 1930s MGM musicals was generally predicated on the establishment-cum-defense of "ideal heterosexual couples,"[147] to borrow a phrase from Cohan, while their musical numbers – though "immanent from [a] diegesis"[148] – did not function as crucial spots of narrative development or expression of ideological meaning.[149] Such films were semantically distinguishable from romantic comedies and melodramas by virtue of their having spectacular musical numbers, but they were oftentimes more akin to "musical films," as Altman puts it, than to "musicals" in terms of their overriding narrative and ideological structures.[150] Accordingly, MGM musical films prioritized the display of individuated star-performers' unique musical talents over the representation of social collectives vis-à-vis mass musical performance (which, as we have seen, characterized Berkeleyesque musical numbers). However, in that early MGM musicals' narratives also tended not to stray markedly from the primary meaning-bearing structures of romantic comedy and/or melodrama, MGM was slower than Warner Bros. to establish a "brand," as such, of musical style.

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[146] MGM did, however, also release a number of backstage musicals in a pseudo-Berkeyesque format, including *Blondie of the Follies* (Edmund Goulding, 1932) and *Dancing Lady* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1933). While these films tended to be capped with a spectacular musical number as part of (or in place of) the action's denouement, similar to the Warner Bros. films, from the early 1930s onwards their narratives were not similarly predicated on representing female homosocial groups.

[147] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man," Op. Cit., 87.

[148] Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Op. Cit., 12.

[149] Admittedly, the Warner Bros. musicals posited at least one heterosexual romance at the centre of their story, with which the major musical numbers seldom interacted. However, in that the musical numbers may be seen to have existed in a space radically at a distance or divorced from the spatial integrity of the narrative world, each number may be read as having its own discrete signifying function or ontological wholeness. Musical numbers are thus comparatively ideologically significant in the early Warner Bros. backstage musicals by virtue of their discreetness and ontological integrity. Musical numbers in early 1930s MGM musicals, on the other hand, tend to be more fully integrated into the spatial universe of their surrounding narrative, however they also tended to have less of a "story" in and of themselves.

[150] In *Film/Genre* (Op. Cit., 32-33), Altman notes that before 1931, the word "musical" was more commonly used as an adjective to modify the description of individual genre films, as opposed to signifying as a noun its own film genre. In 1933, 42nd Street was the first film to be labeled (in *Photoplay*) an "out-and-out musical." This speaks to the dubiousness with which "musical filmmaking" was regarded by studios as a saleable venture after the drought years of 1930-1931, and to the inherent plasticity of generic paradigms more broadly (notwithstanding Altman's exacting definitions).

With the conservatization of socio-political ideology and corollary censorship practices in the mid-1930s, however, the Warner Bros. backstage musical had declined in cultural relevancy. Nevertheless, Warners had established a practicable and easily reproducible narrative blueprint for musical filmmaking, ripe for appropriation in less suspect (from the PCA's point of view) hands.[151] Thus, a few months after the release of *Gold Diggers of 1935* (which as I have shown demonstrated an unsatisfying departure from setting within a female homosocial milieu), MGM released its own Berkeleyesque backstage musical redux, *The Broadway Melody of 1936*. The success of this release, followed by *Born to Dance* the next year, effectively revitalized the backstage formula, and the positive reaction it received from the PCA spurred production of a further two films: *The Broadway Melody of 1938* and *The Broadway Melody of 1940*. All four films starred MGM's latest dance discovery Eleanor Powell,[152] and in addition to sharing (largely) the same cast and crew, the films – which I designate as MGM's classic backstage musical cycle – were united by certain key structural tendencies and representational strategies, which I shall detail below. With this cycle, MGM thus capitalized and built upon established tropes of the Warner Bros. Berkeleyesque backstage cycle, but crucially as divested of their more liberalist leanings.

On the level of presentation/spectacle, MGM's classic backstage musicals were predicated on the individuation of talent – particularly as regards the representation of its primary female star, Eleanor Powell – whilst displaying dual tendencies towards formal integration and Berkeleyesque aggregation. This marks a syntactic departure from the early 1930s backstage musicals, which constructed autonomous communities or homosocieties of female performers from a non-phallogocentric perspective. It also diverges from the immediately preceding (and slightly overlapping) cycle of backstage musicals at Warner Bros., which, as detailed, were invested in effectively de-skilling female performers (individuated purely according to sex-role archetype or almost entirely "effaced" or anonymized as a reaction against the transgressive images of femininity associated with pre-Code Hollywood cinema), and which resulted in the manifest "image of woman" being

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[151] Beyond the troubles Warner Bros. had had with censorship under Breen, Louis B. Mayer's reputation in Hollywood – unlike the democratic Warner brothers – was as a prominent, conservative Republican (Babington and Evans, Op. Cit., 46). Mayer's ideological leanings translated into less overt politicism and subversiveness within MGM's releases during the Depression era and into the 1940s; not coincidentally, they were generally more palatable to censors.

[152] Powell had appeared previously in Fox's backstage musical-cum-revue *George White's 1935 Scandals* (George White, 1935) to favorable reviews and enthusiastic box office reception. She was subsequently snapped up by MGM to round out their roster of musical performers, becoming the studio's go-to female dance star, as Jeanette MacDonald and Judy Garland spearheaded MGM's diva contingent (I consider their performances and representation as part of distinct musical cycles in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively).

divested of both narrative and performative agency. The classic MGM cycle of backstagers emulated the Berkeleyesque in terms of its outward formal aggregation (most recognizably via the "stacking" of climactic musical sequences at the end of each film) and its presentation of a multiplicity of musical entertainments.[153] However, in contrast to the Warner Bros. films on an ideological level, the classic MGM backstage musicals tended towards a-politicism, in that they obfuscated the evident economic disenfranchisement of their protagonists within overt love-longing and/or comedic haplessness.

Narratively, each film follows the same central conceit: a small-town girl played by Eleanor Powell finds love and stardom (though not necessarily in that order) on Broadway, despite the personal and professional hindrances posed by a female rival of superior professional status. Along the way she befriends a fellow performer or performers, whose success(es) (either in love or work, though never both for one character) mirror – though do not outstrip – her own; Powell's professional triumph is realized in a final musical number, with a brief non- or semi-musical coda in which her future marriage to Robert Taylor (or James Stewart in *'38*) is confirmed. (There is the notable exception of *Broadway Melody of 1940*, which as I detail below exhibits anachronistic narrative features for reasons significant in the context of gender representation in the Classical Hollywood Musical). Powell's love rivals tend to be represented as economically privileged over the country girls she plays: in *'36,* a rich widow wants to invest and star in Taylor's show; similarly, in *Born to Dance*, a Broadway diva covets both Powell's beau and her leading role in a show; and in *'38,* an investor's wife casts doubt on Powell's proficiency as a performer. Despite their class, however, these women's essential cynicism marks them each as an unsuitable match for the male lead and, consequently, as undeserving of stardom. Where the earliest Warner Bros. heroines had triumphed through collectivization and subversion of socio-economic hierarchies, Powell's transcendent individualism – which is indicated by her virtuousness, simplicity, and represented/literalized in her virtuoso dance solos – saves the day. Thus, Powell's individuated female stardom both within and without the text bestows grandeur upon the collective, such that in her final moments onstage she comes to embody perfectly the American (Male's) Dream: open-mouthed and smiling, her physical exertions appearing nonetheless paradoxically effortless, Powell's performances ultimately capitulate to the

[153] In addition to the pleasures of viewing Powell's virtuoso tap-dancing performances, the films are also invested in providing a stage for their secondary musical performers/comedic character actors, such as Buddy Ebsen, Sid Silvers, Sophie Tucker and Robert Wildhack, whose idiosyncratic performances tend to function as stand-alone set pieces, less integrative with narrative even than Powell's spectacular tap solos. The presence of these actors (most of whom originated from the Broadway and vaudeville stages themselves) could be said to detract from the overall "seamlessness" of style to which the MGM musical has often been said to aspire, compounding the sense of aggregation and heterogeneity of amusements within the single musical film.

patriarchal/capitalist system that would use her body as an overdetermined symbol of purity.

In arguing such, however, I contradict Greg Faller's account of Powell's "performance-image," put forward in his thesis on *The Function of Star-Image and Performance in the Hollywood Musical*. Faller has argued, contrary to my reading, that Powell resists assimilation and re-containment within the phallogocentric structures of dual-focus narrative and Platonic integrationism, positing that the narratives of her classic MGM backstagers "centre[d] as much on [her attaining] a successful career as on domesticity or romance."[154] Faller has also highlighted the significance of her tendency to dance solo, attributable to the fact that her talent far exceeded her male co-stars' (with the exception of Fred Astaire),[155] such that she came to "dominate the screen space" of musical performance in her films.[156] I do not dispute that Powell's ascendancy at MGM represented a paradigm shift towards individuated female performance in the late 1930s backstage musical: her nascent star persona and image, predicated on the spectacularization of her physical performance (her individuated talent in dancing) was uniquely athletic as opposed to objectively sexy/sexual; it was also suitably integrative within the formal tendencies of the backstage musical (with its predilection for narrative flow-stopping musical numbers) as well as adherent to the gendered representational paradigms enforced by the PCA. However, a closer reading of her performances in generic context evinces their re-containment within a phallogocentric representational paradigm through visually fetishistic means. While Powell threatened – and even at times enacted – subversion of the phallogocentric representational praxis by virtue of her extraordinary and unequalled talent in dancing, the ideological significance of the narratives that surrounded her performances and attempted (albeit awkwardly) to re-domesticate her persona, cannot be ignored. Her performances may not in fact be read as quite so lastingly subversive as Faller has suggested.

First of all, Faller's reading of Powell's characters' narrative significance in the MGM cycle of integrated backstage musicals (which supplanted the Berkeleyesque during the late 1930s) is overstated. Faller has asserted that, in addition to the strong "performance image" Powell puts forward in her musical sequences, her characters are "independent, self-assured, intelligent, and interested in romance but not as an exclusive goal," and that establishing a career amidst a "close community of strong and supportive female friends" is

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[154] Neale, discussing Faller in *Genre in Hollywood*, Op. Cit., 102.
[155] Greg S. Faller, *The Function of Star-Image and Performance in the Hollywood Musical: Sonja Henie, Esther Williams, and Eleanor Powell* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Library, 1987), 367.
[156] Ibid., 345.

always her top priority.[157] In fact, in each of these films (bar *Broadway Melody of 1940*) Powell's rise to stardom is little more than happenstance along the way to her marriage; she just as frequently befriends men as women, and in fact where she establishes friendly ties with the latter, it is never in the context of a female homosocial milieu: women are seldom "grouped" together in these films, but are rather more solitary figures.[158] This is borne out in the narrative trajectories of Powell's characters: In *'36*, Irene Foster goes in search of her high school sweetheart (Taylor) with the express purpose of rekindling their flame and – secondarily – hoping to get a part in his Broadway play; she wins the approval of secretary Kitty (Una Merkel), who advocates for Irene as a performer and ultimately helps to unite Irene with her long-lost love. In *Born to Dance*, Nora Paige falls in love with sailor Ted (James Stewart), and she only turns towards focusing on their career when a perceptible rival gets in the way; she is taken in by Jenny (Merkel) whose tumultuous relationship with her husband parallels that of Nora and Ted. (Thus, in the first two films, Powell moves from a close relationship with a woman towards a close relationship with a man.) In *'38*, horse trainer Sally fixes her sights on talent agent Steve (Taylor) whose encouragement – along with buddies Sonny and Peter (George Murphy and Buddy Ebsen, respectively) – finally gets her onstage. Only in *1940* does Powell, as Broadway star Clare Bennett, actually prioritize her career as a dancer over her romantic interests and friendships. Furthermore, in this last film, Powell has vastly decreased narrative agency, in that the story follows Astaire's pursuit of stardom (and Powell) more closely. In all narrative cases, Powell (with or without Una Merkel) is surrounded by – contained within – a male performance collective/audience whose admiring gaze is reflected by the male chorus of dancers surrounding Powell at the close of each film and shared by/transferred to the extra-diegetic audience alike.

Powell's agency in her musical sequences is offset by the relative innocence (and consequent blandness) of her good-girl characters, whose narrative importance is proven only by the relatively generous screen-time afforded Powell when dancing. This is in direct contrast to the early Berkeleyesque backstage cycle of musicals (which we have seen was predicated on the representation of female homosociality) wherein female protagonists' narrative centrality (and social transgressiveness) could effectively contradict, subvert, or otherwise comment on their visual objectification in musical numbers. Tellingly, and in evidence of the crucial semantic and syntactic differences between *The Broadway Melody of 1936* and previous iterations of the backstage musical genre, Joseph Breen cited the later

[157] Faller, Op. Cit., 344.

[158] This is literalized in the discreet musical performances by Powell, Garland and Tucker individually throughout *Broadway Melody of 1938*.

film as a particularly "fine example of a good musical," based on its narrative moralizing and, implicitly, on the wholesomeness of its female talent: boasting to the Reverend Edward S. Schwegler of the PCA's efficacy in cleaning up the movies, Breen went on to ask his clerical contact to "note how cleverly we have succeeded in keeping away from suggestive camera angles in the dancing and costumes."[159] Breen took credit in the first person plural for certain aspects of the film that were also attributable to Ray Enright's direction and to the favoured dancing style of Eleanor Powell (emphasizing athleticism over sensuality). However his blessing confirms that *The Broadway Melody of 1936* negotiated and exemplified certain impulses towards integration and conservatization within the backstage musical – at the same time MGM asserted its dominance over production within the genre – towards the end of the 1930s. It also helps explain why Eleanor Powell became – however briefly – the darling of the studio, prior to the establishment of the Freed Unit, and notwithstanding her relatively blank affect as a dramatic actor: Powell's star image adhered perfectly to the PCA's idealized vision of non-narrativizing musical femininity;[160] her films tended to pass through the various stages of production smoothly and proved generally palatable to audiences and censors alike.

By way of explicating Eleanor Powell's significance as a performer in backstage musicals, and as an exemplar of the paradigmatic individuated female musical star, I consider more closely her performance and representation throughout *The Broadway Melody of 1936*. As previously noted, this was Powell's entrée into musical stardom, playing the role of ingénue equivalent to that which Ruby Keeler owned in the earliest Busby Berkeley iterations of the backstage genre. Also similar to the Berkeleysque narrative formula – and the 1929 musical to which its title alludes - this reboot of the *Broadway Melody* centres on a theatrical milieu, if not exactly a collective of performers (in that the two male leads – Jack Benny and Robert Taylor – are a gossip columnist and producer, respectively; this goes some way towards explaining their absence, for the most part, from

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[159] Joseph Breen to Rev. Edward S. Schegler. Memorandum. September 3 1935 (*Broadway Melody of 1936*, PCA file). It is interesting to note how Breen not only takes credit for but claims authorship over the film. His mention of "camera angles" in particular speaks to the level of directorial pre-emption on the part of the PCA – how they not only censored/cut films after the fact but determined what could be seen or heard in the very process of production. The PCA thus effected not a reductive/proscriptive influence on meaning-making within Hollywood cinema, but a very productive one (if conservatively so).

[160] Arthur Freed rose to prominence for his contributions to *The Wizard of Oz* as an associate producer before he was put in charge of musical production at MGM as head of the famed "Freed unit." Under his aegis, Judy Garland (often opposite Mickey Rooney) became MGM's number one musical star during the 1940s, while Jeanette MacDonald and Eleanor Powell (both of whom suffered from health complications) declined in prominence and popularity. Powell did, however, appear in a Freed Unit musical, 1941's *Lady Be Good*, in which – despite her top billing – she played a supporting role, by which she was confined mostly to musical sequences. Powell's evident incompatibility with the developing MGM musical style under Arthur Freed, who greatly favoured integration over formal aggregation, speaks to her limitations as a dramatic actor.

the musical numbers). Innocent Irene Foster (Powell) travels from Albany to Manhattan to reunite with her childhood sweetheart-turned-Broadway hotshot producer Robert Gordon (Taylor), who is simultaneously trying to placate a rich widow (June Knight) who wants to star in his show and a vindictive gossip (Benny) bent on humiliating Gordon by way of inventing (and exposing) the phony French dancer "Madame La Belle Arlette." Of course, Irene intends to make it in show business too and winds up assuming the fictional persona of Madame Arlette in order to get cast in Gordon's show. Irene/Arlette is a hit, ultimately uniting the warring factions of journalist and producer as well as producer and star, as she is set to marry Gordon at the film's end.

Powell's performance within the musical numbers juxtaposes uncomfortably with the fantastical elements of the film on a representational level.[161] As Faller has established, Powell's performance as athletic spectacle within her films functions as "aggressively" presentational, as showing off, asserting an authority over the filmic sequence that cannot be contained within narrative, and thus necessitating a perceptible "shift[ing] down" into character at the close of each number.[162] Indeed, Powell-as-Irene has to "shift up" to her "performance-image" as a virtuoso dancer in two key numbers, the dream sequence "You Are My Lucky Star," which sees Powell (dubbed in song by Marjorie Lane) envision herself onstage in an elaborate ballet number, and her tap audition as Arlette. In the former number, Powell's outsize talent as both a classically trained dancer and tap-dancer is accommodated as a solo spectacle in its narrative framing as a day-dream; in the latter, her masquerade as a phony French "Madame" allows Powell to express an overt female

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[161] As a backstage musical, the numbers are performed either as shows-within-the-show, or by characters that are themselves performers (or performance-oriented) and therefore inclined towards musical self-expression, and thus, the musical sequences are ostensibly "logically" motivated. However, *The Broadway Melody of 1936* breaks with the paradigm of formal aggregation associated with the backstage musical, vis-a-vis the Berkeleyesque, in seeking to integrate the characters' psychological "space" or meaning more fully into the physical space of the musical numbers, so that approximately half of the musical sequences take place in an "offstage" or imagined stage-place. Whereas spatial expansion (in terms of the unrealistic widening of the stage space) and temporal compression (in terms of the jumps effected between performance spaces without attending to set and costume changes) in the Berkeleyesque backstage musical has been shown to be limited (ostensibly) to the diegetic stage, in *The Broadway Melody of 1936*, musical performance can take place anywhere: in a nightclub ("Broadway Rhythm", "You Are My Lucky Star," "I've Got a Feelin' You're Foolin'"), on a tenement balcony ("Sing Before Breakfast"), or in a dream ("You Are My Lucky Star", reprise). In any and all of these stage-places, characters dissolve in and out of frame and/or burst spontaneously into song (as Gordon does twice, in "I've Got a Feelin' You're Foolin'" and "You Are My Lucky Star"). Musical performance is thus partially liberated from the physical stage space/realistic logic of the narrative, yet simultaneously yoked to the characters' psychological motivation and to the internal logic of the film-as-musical. Though *The Broadway Melody* effects this admittedly somewhat awkwardly – in that the associations of the backstage-Broadway setting and milieu push towards naturalism, at the same time as the style of the musical sequences pushes towards the fantastical – nevertheless the film form provides a jumping-off point for the employment of such impossible spatial relationships in later, classically integrated MGM musicals such as *On The Town* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1949), in which Kelly and company traverse tens of miles of Manhattan in the blink of an eye, and *Royal Wedding* (Stanley Donen, 1951), in which Fred Astaire tap-dances on the ceiling, overcome as they are with enthusiasm and feeling enough to bend the laws of physics.

[162] Faller, Op. Cit., 344-362.

sexuality that cannot otherwise be reconciled with the character of Irene: costumed in a curly blonde wig and dressed only in unitard and tights, she performs hip roles and pelvic gyrations that lend an erotic quality to her dancing not seen anywhere else. Thus already individuated as a virtuoso solo performer within the musical, she exerts a subjective control over these numbers that exceeds her narrative function as Irene Taylor. She is spectacularized, even sexually objectified, but in a way that transcends her narrative passivity, making her the film's primary, active source of viewing pleasure in such musical performances.

Powell's performative agency and affective power within such numbers is, however, effectively denied in the climactic reprise of "Broadway Rhythm," by which she is re-contained within a phallogocentric paradigm of representation via the fetishization of her "performance-image." Powell appears costumed (as she does at the end of *Born to Dance* and *Broadway Melody of 1938*) in a sort of feminized tuxedo, all spangled top-hat-and-tails, and backed by an all-male chorus. At the same time as her pseudo-masculinized dress denies her gender difference as "subject" of the performance number – in such a way disavowing that performative agency on behalf of the female may also be represented imagistically as fully "feminine" – its flamboyancy, its superfluous decorativeness, confirms her as "to-be-looked-at," which the cohort of properly-tuxedoed men standing behind visually confirm. (Interestingly, in comparable numbers at the end of both *Born to Dance* and *Broadway Melody of 1938*, Powell is not only "watched" diegetically by this chorus but literally tossed between members in the performance of various acrobatic routines, thus further subtracting from her "command" of each number.) In such a way, Powell's performance within *Broadway Melody of 1936* establishes a pattern of subversion-followed-by-capitulation to the gendered politics of representation that is continued in *Born to Dance* and *Broadway Melody of 1938*.

Born to Dance, in particular, betrays considerable unease over its inability to satisfy the balance of dual-focus narrative as result of Powell's excessive performative subjectivity in her musical numbers. This is particularly evident in her "duet" with James Stewart in Central Park, whereby Stewart-as-Ted "conducts" Powell's solo dancing from the sidelines. In such a way, the number's narrative framing awkwardly establishes Powell as "directed" by Stewart, though the mannered-ness and irrepressible athleticism of her performance at once contradicts Stewart/Ted's participation in the number's "authorship." Thus, as if to avoid confirming Powell's assumption of subjective authority, the non-musical narrative re-imposes itself upon the number, introducing a police officer who "takes over" its

conduction, prompting Ted and Nora to flee. Tellingly, Powell's next film, opposite Taylor once more, removes the possibility of their duet-through-dance altogether, instead positing George Murphy in the role of Powell's hoofer friend as her performance partner. In such a way, both films do indeed let Powell "dominate" performance space at the expense of establishing/counter-balancing male performative agency throughout the narrative, confounding these films' adherence to dual-focus narrative. Nevertheless, Powell's performance is yoked back to a phallogocentric representational paradigm in the last few minutes of each film.

As a result, I would argue (and as Faller has intimated), Powell's narrative subjectivity is significantly decreased within *Broadway Melody of 1940*. In this film, for the first time, she is "matched" by a musical male star, Fred Astaire, whose performance image might be judged appropriately as "of equal value."[163] When they dance "Begin the Beguine," they satisfy a utopian ideal of equalized skill that is representative of their ideological integration, in that their professional union coincides with their conciliation as a heterosexual couple. Yet even more repressive of Powell's perceptible subjectivity relative to Astaire (both on representational and presentational levels), their duet is followed by her dancing with *both* Astaire and Murphy (thus to reconcile via the narrative the male characters' temporarily rended friendship; in such a way, the symbolic recuperation of male subjectivity is prioritized even above satisfying romance between Powell and Astaire). Whereas Faller has argued that in this scene "Powell's male leads contained her powerful performance image only because, together, they equaled her talent,"[164] I would argue that in narrative context, the ending of *Broadway Melody of 1940* affirms the prioritization of patriarchal power structures over individuated female talent. This confirms the re-conservatization of ideology foundational to the meaning-bearing structures of the backstage musical at MGM, concomitant with the rise of the classically integrated musical under the Freed Unit.

Conclusion

Unlike the early Warner Bros. backstage musicals in which homosocieties of women stood in as collective protagonists, or in the succeeding cycle by which individuated female leads were effectively de-skilled and re-subsumed into a faceless chorus of women, Powell's individuated talent was fetishized for its uniqueness and spectacularity. Visually, this was

[163] Faller, Op. Cit., 367.
[164] Ibid., 383.

accomplished both in her costuming and by her in-camera framing: posed always as/at the dynamic center of a stage, in alternating close-ups and long-shots (thus establishing her figure in the context of, and as distinct from, the background set and chorus), Powell appeared in shorts, slim trousers, or otherwise abbreviated costumes designed to show off her sinewy legs and accentuate the movement of her body, and the overall spectacle of her dance performance.[165] The performative excesses of her female body and visible skill were nevertheless compartmentalized and re-contained within a phallogocentric representational paradigm whereby her physical talent was displayed and observable largely within the literal and figurative borders of the stage/frame. Ostentatious performance and talent on behalf of the female star/performer was thus fetishized and packaged away into stand-alone musical sequences, to be appreciated objectively from a masculinized perspective and at a remove from the "image of woman" onscreen. In such a way, female star performance in the late 1930s backstage musical may be seen as increasingly individuated at the same time as – and because – it was contained within a conservatively gendered politics of representation and viewing.

Overall, over the course of the 1930s, the backstage musical moved from a paradigm of formal aggregation, exemplified by the Berkeleyesque backstage musical, towards greater integration, falling into line – as spear-headed by MGM productions – with a classical form and syntax. Narratively speaking, this effected a greater individuation of characters and performers within each text, as representational focus shifted from homosocieties of women to the heterosexual pair. As I shall explore in the next chapter, such a paradigm shift was reflected in the rapid individuation of female musical star personas, particularly early on in the case of Ginger Rogers. Originally one of the girls backstage at Warner Bros., she would tap-dance out of the RKO woodwork into stardom opposite Fred Astaire, concurrent with the establishment of the classical Hollywood musical form under the regulation of the PCA.

[165] At the same time, and as noted previously by Breen in his memo to the Rev. Schwegler, her costumes never stray into risqué territory: where her legs are exposed, they are usually partially covered by dark tights, or the top half of her costume is compensatingly decorated – usually with bows or frills in order to tamp down further the sexual connotations of her outfit.

Chapter 2

A Fine Romance: the integration and individuation of the female musical star – Ginger Rogers at RKO, 1933-1939

Of the four female performers who featured prominently in Berkeleyesque backstage musicals throughout the 1930s – Ruby Keeler, Ginger Rogers, Joan Blondell, and Glenda Farrell – only Rogers retained her stardom at the end of the decade. With the decline of musical film production at Warner Bros., so too declined the careers of many of its female players.[166] Rogers, however, had changed studio in 1933, departing Warner Bros. after the first *Gold Diggers* film to sign with RKO. There she rose to prominence as Fred Astaire's dance partner in a famous cycle of integrated dance musicals, beginning with *Flying Down to Rio* (Thornton Freeland) in 1933 and ending with *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (H. C. Potter) in 1939.[167] While Warner Bros.'s frequent pairing of Keeler and Blondell (separately) opposite Dick Powell failed to propel either actress beyond musical ensemble performance (and Glenda Farrell never rose above secondary lead status in musicals),[168] Rogers had emerged from the 1930s "look[ing] better and work[ing] better with each succeeding picture," to quote *Variety*'s summary review of her musical performance in 1935.[169] Indeed, discussion of Rogers in contemporaneous trade journals and fan magazines evinced her increasing prominence and appreciation as a musical star over the course of the decade, as she transitioned from supporting player to individuated star.

Though both early on and in her later career Rogers played more frequently in light comedy and melodramatic roles, she is best known today for her musical performances in the nine films she made with Astaire between 1933 and 1939. It was not, however, until her last few films with Astaire by the end of the decade that Rogers's star profile could be judged as represented on a par with – or even surpassing – her male co-star's. This speaks

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[166] Keeler went into retirement in 1941, following her divorce from Al Jolson, remarriage, and the end of her contractual obligations to Warner Bros. in the late 1930s. Blondell's and Farrell's contracts were similarly not renewed in 1939, and they continued to work largely in supporting roles in films thereafter.

[167] Astaire and Rogers reunited at MGM for *The Barkleys of Broadway* (Charles Walters) in 1949; however, the film stands apart from the 1930s cycle in that it was produced at a different studio under different standards of censorship (fifteen years after the implementation of the Code and ten years after the last RKO dance musical starring the pair).

[168] Both Blondell and Farrell had successful film careers playing comedic and dramatic parts, however they were never individuated in terms of their overall star profiles by their particularly *musical* talent. Keeler, who had established herself early on as a novelty tap-dancer, appears not to have been able to sustain long-term interest, either on behalf of her studio or the public: her last musical with Warner Bros. was *Ready, Willing and Able* (Ray Enright, 1937); she was then shopped around the other studios for several pictures before retiring from Hollywood.

[169] *Variety*, March 13 1935 (*Roberta*, PCA file).

both to Astaire's contrastively well-established reputation as a stage musical performer prior to his signing with RKO in 1933, as well as to the relative rapidity with which Rogers was individuated/able to individuate herself as an ascendant star both opposite and independent of Astaire. As I will show, through textual analysis of Rogers's performance and representation opposite Astaire, and with reference to contemporaneous reviews, star discourses and production files, Rogers's star development and individuation actually functioned to distract from the more camp or "feminizing" (to borrow a term from Steve Cohan)[170] aspects of her frequent co-star's performance – particularly following the implementation of the Code, which closed off the more explicitly (hetero)sexual implications of their performed relationship. Paradoxically, then, Rogers's ascendancy to relative subjectivity as both a musical performer and a star attraction by the end of the decade resulted from a trend towards ideological conservatism and integrativeness within the musical. Further, Rogers's spectacularity as an individuated star – a function of the classic dual-focus narrative developed throughout her dance musicals with Astaire – ultimately threatened to transgress the syntactic boundaries of narrative. Her performances became increasingly excessive to the narrative logic established via the cycle, as well as subversive of/within the phallogocentric system of representation they exemplified – despite the fact that the Astaire-Rogers cycle exemplifies the Classical Hollywood Musical narrative and representational paradigm.

Indeed, the Astaire-Rogers musicals at RKO conform most unproblematically – relative to the other musical cycles considered in this thesis – to the dual-focus narrative paradigm and classically integrative syntax, as theorized by Altman.[171] Prior to Altman, even, Robin Wood has noted the significance of the "double love story" within their plots structurally, with the two stars' ultimate reconciliation representing a fusion of "ordinariness and romance," and the overall cycle addressing "fundamental contradictions" within society and culture more broadly.[172] At the same time, the Astaire-Rogers films were unique amongst 1930s musicals for their semantic structuring around dance. In such a way, they represent a distinct cycle of musical, further distinguished by the recurrence of featured players in supporting roles, their repetition of plot, as well as the integration of extended

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[170] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the spectacle of masculinity in the Hollywood musical," Op. Cit.

[171] Neale – who has criticized Altman's generalizing approach to film classification – accepts the Astaire-Rogers cycle as conforming to this narrative and ideological paradigm, based on its similarities to romantic comedy (a genre for which, Neale notes, the Altman model of classification fails to provide a syntactic distinction) (Op. Cit., 99).

[172] Robin Wood, "Never, Never Change, Always Gonna Dance," *Film Commentary*, Vol. 25, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1979), 30.

dance sequences within their narratives. Established with *Flying Down to Rio*, the Astaire-Rogers dance musical is one of the earliest examples of the "seamlessly" integrated Hollywood musical film-qua-film, produced expressly for the cinema and, unlike operetta, neither largely reliant on previously produced stage texts as source material nor, as a corollary, seemingly "stagey" in its *mise-en-scene*. Dance in the Astaire-Rogers musical always either propels narrative or functions as a commentary upon it, and is thus crucial to the telling or understanding of each story. Though Arlene Croce has praised the Astaire-Rogers dance numbers for not "press[ing] meaning" on their audiences[173] – that is, not making explicit the symbolic meaning of each dance as a manifestation of conflict and/or attraction between the two leads – narratively-speaking, their dances are in fact indispensible to the plot progression of each film (despite dance's waning centrality as a locus of erotic impact in their last two films together, as observed by Edward Gallafent).[174] Dance between Astaire and Rogers makes physically manifest their characters' motivations and inner feelings; it is the only cycle of films here discussed in which the relationship, understood to be sexual, between two oppositely-gendered leads is expressed in consistently physical terms. The Astaire-Rogers dance musical is therefore a crucial site for the negotiation of gender representation and individuated female performance in the musical, in that the self-conscious employment of Ginger Rogers's performing body is key to the meaningful integration of narrative and spectacle in each film.

Like the Berkeleyesque backstage musical and the operetta, the Astaire-Rogers musical cycle reflects the teleological advancement of the Hollywood musical throughout the 1930s. The Astaire-Rogers musicals spanned the eras before and after the establishment of the PCA, and an historical analysis of their production, alongside close textual analysis of the films themselves, reveals the impact of socio-political conservatization on their structural development. Whereas the revue-format musical existed purely in the context of so-called "pre-Code" Hollywood cinema (and had largely run its course as a subgenre of the musical by 1930), and the child narrative musical belonged exclusively to the "post-Code" era, the operetta, the Berkeleyesque backstage musical, and the Astaire-Rogers dance musical all straddled the pre- to post-Code transition period. In such a way they reflect censorship's "coextensiv[ity] with plot" [175] – particularly to do with the narrative representation of female characters – in the Classical Hollywood (in this case, specifically "Musical") cinema.

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[173] Arlene Croce, *The Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers Book* (London: W.H. Allen, 1972), 7.
[174] Edward Gallafent, *Astaire and Rogers* (Dumfriesshire: Cameron & Hollis, 2000), 89-93.
[175] Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942*, Op. Cit., 122.

The first film to feature Astaire and Rogers together, *Flying Down to Rio* (Thornton Freeland, 1933), was released a year prior to the strict implementation of censorship under the Production Code Administration. Their second film – and the first in which they took top-billing – *The Gay Divorcee* (Mark Sandrich, 1934) was released several months after the institution of the PCA. The film had gone into production well beforehand, however, which accounts for its retaining certain narrative elements (discussed below) that would not have made it into the text the following year. This is borne out in comparison to *Top Hat* (1935), which redresses the more salacious aspects of *The Gay Divorcée* – particularly in relation to the characterization of Rogers's female lead – such that its moralistic glorification of heterosexual matrimony becomes indeed "coextensive" with the film's narrative structure and tone. Astaire and Rogers' subsequent films together – *Roberta* (William A. Seiter, 1935), *Top Hat* (Sandrich, 1935), *Follow the Fleet* (Sandrich, 1936), *Swing Time* (George Stevens, 1936), *Shall We Dance* (Sandrich, 1937), *Carefree* (Sandrich, 1938), and *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (Sandrich, 1939) – were all produced and released fully under the aegis of the PCA, and they are narratively structured accordingly.

The fact that *The Gay Divorcée* was released in 1934 and bears crucial narrative differences to successive Astaire-Rogers musicals makes it tempting to read as a sort of landmark musical distinguishing the topographies of pre- and post-Code cinema. As Maltby has shown, however, the "storm of '34"[176] did not so much conclude an era of relative hedonism in Hollywood as it reflected and affirmed the more gradual adoption of conservative ideologism, post-1920s. [177] Nevertheless, as Jacobs has shown, Breen's particularly hardline approach to film censorship – and particularly the narrativistic treatment of transgressive female sexuality – fundamentally altered generic representational paradigms, such that censorship was integrated into and within the very plot structures of melodrama, comedy, and – I would further argue – the musical.[178] *The Gay Divorcée* was by no means unaffected by censorship under the SRC; indeed its title had

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[176] Doherty, Op. Cit., 325.

[177] Maltby, Op. Cit.

[178] Jacobs's subject of focus within *The Wages of Sin* is, of course, the effect of censorship practices on the evolution of the "fallen woman film" in Hollywood, a genre that falls within the umbrella category of melodrama. By way of explicating her theory of the "coextensivity" of censorship with post-Code plots, however, Jacobs draws comparisons between the fallen woman film and the screwball comedy, using *Anna Karenina* (Clarence Brown, 1935) and *Bachelor Mother* (Garson Kanin, 1939) to illustrate each, respectively. Jacobs notes how narrative structure and characterization within the former film is manipulated to overdetermine Anna's (Greta Garbo) desolation and doom, thus undercutting the attractiveness of her transgressions, whereas *Bachelor Mother* obsessively reiterates the actual virginity of its "bachelor mother" (Ginger Rogers), thus making a joke of other characters' assumptions (at the same time confirming the "rightness" of her sexual inexperience). Jane Greene has further demonstrated that PCA dictates altered the limits of representation and signification within the screwball comedy, spurring new subgenres (such as the "sentimental comedy") and thematic concerns (such as married love): "Hollywood's Production Code and Thirties Romantic Comedy," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (March 2010), 55-73.

already been changed from the original stage play *Gay Divorce* in order to mitigate some of the objectionable nuances of its meaning. The film also took great care to ensure that its titular divorcée Mimi Glossop (Rogers) need not ultimately engage with a co-respondent in order to force a bill of divorcement from her husband, thus ostensibly preserving her chastity outside marriage. Nevertheless, the film is predicated on the necessity of her first marriage's dissolution – also, never casting doubt on its consummation – so that she can make a love match with dancer Guy Holden (Astaire). Furthermore, it represents sexual congress between Mimi and Guy through metaphorical means – their romantic dance duet to "Day and Night," which culminates in Guy offering Mimi a post-coital cigarette – while she is still technically married. Thus the film plays on an implicit understanding of the ramifications of sexual transgression and existing codes of reference, which are relatively foregrounded in its text.

Top Hat, on the other hand, takes every care to establish that Dale Tremont (Rogers) is a righteous virgin (highlighting her evident discomfort as she pretends she once trysted with Jerry [Astaire] in Paris and her indignation at the [misguided] belief he is married to her best friend [Helen Broderick]). Dale's objection to the very idea of pre- and/or extra-marital relations is crucial to the narrative, and *Top Hat* ensures that its leading lady's moral intentions – in addition to her actions – explicitly fall into line with conservatively moral expectations. Yet as Gallafent has noted, Dales's moralizing is not fully consistent throughout the movie: she is first seduced (again, figuratively through dance) by Jerry while under the illusion of his false identity; this indicates that her romantic (if not sexual) capitulation is willingly transgressive.[179] Thus, the narrative facilitates a communication of Dale's (briefly) transgressive intent without a) literalizing it as sexual or b) confirming that their hypothetical sex would indeed *be* fully transgressive (in that Jerry is not actually married).[180] Nevertheless, the film manages in such a way to represent as attractive – however obliquely – a taboo (pseudo)sexual relationship between the two leads precisely *because* it is illicit – thus embracing the embeddedness of censorship within its text through sophisticated narrative means and towards the communication of sophisticatedly pleasurable meanings.

This switch-reversal narrative trope, by which Rogers's character comes to believe something (crucially, erroneously) about Astaire that should prevent their marriage – the "wrongness" of their relationship thus leading (however counter-intuitively) to her falling in

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[179] Gallafent, Op. Cit., 8-39.

[180] Dale's momentary lapse of moral judgment is also further covered by the fact that she believes her friend condones the match.

love with him in the "right" way – is foundational to (what I term) the "classic" cycle of Astaire-Rogers musicals. Similar to *The Gay Divorcee* and *Top Hat*, the plots of both *Swing Time* and *Shall We Dance* are driven by a series of Rogers's misunderstandings regarding Astaire's identity and intentions; it is never in doubt they will get together, but (part of) the pleasure in viewing comes from seeing just how far Rogers will stray from that understanding. The cycle is thusly accessible on account of its narrative consistency and overall semantic cohesiveness from film to film, at the same time each film generates comedy (in narrative terms) and humour (affectively) in breaking the rules of expectation from both within and without the plot. Thus, while Croce has minimized the importance narrative plays in the communication of pleasure throughout the Astaire-Rogers cycle, a closer analysis of its narrative and representational trends and deviations reveals a more complex teleology.[181] Gallafent's reading of the cycle's narrative structuration, for instance, reveals that following the release of *Top Hat* in 1935 (which Gallafent argues "deepened the meaning and extended the possibilities of the plot" system established by the previous three films),[182] significant variations in thematic emphasis and the respective narrative agencies of the two leads occurred. This may be seen through the films' individual and discreet manipulation of the switch-reversal plot established via *Top Hat*. It is my contention here that not only did the respective narrative agencies of the two dichotomously gendered leads shift in relation to each other throughout the cycle by virtue of the necessity of variation, but they did so also in reflection of the increasing ideological significance of female representation at the centre of narrative within the Classical Hollywood Musical, in response to narrative revisionism necessitated by the PCA.

Nevertheless, the formulaic-ness of the Astaire-Rogers cycle – or indeed, cycles, as it may be broken into two – must be acknowledged in order to make possible the identification of certain trends and paradigmatic shifts throughout. *Flying Down to Rio*, *Roberta*, and *Follow the Fleet*, each made a year apart from each other, follow similar and nearly identical plots, as do (separately) *The Gay Divorcée*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time*, and *Shall We Dance* (with their last two films existing as significant outliers, which I shall go on to explore). In these three films, Astaire and Rogers do not portray the primary romantic leads but rather secondary characters; they share a vague romantic connection, but function

[181] She has observed that early on, when RKO set about producing two Astaire-Rogers musicals per year, studio writers were faced with the problem of fashioning a seemingly original plot for each film, and thus resorted to a formula, which she disparages as "falling back on the last script plus one," Op. Cit., 83.

[182] Gallafent, Op. Cit., 43. For example: *The Gay Divorcée* and *Top Hat* are distinguished by their "worlds" (the former being concerned with a return to normalcy and the latter with transition), and further by the added subtextual element of Rogers's relative subordination in class within *Top Hat*. Such variations add layers of distinctive meaning onto each film, even if they follow a broad narrative pattern.

largely as comic relief and to entertain audiences (both diegetic and extra-diegetic) through their song and dance numbers – Gallafent therefore refers to them as Astaire and Rogers's "dance team" films)[183] – while another heterosexual pair effect the central narrative's closure (on which classically comedic syntax structurally depends).[184] Significantly, and in contrast to their other films together, Astaire and Rogers's musical performances in *Flying Down to Rio*, *Roberta* and *Follow the Fleet* are self-consciously performative; that is, they are performed for a diegetic audience of the show-within-the-greater show of the film. On the other hand, in those films in which they play the main leads, their dance numbers (particularly the romantic ones) tend to be psychologically, as opposed to performatively, motivated, and are therefore more smoothly integrated within the narrative diegesis. Thus semantically and partially syntactically distinguished, these three films form a sub-cycle within the greater cycle of Astaire-Rogers dance musicals.

This second sub-cycle of films then, made between 1934 and 1937, overlaps temporally with the first, in that each (with the exception of *Shall We Dance*) was made following a film in which Astaire and Rogers play secondary leads. In *The Gay Divorcee* (which followed *Flying Down to Rio* and preceded *Roberta*), *Top Hat* (made after *Roberta*), *Swing Time* (after *Follow the Fleet*), and *Shall We Dance*, Astaire and Rogers play characters whose romantic entanglements drive the narrative of each film. In each of these four, Rogers's character is involved with another man coded as foreign or ethnically "Other" – that is, marked out as sexually unsuitable according to the film's narrative logic and ideology – whose attentions Astaire must thwart in order to prove himself as her ideal sexual partner. Each of these films is based on the premise that Astaire must lead Rogers to realize the full "rightness" of their sexual compatibility. Peter Evans has read this as an implicit defense of the type of "unthreatening," wholesome, American masculinity that Astaire represents: a "relief from ultra-virility" or hyper-sexualized masculinity[185] (thus contradicting the type of unrestrained "phallic authority" presented by Maurice Chevalier in Lubitschean operettas, as discussed in Chapter 3). Crucially, this compatibility is always physically realized, idealized and anticipated in their dancing together.

Further distinguishing Astaire and Rogers' leading roles within this sub-cycle from the secondary roles they play in *Flying Down to Rio*, *Roberta* and *Follow the Fleet*, in *The Gay Divorcee*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time* and *Shall We Dance*, we are granted special, almost voyeuristic, privilege as spectators to their romantic dances together. In the numbers "Night

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[183] Gallafent, Op. Cit., 53.

[184] In such a way, this secondary-lead sub-cycle bears hallmarks of aggregation similar to the Berkeleyesque backstage musical.

[185] Peter William Evans, *Top Hat* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 21.

and Day" from *The Gay Divorcee*, "Cheek to Cheek" in *Top Hat*, "Never Gonna Dance" in *Swing Time* and "They Can't Take That Away From Me" from *Shall We Dance* (though this number is sung and not danced, which is a significant departure from convention that I shall return to later), we see their characters express/consummate their love for each other in private, intimate spaces devoid of a diegetic audience. In such a way, the romantic narrative is integrated smoothly and fully into the musical/dance number and vice versa; the performative impulse of Astaire and Rogers' love therefore appears spontaneously and psychologically/emotionally motivated, regardless of the presence of a diegetic audience. Such dances are therefore constructed to be more erotically appealing from a voyeuristic point of view than those dances in which Astaire and Rogers' characters perform to be seen by diegetic audiences (and not as if they had been spontaneously, emotionally inspired to dance). *The Gay Divorcee*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time*, *Shall We Dance*, and *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* are thus classically integrated musicals.

Theorizing the impulse to dance is of crucial importance to charting and understanding paradigmatic shifts in the representation of gender and sexuality over the course of the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers cycle of musicals. Cohan, interrogating the gendered politics of viewing Astaire's male body vis-à-vis Mulvey's theory of the eroticizing male gaze, has suggested that the male dancer is always already "feminized" as a spectacle/object in the act of self-conscious performance,[186] an idea to which I shall return again over the course of this chapter, tracing how the form and narrative of the Astaire-Rogers musical evolved over six years to "rectify" the problem of Astaire's feminization-as-predetermined by musical performance. Instead of focusing merely on the problematization of Astaire's masculinity as Cohan has done, however, I shall seek to theorize a shift in trend in terms of Ginger Rogers's affective/emotional performance and representation of femininity, both in character and as a star, over the course of this film cycle. By their eighth film together, *Carefree* (Mark Sandrich, 1938), the sexual dynamic between Astaire and Rogers which had been established and confirmed in each of their previous seven films together – a dynamic by which Astaire's protagonist, in the traditional role of active male/narrative agent is seen to instigate/initiate a sexual relationship with Rogers – would be reversed. As a reflection of Rogers's increased tendency to play narrative agents, her character (as opposed to Astaire's) becomes the initial sexual aggressor in their romance. If, as Thomas Schatz has observed, Rogers's feminine presence up until this point in the film

[186] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man: Fred Astaire and the spectacle of masculinity in the Hollywood musical," Op. Cit., 63.

cycle has been associated with passivity and discretion,[187] then such a shift in representation must reflect and/or bring about at least the partial diminution of phallogocentric subtext within the film, as well as the larger cycle to which it belongs.

Over the course of Rogers's nine films with Astaire, we may observe the evolution of a crucial plot device: the increased narrative agency of Rogers' (female) characters relative to the gradual disempowerment – and even death, in the case of *Vernon and Irene*[188] – of Astaire's (male) protagonists. There are several possible reasons for this adjustment in relative power between the sexes in the Astaire-Rogers musical cycle. The first, of course, is that by the time of *Shall We Dance*, writers at RKO had quite exhausted the tried-and-true formula of Astaire winning Rogers away from her other, obviously ill-suited, potential partner. The safest narrative solution was therefore to turn the tables of narrative and sexual agency, re-positioning Rogers's character as the protagonist-cum-romantic pursuant in *Carefree* and *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (it should be noted that Rogers plays romantic pursuant at various points in *Swing Time*, though Astaire's character propels most of the narrative developments in that film). The plot formula in *Carefree* – the first film which is more "about" Rogers's character than it is "about" Astaire's – is thus refreshed in casting Rogers as the main protagonist and, for most of the film, positing her character as its sexual aggressor (while still satisfying the semantic requirements of an Astaire-Rogers musical in that their union is a foregone conclusion).

As Croce has observed, *Carefree* thus plays in some ways more like a screwball comedy with musical numbers than a musical that incorporates aspects of screwball humour.[189] It adheres to the syntax of screwball comedy in that it is concerned with the disruption of "fallacies of normality"[190] through a backwards logic of interaction between the sexes. *Carefree* amplifies the comedic elements of musical cinema beyond the confines of its genre by playing with the already established narrative/gendered "order" of the

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[187] Schatz, Op. Cit., 197.

[188] It is significant that Astaire and Rogers' final film together in this cycle defies the traditional romance narrative's sexual dynamic. In *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, Astaire and Rogers portray the eponymous married couple who in real life popularized modern partner dancing for American audiences in the early 1900s. The narrative is not so much about bringing the two halves of the couple together as it is about the inevitable rending of their on- and off-screen partnership. *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* approaches metanarrative in that at the time of its making, it was thought that *Vernon and Irene* would be the last film Astaire and Rogers would ever make together; as a reflection of this finality, Astaire, as Vernon Castle, dies at the end of the film. Jane Feuer in "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," Op. Cit., has suggested that musicals carry with them an implicit defense of the impulse to entertain, a spirit that might be characterized as "timelessly" optimistic, to borrow Thomas Schatz's phrase (Ibid., 197). *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, however, carries with it an implicit sense of defeat, a concession to the fact that there are limits to the scope of entertainment. Like the life of its hero, time and entertainment are fleeting and finite. *Vernon and Irene* might therefore be read as an implicit, if unintended, critique of the Hollywood musical's cultural relevance – or lack thereof – in the context of pre-War American society – at least, as the musical existed up until 1939.

[189] Croce, Op. Cit., 140.

[190] Thomas Leitch, *Crime Films* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 268.

previous films in the series, and by elevating Rogers's narrative agency above that of Astaire. She plays the archetypal "unruly woman" who is central to the plot of screwball comedy and key to unleashing the comedic disorder that defines the genre. As Geoff King explains, the woman-centric screwball comedy form is particularly subversive of social/sexual convention and conservatism – particularly traditionalist/phallogocentric culture – in that "[t]he unruly woman represents a [...] serious challenge to the gender hierarchies on which so many social relationships are based, while the "unruly comic male [...] exploit[s] just one of the many available avenues of power and freedom,"[191] Astaire's narrative agency and gendered authority is increasingly compromised over the course of his nine films with Ginger Rogers, and ultimately with *Carefree* it is overthrown; as his narrative agency decreases, his characters come to function more as objects of spectacle than as subjects in their own right. Moreover this shift in the respective narrative agency of Astaire and Rogers's characters also indicates a structural shift in terms of the gendered paradigms of performance and representation fundamental to the integrated musical's generic coherence and the establishment of its classical mode.

It is, of course, necessary to bear in mind that by the end of the 1930s, Ginger Rogers's star profile outside the musical genre had begun to eclipse Astaire's; this proves, perhaps, her greater versatility as an actor between multiple genres. By 1939, Rogers's movies made without Astaire were more successful than Astaire's movies made independently of Rogers. Evidently, audiences had easily adjusted to her playing non-singing, non-dancing comedic roles, as well as dramatic ones, in such films as *Stage Door* (Gregory La Cava, 1937) and *Bachelor Mother* (Garson Kanin, 1939). Astaire, on the other hand, had had limited success playing the same song-and-dance man character he had previously played opposite Rogers, but now without her, in *A Damsel in Distress* (George Stevens, 1937). It therefore must be taken into account that RKO producers wanted to maximize Rogers's playing time in films and augmented her characters' centrality to the Astaire-Rogers musical plots accordingly. Hence, in addition to *Carefree* being "more screwball comedy than musical," as Croce says, "it is more Ginger Rogers's film than Fred Astaire's."[192] So while Astaire's male characters may be seen to have provided the main spectacular attraction/imperative within their films together, Rogers's female characters lead each film progressively towards the backwards logic (but logic nonetheless) of a comedic narrative impulse, evidencing a trend towards individuation in terms both of her characters' and her star persona's representation.

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[191] Geoff King, *Film Comedy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 133.
[192] Croce, Op. Cit., 140.

Cohan has posited that Astaire's masculinity in the dance-based RKO musicals breaks the performative mold of the conventional leading man.[193] As Mulvey has theorized in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the conventional leading man resists/is made to resist the "spectacularization" of his male body and to disavow his performing body as an object to be looked at. This is the result and/or a reflection of the cinematic apparatus/eye/camera's identification with the "male gaze," by which the individual film viewer is always already gendered male, regardless of his/her physical sex, while the diametrically opposed object of the gaze is gendered feminine.[194] Hollywood cinema in its most classical form, as theorized by Mulvey and accepted by Cohan, is therefore predisposed to spectacularize the female body while the male body is purposely overlooked. However, as Cohan notes, in each of the nine films he made with Rogers during the 1930s, Astaire's dancing body is most often the visual focal point or object of musical spectacle, and thus "feminized" by his performative qualities of narcissism, exhibitionism, and masquerade.[195] So speaking, Astaire's function as a spectacular object, rather than as a narrative or narrativizing agent (which would be his conventionally male role), may be seen to "exceed both linear narrativity and the heterosexual (that is, 'straight' in the cultural as well as the narrative sense) male desire that fuels it" (that is, the impulse to witness spectacle in the first place).[196] But in that each half of a leading couple in the classical Hollywood musical must be identifiable with a "particular attitude, value, desire, location, age, or other characteristic attribute [...] diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive" to the other half/gender in order that coherent meaning may be taken from its syntactic structure,[197] Fred Astaire's functional representation of an opposing ideology/gender to Ginger Rogers's is effectively undermined by his performance as a "song and dance man." For this reason, Astaire's characters are often juxtaposed with more overtly effeminate, foreign/Other men who posture as rivals for Rogers's characters' affections – thus effecting Astaire's relative re-masculinization.[198]

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[193] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man," Op. Cit.

[194] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Op. Cit., 837: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female [...] According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the psychical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like."

[195] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man," Op. Cit., 62-63.

[196] Ibid., 47.

[197] Altman, *The American Film Musical*, Op. Cit., 24-25.

[198] The quintessential examples of the ineffectual love rival are the characters Tonnetti in *The Gay Divorcee* and Beddini in *Top Hat*, both played by Erik Rhodes. In his article "Gangsters, Fessos, Tricksters, and Sopranos: The Historical Roots of Italian American Stereotype Anxiety," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 50-63, Jonathan Cavallero has tellingly linked Tonnetti and Beddini to the stereotypical Italian "*fesso*" or "fool" "excessively feminine" men who "attempt to compensate for their feminine images with an

This concern towards asserting Astaire's "phallic potency" [199] in diametric opposition to a romantic rival has already been noted by a number of historians, notably Wood, Evans and Britton in their various studies of the Astaire-Rogers cycle. For Wood, Astaire may be seen simply as "less feminine" than the exaggeratedly effeminate secondary male leads. For Evans, Astaire's juxtaposition with overdeterminedly sexually deviant/ethnic-Other types represents his mediation of an ideally "classless" and "unthreatening" brand of modern masculinity,[200] a reading which Britton echoes in analysis of *Top Hat* and *Swing Time*. [201] Here, I will draw out the specific strategies by which these ideological associations are effected, but also crucially explicate the ways in which Astaire's representational gendering dialectically affects Rogers's, and further how this interacts with Rogers's performative individuation across their films together.

Hard to Handle: The "Secondary Lead" Films of Astaire and Rogers

Flying Down to Rio (Thornton Freeland, 1933)

Roberta (William A. Seiter, 1935)

Follow the Fleet (Mark Sandrich, 1936)

Though comprised of only three films, the "Secondary Lead" sub-cycle of the Astaire-Rogers musicals at RKO represent a significant site of evolution in terms of systems of gender representation in the integrated dance musical. The first two films in this sub-cycle, *Flying Down to Rio* and *Roberta*, are also two of the first three films Astaire and Rogers made together; as such, they betray a certain degree of semantic and syntactic inconsistency. Indeed, for Gallafent the first three films in the Astaire-Rogers canon represent a sort of testing ground for the various narrative and thematic tropes that would coalesce and crystallize in *Top Hat*, modulated to significant effect in their films thereafter.[202] Contributing to these films' early inconsistency was the fact RKO Studios had yet to settle on Mark Sandrich as de facto director of the series (he directed *The Gay Divorcee* first, between *Flying Down to Rio* and *Roberta*, and was re-hired to direct *Top Hat* in 1935; he would go on to direct all their subsequent films, save for *Swing Time*, which was directed by George Stevens in 1936). Certainly, by the mid-1930s, RKO was still processing

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excessive sexuality and aggressiveness that, one suspects, would emphasize their masculinity if it were not for the comic manner in which Rhodes plays these roles."

[199] Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Tyneside Cinema, 1984), 59.

[200] Evans, *Top Hat* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 24.

[201] Britton, *Katharine Hepburn*, Op. Cit., 59-61.

[202] Gallafent, Op. Cit., 43.

audiences' responses to the Astaire-Rogers dance musical, and particularly to the chemistry and sexual dynamics between the two performers. Here, I shall trace the paradigmatic shifts in gendered representation and narrative agency throughout the three films in which Astaire and Rogers portray secondary-lead, comic relief roles, with reference to the industrial, critical and popular reception of their films.

Flying Down to Rio was the first film in which Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers appeared together as dance partners. Neither of their characters in the film – Rogers as Honey Hale, Astaire as Fred Ayres – has significant bearing on the main plot, and unlike even *Roberta* or *Follow the Fleet*, they express no romantic or sexual interest in one another, with the exception of a brief partner dance to "The Carioca". Aside from engaging in some playful dialogue (largely with other characters, not with each other) and performing in two major musical numbers Fred and Honey are superfluous characters. This is reflected in Rogers and Astaire taking fourth and fifth billing, respectively, after Delores Del Rio, Gene Raymond, and Raul Roulien (who comprise the love triangle which is of primary importance to the plot). Interestingly, in the context of their later films together, Rogers is billed *before* Astaire: just prior to *Rio*, she had featured in the popular Busby Berkeley musicals *42nd Street* and *Gold Diggers of 1933* playing wisecracking young women of dubious morality, and was a familiar face in the background of several musical comedies; in *Flying Down to Rio*, she is cast in a similarly sardonic role. However, where Anytime Annie of *42nd Street* was positioned firmly in the context of a homosocial (though at the same time very actively heterosexual) community of women, Honey Hale is, crucially, one of the guys. She is usually literally framed by other male members of the band, or she is positioned next to Astaire and thus individuated as his platonic female foil.

Though she is not a love interest (to Fred Ayres or any other character), nevertheless Rogers-as-Honey displays a certain degree of sexual agency and a lack of demureness/passivity – particularly in terms of her musical performance style – to which her characters would not be privy again, once the structural conventions of the cycle were concretized. Throughout the film, Honey projects an air of confident sexuality and a penchant for exhibitionism: as she responds to the admonitions of a hotel butler not to get too "familiar" with the guests, she raises her skirt and asks, "What if the guests get familiar with *us*?" [203] Honey/Rogers, a relatively insignificant character, narratively speaking,

[203] Some of the dialogue in this opening scene was cut in order to appease Studio Relations Committee director James Wingate's misgivings; most of the innuendo is therefore performed through Rogers's glances and gestures in and around this line. James Wingate to Merian C. Cooper, memorandum (August 11 1933, *Flying Down to Rio*, PCA file).

nevertheless remains a source of titillation, entertainment, and visual pleasure throughout the film. Indeed, Rogers is highly visible in it.

As in the Berkeleyesque style, Rogers's body is imaged fetishistically throughout *Flying Down to Rio*.[204] In her first musical number she performs the lyrically suggestive "Music Makes Me" in a see-through dress (such as the kind that female stars in musicals never wear post-1934, as per Code enforcement) singing, "Music makes me do the things I never should do." Rogers performs the number with a sort of vocal lightness, unaffected in tone or style, which connotes a seeming innocence at odds with the racy subtext of the lyrics and vulgar pelvic movements that punctuate her words. In such a way, Rogers's performance registers as overtly presentational rather than representationally significant, in that it is narratively inconsequential and un-yoked to psychological motivation on behalf of her character. She performs within the constraints of functional spectacularity, as opposed to within a representational paradigm of character-individuation.

This is further borne out when Rogers performs "The Carioca" opposite Astaire. The choreography of the dance, as demonstrated by Fred and Honey, is overtly erotic, with partners touching both foreheads and hips together.[205] Unlike in future romantic numbers between the two, which represent the sexual attraction and/or consummation between their characters in a private space/interior, here Rogers-as-Mimi engages in the dance willingly and with a degree of exhibitionistic desire. "We'll show them a thing or three!" she exclaims to Fred as he pulls her onto the dance floor, falling into step with a smile on her face. In such a way, she expresses an active and performative self-consciousness or desire to be looked at: an invitation of the scopophilic male gaze, and thus a partial subversion of the traditionally gendered politics of viewing and narrativization by which the female is constructed as essentially passive. Future films within the cycle would make a concerted effort to avoid the overtly sexual depiction of Ginger Rogers in order to sidestep contentious negotiations with the PCA. This is evidenced immediately in *Roberta*, the next secondary-lead musical featuring Rogers and Astaire, which was produced in the aftermath of Code

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[204] I refer to Mulvey's definition (in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, Op. Cit.,) of "fetishistic scopophilia" here as distinguished from a voyeuristic mode of viewing. Mulvey characterizes the voyeuristic gaze upon the woman as investigative and sadistic, exploratory of her "difference," whereas the fetishistic gaze tends to indulge more lovingly in the female form as a "pure image," (borrowing also from Fischer's terminology) representative of a love of viewing/spectatorship. Rogers's overtly presentational style of performance here, alongside her visual representation, invokes the latter.

[205] "I can see what they're thinking about from here," Honey remarks, "Let's show them a thing or three!" Picking up on the implications of Honey's dialogue, the PCA deemed "The Carioca" objectionable for its "offensive sex suggestiveness" upon Sidney Kramer's application for re-issue in 1935, and required that it be cut from future prints – the only instance of a dance performance by Rogers being so heavily censored (Vincent G. Hart to Sidney Kramer, memorandum [July 31 1935, *Flying Down to Rio*, PCA file]).

implementation and displays key semantic differences regarding the representation of gender and sexuality in their films together.

In *Roberta*, Astaire and Rogers play Huck Haines and the "Comtesse Scharwenka,"[206] in support of the central love story between a Russian princess/dressmaker (Irene Dunne) and the dress shop's heir (Randolph Scott). Here, Rogers is strongly individuated as a character/performer in contrast to her role in *Flying Down to Rio* (or even the immediately preceding *Gay Divorcee*, in which she plays a lead role but with few distinguishing characteristics). In *Roberta*, Rogers takes on the comedic role of a phony Russian countess – really Huck's childhood sweetheart Lizzie Gatz from Wabash, Indiana – who struggles to maintain her stage persona on the Parisian nightclub circuit by speaking in a phony accent and wearing outrageous clothing. Rogers's function again is to present an element of visual attraction or spectacle, but in keeping with Code restrictions she is removed of any overt sexual referentiality. Telling of the degree to which the PCA was sensitive to the representation of female sexuality in the musical by this point, Joseph Breen's primary concern with the film during its development was that all female costuming be checked for "decency" (which would become standard procedure for the PCA in dealing with musicals pre-production).[207] Rogers's performative affect in this case, and as influenced by the fact of her performance's regulation, is more comedic than erotic, more personality-specific and individuated than sexually suggestive. Indeed, the potential innuendo of the song "I'll Be Hard to Handle," which Rogers performs as Lizzie-as-Scharwenka, is diluted by Rogers's comic manipulation of her voice into an obviously phony European accent. Whereas female sexuality is played straight (presentationally) for spectacle in *Flying Down to Rio*, befitting of its pre-Code status, Rogers plays female sexuality (representationally) for laughs in *Roberta* (its comic significance thus containing its subversive potential). At the same time, Rogers is afforded greater authorial control over her own characterization, in that her performance relies on particular vocal skills and manipulation to put forward the joke – to thus be made meaningful – a specific employment of talent without recourse to her sexuality.[208]

Follow the Fleet (Mark Sandrich, 1936), the third and last film in which Rogers and Astaire would play secondary leads (as dancer Sherry Martin and sailor Bake Baker, respectively), further individuates Rogers by granting her a tap solo (her only one in the entire cycle of nine films). Performed as an audition by Sherry, the number functions less to

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[206] She parodies Lyda Roberti, who performed the original stage role.

[207] Joseph Breen to B. B. Kahane, memorandum (November 21 1934, *Roberta*, PCA file).

[208] Rogers's talent in this regard was celebrated in several reviews and publications, with *Variety* proclaiming her the "no. 1 Hollywood ingénue" based on her parody of the stage performer Lyda Roberti here: *Variety*. March 13 1935 (*Roberta*, PCA file).

spectacularize Rogers's female body than to celebrate her skill as a dancer. This represents a departure from representational paradigm in the Astaire-Rogers cycle on which several contemporaneous reviews remarked. As reviewed in *Variety*,

> All the star team's dancing efforts are honeys. Miss Rogers in this one goes beyond the role of dancing vis-à-vis for Astaire and emerges as a corking stepper in her own right. Her assimilation of the Astaire method now permits wider scope in the routines, and that Astaire has taken advantage of this is notable in all three of their doubles. In a rehearsal dance on a boat deck they really go eccentric. There is no better comedy than dancing comedy, and this is dancing comedy at its best.[209]

When Rogers *does* dance with Astaire, it is not narratively implicated that Astaire-as-Bake is leading or compelling Rogers-as-Sherry to dance, but rather that she chooses to perform. Their first number together, "Let Yourself Go," is staged as a dance competition at the nightclub where Sherry works, and in "I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket," Sherry and Bake rehearse a number for the show-within-the-show that closes the film.[210] Sherry keeps making mistakes that Bake must follow to preserve the continuity of the dance: for the first time, Astaire has to follow Rogers's lead.

More significantly, in the final, climactic dance sequence, "Let's Face the Music and Dance," Rogers's performance and representation exceeds the function of visual spectacularity that has marked her previous musical appearances. Dressed in a figure-hugging beaded dress emphasized with bell sleeves and an extravagant trimming of fur that bespeaks its literal weightedness, Rogers does not, visually-speaking, connote the same sense of lightness, ease, and fluidity that her costuming in previous partner dances tended to effect.[211] In motion, her gown whips about her body: it does not float, as past gowns had done (most notably the feathered dress in "Cheek to Cheek" from *Top Hat*), and this works to accentuate her bodily-ness, her physicality and the overall visceral effect of her dancing. Rogers herself is fully – even exaggeratedly – committed to the physical aspect of her performance, extending her back-bends and arabesque leg positions further than usual and delaying her arms' motion behind steps a millisecond longer than rhythmically traditional. This is of course in keeping with the languishing nature of the dance's choreography and

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[209] *Variety*, February 26 1936 (*Follow the Fleet*, PCA file).

[210] In such a way, it should be noted, *Follow the Fleet* – like *Flying Down to Rio* and *Roberta* – displays aspects of the Berkeleyesque form, positioning their major production numbers post-narrative resolution. Their formal aggregation is complemented by their multiple-character focus.

[211] Astaire, presumably, would have agreed, having been granted first-hand experience of its weight: during one of their first turns, Rogers's sleeve hits him in the face.

Astaire's own movements, and in such a way Rogers's perceptible dynamism also speaks to the representational intentions of Sandrich, Astaire and Hermes Pan (Astaire's choreographer/collaborator) beyond her own self-authorization. Nevertheless, Rogers's physical performance is the focal point of action within the frame and the locus of affect, communicating despair and emotional capitulation – the "meaning" that the number seeks to convey – through her bodily motions. Rogers thus commands both subjective (active and controlling) and objective (passive, in that she is guided – as per usual – into the dance by Astaire , and to-be-looked-at as a performer) positions throughout the number.

In these ways, over the course of *Flying Down to Rio* and through *Roberta* and *Follow the Fleet*, we may perceive a subtle but nonetheless purposeful re-focusing of attention towards the affective potential of Ginger Rogers's performance and her individuation within musical sequences in each film. It is important to note, however, that Rogers's performative individuation is not equally represented by or integrated within the narratives, by virtue of the fact that she and Astaire play secondary (all but narratively superfluous) leads. On the level of presentation/musical performance within this sub-cycle of films, Rogers invokes a focus of attention not fully matched by her characters' narrative agency. Though displaying certain narrative and formal characteristics distinct from the classic cycle of Astaire-Rogers musicals, which I shall go on to explicate, Astaire and Rogers's secondary lead films evidence a similar paradigm shift by which Ginger Rogers's musical performance is increasingly individuated and/or marked out for spectacular effect within each text; as Rogers sings in *Roberta*, her performance and representation as a female lead becomes increasingly "hard to handle" at the purely passive/objective level of spectacularization.

The Classics: The Primary Lead Cycle of Astaire-Rogers Musicals

The Gay Divorcee (Mark Sandrich, 1934)

Top Hat (Mark Sandrich, 1935)

Swing Time (George Stevens, 1936)

Shall We Dance (Mark Sandrich, 1937)

From 1934 to 1937 (during which time they also appeared in *Roberta* and *Follow the Fleet*), the Astaire-Rogers musicals most profitably conformed to a "classical" paradigm or cycle, which is also comprised of their four most critically acclaimed films. In these films – *The Gay Divorcee*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time* and *Shall We Dance* – Rogers and Astaire play the

romantic leads. All four films follow a similar plot structure, which involves Astaire's mistaken identity, Rogers's flight from him, and Astaire's subsequent pursuit. They further share semantic structures built upon the integrated musical form and "dual-focus narrative",[212] as well as a syntax or overall "meaning-bearing" structure predicated on (hetero)sexual union as a metaphor for ideological conciliation. Indeed, based on this structuration, Evans[213] and Neale[214] have accepted the cycle as exemplary of a classically integrative syntax, as theorized by Altman, where elsewhere they have challenged the application of such methodology. At the same time, It should be noted that they do so based more on its structural similarities to romantic comedy than for its perceptible musical-ity, in that the classic cycle of Astaire-Rogers musicals may be seen as musical-comedy hybrids, or even more specifically screwball-comedy hybrids.[215] Nevertheless, the classic cycle of Astaire-Rogers dance musicals enacts in every instance a utopian vision of ideological conciliation (oftentimes with subtextual implications of class integration, as Britton has argued),[216] which is represented by a battle and subsequent reconciliation of the sexes. The concretization of this narrative and syntax will be seen to have reflected, in part, the conservatizing strictures of the Production Code Administration, in that the musical genre's trend towards narrative and formal integration mirrored the conservative impulse towards ideological compromise and/or the effacement of ideological difference.

At the same time, censorship as implemented under the PCA may be seen rather to have worked *against* the conservative delimitation of meaning in in some instances of the classically integrated dance musical. In that the Production Code stipulated implicitly against the direct representation of homosexuality or sexual abnormativity,[217] many of the supporting male characters against whom Astaire might otherwise have been coded/individuated as conventionally masculine (as in the proto-classical musical *The Gay Divorcee*) were effectively redacted from post-Code iterations. In such films – *Top Hat*, *Swing Time*, and *Shall We Dance* – Astaire's position as diametrically gendered and ideologically opposed to Rogers is destabilized as a result, problematizing the balance of

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[212] Altman, "The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative," Op. Cit.
[213] Evans, Op. Cit., 2-3.
[214] Neale, Op., Cit., 99.
[215] As Croce, Op. Cit., 140, alludes to.
[216] Britton, (Op. Cit., 59) regards the Astaire-Rogers cycle as a site wherein themes of class and sexual difference are negotiated in a dialectical relationship, and whereby Rogers's class and sexuality mark her as a "good broad" who anchors Astaire's persona in "democratic heterosexual normalcy," at the same time as Astaire's slightly effeminate brand of maleness "contain[s] and soften[s] the negatives" of her own persona (60).
[217] The Code explicitly prohibited reference to so-called "sex perversion," acting as a euphemism for homosexuality. Daniel Lord and Martin Quigley, "The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930," 1930, reprinted in Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 363.

dual-focus within their narrative structure. Rogers's characters, in the meantime, may be seen to have gained in narrative agency and individuation throughout the cycle, from *The Gay Divorcee* to *Shall We Dance*, which is a result both of evolving gendered paradigms of representation and to Rogers's individual significance as a Hollywood star-performer.

The Gay Divorcee was Fred Astaire's first starring vehicle, based on the play *Gay Divorce* in which Astaire had performed in London in 1933. The film version is largely concerned with establishing Astaire (as Guy Holden) as suitably masculine and thus syntactically functional as half of a central romantic couple. All secondary males in the text are therefore effectively emasculated or marked out in some way as sexually ineffectual, deficient or abnormative relative to Guy/Astaire. The arguably suspect implications of his vocation as a dancer – indeed his overall propensity for flamboyant physical expression and self-conscious performance (recalling Cohan's theory of the concomitant "feminization" of the song and dance man)[218] – are thus mitigated. Guy's best friend, a divorce lawyer played by Edward Everett Horton (who would frequently play foil to Astaire in the RKO musicals) is seemingly powerless to reject the sexual advances of his ex-lover (Alice Brady), while Mimi's co-respondent, the gigolo Tonneti, is oblivious to the fact that his wife is having an affair. He is also seemingly oblivious to the fact that he is a repressed homosexual:[219] Tonneti makes frequent remarks referring to his impotency and heterosexual inefficacy, such as, "Your wife is safe with Tonneti: he prefers spaghetti!" and "My wife, he [sic] do not like me to sing". In such a way, Astaire/Guy is characterized in juxtaposition as more stereotypically masculine and sexually active than the other males in the text.

On the other hand, Mimi/Rogers, functions as little more than a dance partner to, and object of affection for, Guy throughout the film. While narratively/syntactically functional, she is individuated representationally only slightly. Tellingly, she is first seen from Guy's point of view with her dress caught in a suitcase, and thus firmly established as the desired object of the narrative. Mimi does not so much "act" as be "acted upon," while all the secondary characters of the film are in some way implicated in the acquisition of the divorce she cannot achieve on her own. As for the spectacular dance sequences, Rogers has no solos (while Astaire has several), and when they dance together, she has to be compelled first to do so. Astaire is thus the active male leader/subject of the narrative and musical numbers, with Rogers in a traditionally passive female role. Any potential subversiveness of

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[218] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man," Op. Cit., 63.

[219] Tonnetti's ethnic Otherness is also in dialogue with his sexual abnormativity; as Jonathan Cavallero has shown, his conformance to the ethnic Italian stereotype of the *fesso* or fool implicates his sexual inefficacy. Jonathan Cavallero, "Gangsters, Fessos, Tricksters, and Sopranos: The Historical Roots of Italian American Stereotype Anxiety," Op. Cit., 50-63.

her role as an "unruly woman",[220] being desirous of a divorce – and therefore defiant of the patriarchal construct of matrimony – is, in the end, re-inscribed within a phallogocentric discourse and ideology when Mimi weds Guy.

In such a way, while standing as the only Classical Astaire-Rogers musical to be produced during the pre-Code era, *The Gay Divorcee* is a fundamentally conservative text in terms of its overall narrative, syntax, and its adherence to the traditionally gendered politics of viewing. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers are thus characterized as active-male on the one hand – clarified by his distinction from other secondary male characters – and passive-female on the other. Tellingly, SRC director James Wingate approved of the film as "a first-class musical, with the emphasis thrown to the dancing and singing of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, instead of to the questionable elements of the divorce-by-collusion racket."[221] *The Gay Divorcee* thereby established the semantic and syntactic formulae by which the classical cycle of Astaire-Rogers musicals would be constructed.

Top Hat, which was produced and released firmly in the context of the re-conservatized post-Code era in Hollywood, seeks then to refine or streamline the *Gay Divorcee* narrative by removing even those more subtly suggestive or subversive elements that might imply meanings beyond the range of acceptable signification under the Production Code. This is achieved in two ways, both pertaining to the representation of the primary protagonist pair: firstly, by denying Rogers's character sexual agency and motivation, and secondly, by obfuscating the latent sexual abnormativity signified in/by the secondary male characters. As in *The Gay Divorcee*, these characters might otherwise have functioned to define and individuate Astaire's character in coherence with the film's overall syntactic structure. Similar again to *The Gay Divorcee*, *Top Hat* is centered on a plot of mistaken identity: Dale Tremont (Ginger Rogers) believes that Jerry Travers (Fred Astaire), another professional dancer, is her best friend's philandering husband, which Jerry must disprove in order to win back Dale's affections and prevent her marriage to Beddini (Erik Rhodes, her dress-maker-cum-business partner). This time, however, Rogers is confirmedly virginal, her sexual purity un-confused by the fact of a previous marriage: her characterization in the film may indeed be described as "essentially innocent,"[222] redacting those indications of her being a sexually "unruly woman," which might otherwise corrupt the film's internal hierarchy of gender politics. Thus via Rogers, *Top Hat* projects a vision of society structured according to the performance of dichotomous gender roles, whereby

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[220] King, Op. Cit., 133.
[221] James Wingate to Will Hays, memorandum (October 15 1934, *The Gay Divorcee*, PCA file).
[222] Croce, Op. Cit., 56.

femininity and the female are represented as passive and "to-be-looked-at." (Indeed, this is confirmed by *Variety*'s brief review of Rogers's performance at the time of the film's release: "Miss Rogers has little to do in this picture.")[223] On a narrative level, *Top Hat* is deeply phallogocentric: the male protagonist exercises narrative agency, which is unchallenged by female sexual transgression.

Nevertheless, Rogers exerts a certain degree of authorship over her own representation at various points of the film. Indeed, her performance intermittently exceeds what "the film allows her to be." In his book on *Top Hat*, Evans has argued that in her musical numbers with Astaire – particularly the "Isn't This a Lovely Day" number in the gazebo – Rogers-as-Dale "becomes a spectacle of talent and skill, obliging Jerry [and the audience by proxy] to look at her afresh," i.e. from an alternative perspective outside the bounds of a phallogocentric representational paradigm. Evans argues that in her effectively "matching" Astaire's technical prowess and adding her own "flourishes" to the choreography, Dale partners Jerry on a Platonic (equalized) level.[224] The number begins with Jerry singing *at* Dale – his narrativizing authority however counterbalanced by her facial reactions and gestural responses towards the camera – and it progresses towards her joining *with* him, then challenging him, in the dance. Importantly, Rogers's steps are not consistently identical to Astaire's: the dance is punctuated throughout by her percussive variations in step, functioning as counter-arguments and/or responses to Jerry, as per the conceit of the dance-as-conversation. For the most part, Dale and Jerry are mirror images of each other (compounded by Rogers's masculine riding togs), and in such a way they employ a sort of reciprocal gaze-in-motion. At certain key moments, however – such as when, about two thirds of the way through the number, they step back in turn to watch each other spin, using alternate steps to complete the revolutions – their mutual (yet distinct) authority over the dance-as-narrative is affirmed (and, indeed *con*firmed by their handshake at the end). In such a way, Rogers-as-Dale is marked out as controlling her subjective position opposite Astaire, such that the inverse of Martha Nochimson's statement – they are "as much like each other as they are opposites"[225] – is true: here, Jerry-and-Dale/Fred-and-Ginger are poised as much in opposition to each other and mutually independent as they are experienced as a couple. Musical performance thus offers a platform for Rogers's potential transcendence of an otherwise representationally constrained role within the narrative.

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[223] *Variety*. September 4 1935 (*Top Hat*, PCA file).
[224] Evans, Op. Cit., 61.
[225] Martha Nochimson, *Screen Couple Chemistry: The Power of 2* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 139.

However, such transcendence is not consistently realized throughout the musical portion of the film. In the seduction number "Cheek to Cheek," for instance, wherein Rogers capitulates to Astaire's emotional and physical command, Rogers returns to a subordinate narrative role as well as a less authoritative register of performance. Whereas Evans has argued that her flamboyant visual representation via costume, hair and makeup in this number (the instance of Rogers's famous feathered dress) asserts a "narcissism matching Astaire's," [226] her gestural performance does not so much reflect independent self-absorption as it expresses an outwardly self-effacing absorption with the "other," a willingness to follow her male guide. In addition to matching Astaire step-by-step, Rogers-as-Dale retains eye contact with Astaire, often turning her head to keep him in view. Meanwhile, Astaire's gaze and gestures are reciprocal up until he relinquishes her hand at the end of the dance; they look at each other, Astaire smiling, Rogers's chest heaving and eyebrows raised, a look of equal parts wonderment and desolation on her face as she is deprived of connection with her partner. When Dale/Rogers finally glances away, it is with the realization that she is not incomplete without Astaire/Jerry and, accordingly, the rest of the narrative must be concerned with reuniting the couple, thus to restore the equilibrium – that feeling of utopia – achieved when Rogers dances with Astaire. In such a way, the number watches Rogers watching Astaire: her attention is thus drawn away from herself under a voyeuristic, extra-diegetic gaze, investigating the nature and source of her attachment to Astaire. This yokes the narrative function of the "Cheek to Cheek" number back to a phallogocentric representational paradigm and traditionally gendered politics of viewing. The potential subversiveness of Rogers's performance and representation, which Evans has argued for in his own reading of the film's musical numbers, is therefore transient, readable through individual and self-contained moments or sequences, and thus bound within the narratively meaning-bearing structures/constraints of the film. *Top Hat* exemplifies adherence to a classically integrative syntax, such that Rogers's at-times transcendent expression of performative agency does not threaten to fully subvert the restrictions of the broader representational paradigm at work.

This does not preclude, however, Rogers's assertion of an authorial mark on her performance of Dale throughout the non-musical sequences of *Top Hat*. As suggested above in reference to her (re)acting opposite Astaire when he sings "Isn't This a Lovely Day," Rogers-as-Dale often manages to effect a counterbalance of Astaire's perceptible narrative authority through performative means in excess of her own narrative function. As when she

[226] Evans, Op. Cit., 32.

marches up to Jerry's hotel room at the beginning of the film to ask him to quiet down, Rogers does more than to affect an air of mere exasperation: as Jerry explains the "affliction" that compels him to dance – and suggests it may be soothed by her putting her arms around him - Rogers maintains an expression of perturbation which, when she turns her back to Astaire, she subtly modifies into one of skeptical bemusement. She thus provides commentary on Astaire's dubious narrativization through implicit, unspoken means.[227] Rogers employs such facial expressions – often accompanied by flat line readings – that effectively undercut (while they complement) Astaire's expressive enthusiasm. This does more than to facilitate a reading of Rogers's performance according to her prescribed narrative function, which is to represent an alternative ideological perspective (skepticism) to Astaire's (optimism); rather she succeeds also in pulling focus away from Astaire at various moments when he is either explaining (narrativizing) and/or seducing (exerting an active male dominance) throughout the film. As Evans has observed, Rogers thus "manag[es] through her speech, expression, and overall performance [...] to resist Astaire's aura of superiority;"[228] she also, I would argue, transcends her narrative function on a representational – and syntactically, classically integrative – level through these subtle means of performance.

Astaire's own performance and representation falls short of connoting discreet subjectivity to Rogers as an "active male" opposite a dichotomously "passive female" at such moments. His ideological function as representative of the "masculine" is also further problematized due, I would argue, to the certain delimitations of representational scope imposed by censorship. Jerry/Astaire's straight masculinity and concomitant syntactic function is effectively de-individuated in the presence of his male co-stars, the most significant of whom is his love rival Beddini (Erik Rhodes). As David Lugowski has noted, the overt homosexuality of such secondary male characters (which, I have suggested, was purposely performed in *The Gay Divorcee*) was tempered (if not entirely removed) by conservative Code restrictions regarding the representation of sexuality.[229] Indeed, the PCA production file for *Top Hat* shows that of greatest concern to Joseph Breen in its production was that any implication of homosexuality in relation to these secondary male characters be

[227] Gallafent (Op. Cit., 57-66) has already highlighted the significance of Rogers's performance (primarily through facial expressions in close-up) in reaction to Astaire when he sings, such that she disturbs perception of his authorial or narrativizing control over/within the numbers.
[228] Evans, Op.Cit., 31.
[229] David Lugowski, "Queering the (New) Deal: Lesbian and Gay Representation and the Depression-Era Cultural Politics of Holywood's Production Code," *Cinema Journal*, 38:2 (Winter, 1999), 18.

cut from the script or finessed in performance.[230] Thus, unlike the harmlessly asexual (or indeed, homosexual) Tonneti of *The Gay Divorcee*, Beddini's Otherness is expressed as an excessive male libido, a machismo unrestrained to the point that he charges through a Venice hotel looking to challenge Jerry with his sword. In such a way, Jerry/Astaire falls short of individuation as the single most aggressively/stereotypically "masculine" male character in the film.

It is by no coincidence that following *Top Hat*, focus of character individuation and narrative agency in the Astaire-Rogers gradually shifted in Ginger Rogers's direction. In order to maintain the syntactic coherence of the "dual-focus narrative," it became necessary for Rogers's character(s) to an exercise an agency in subsequent narratives that would previously have been the province of Astaire's characters. Astaire's persona, problematized as a stable structural feature, could no longer bear the burden of such ideological weight. This shift in focus was, of course, also partially informed by Ginger Rogers's rise to prominence as a major Hollywood star in the latter half of 1936. As borne out in her competent performance in *Top Hat*, Rogers was fast developing an independent profile as a dramatic actor. Concurrent with the release of *Swing Time* and *Shall We Dance* (which evidences strongly the concretization of Rogers's star presence as an indispensable structural feature within the cycle), Rogers was contracted for leading roles in the films *Stage Door* (Gregory La Cava, 1937), *Having Wonderful Time* (Alfred Santell, 1938) and *Vivacious Lady* (George Stevens, 1938). Fred Astaire, over this time, appeared only in *A Damsel in Distress* outside the Astaire-Rogers cycle, which did not do well. Thus, by 1937 it had become apparent that the Astaire-Rogers dance musical was dependent on Ginger Rogers's star power for its continued box office success, as much as its narrative formula would be increasingly dependent on her character's subjective individuation to construct syntactically coherent meaning.

Astaire and Rogers's next film together, *Swing Time*, would further develop this trend towards equalizing their characters' narrative subjectivities through a symbolic leveling of their socio-economic status. Whereas previous films in the classical vein (*The Gay Divorcee* and *Top Hat)* implicated a subtle distinction in their lead characters' relative socio-economic privileges (Astaire in both cases plays a successful professional dancer, while Rogers is financially dependent on another man – her husband in *The Gay Divorcee* and

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[230] Breen took exception to Beddini's lines, "I'm no man – I am Beddini!" and "[...] But I am pretty", as well as to the possible "pansy" implications of the butler Bates, played by Eric Blore. Joseph Breen to B. B. Kahane, memorandum, March 20 1935 (*Top Hat*, PCA file). Breen also requested that the line, "Go right ahead boys, don't mind me," be cut, but the line was left in because Helen Broderick's reaction shot was trimmed. Joseph Breen to B. B. Kahane, memorandum, July 30 1935 (*Top Hat*, PCA file).

Beddini in *Top* Hat – connotative of her essential sexual vulnerability) Rogers-as-Penny Carroll and Astaire-as-Lucky Garnett are of a similar socio-economic level.[231] That is to say, Rogers is represented less as an object for Astaire's gain and possession than as his partner (literally in their dance numbers, and symbolically on the level of syntactic meaning). Penny makes her own living from her own talents as a dance instructor, independent either of a husband or a financier. Lucky/Astaire is, at the beginning of the film engaged to another woman; when Penny falls in love with him, he is forced to choose between the two (ultimately, of course, choosing Penny/Rogers). As a result, at different stages of the film, both Lucky and Penny are variably in pursuit of each other. In a significant change of narrative tendency, however, Penny is the more sexually aggressive of the couple, barging into Lucky's dressing room to kiss him.[232] Also, building on Rogers's already-established individuation as a dance soloist in *Follow the Fleet*, she performs – for the first time in the cycle – a narratively integrated love song: "A Fine Romance" effectively positions Astaire/Lucky as the object of her desire, reciprocating Astaire's longing expressed via "The Way You Look Tonight." The two leads thus command a balance of agency and subjectivity within the narrative, which is mirrored in the individuation of Rogers's musical performance throughout the text.[233] In such a way, *Swing Time* might be seen as "the most self-consciously integrated of the Astaire-Rogers musicals."[234]

While joining the lovers in requisite heterosexual union at the film's end, *Swing Time* nevertheless marks the beginning of the end for the Classical Astaire-Rogers musical. Its final musical number is of particular significance in foreshadowing the ultimate dissolution of the

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[231] In their secondary-lead musicals, on the other hand, Rogers's characters are consistently on a working-class level with Astaire's. This is a distinguishing semantic feature of the two sub-cycles, which also plays into a slight differentiation of their syntax: the socio-economic inequality attendant on the protagonists of the Classical cycle underscores their diametrical opposition, and thus the integrativeness of their union. It also confirms Rogers's early characterizations as essentially passive-female in contrast to Astaire's subjective, socio-economic agency.

[232] Rogers's costuming in this scene proved the greatest point of contention for Joseph Breen during the film's production; he feared its low-cut design would attract negative publicity. Joseph Breen to S. J. Briskin, memorandum (August 21 1936, *Swing Time*, PCA file) and Carl E. Milliken to Will Hays, inter-office memorandum (September 11 1936, *Swing Time*, PCA file). Interestingly, Rogers's relatively daring outfit does, in fact, invite optic focus; her sexual agency in the brazen act of kissing Astaire (as explicitly physical an act of sexual consummation as would be attempted in any of their films together – usually they do not even kiss) is compounded by her overtly sexual costuming. Rogers is thus here represented as subjectively – but excessively, according to the genre's syntactic limitations – feminine.

[233] Wood reads the narrative text conservatively, in that Penny appears nevertheless to be "perpetually at the mercy" of men (Op. Cit., 30). I do not dispute that, in conforming to a classic dual-focus, Penny's narrative function exists always in dialectic with that of a potential love partner – that is, it is predicated on the putative uncertainty of who she will end up marrying. Nevertheless, Rogers's role here is relatively active compared to previous protagonists in *The Gay Divorcee* and *Top Hat*. Babington and Evans (Op. Cit., 96) recognize this as distinctive in the context of the Astaire-Rogers cycle, in that "whatever ideological structuring of the Rogers character takes place, she is never merely Astaire's shadow in the narrative, but a humorous trenchant partner, while in the world of the duet numbers, partly bracketed off as they are from the narrative as privileged moments, submissiveness is only one role among many and not in any way the full significance of their relationship."

[234] Babington and Evans, Op. Cit., 105.

cycle: the ostensibly romantic duet between Lucky/Astaire and Penny/Rogers, "Never Gonna Dance," conversely enacts their *dis*integration as a couple. Instead of celebrating Lucky and Penny's (metaphorical) sexual congress (as the numbers "Night and Day" and "Cheek to Cheek" in *The Gay Divorcee* and *Top Hat* respectively have done), "Never Gonna Dance" effectively dramatizes their breakup.[235] As in previous romantic numbers-cum-seduction scenes, Astaire physically arrests Rogers in order to compel her into the dance. Instead of confirming his mastery over her body, however, the number both lyrically and choreographically posits her rejection of his control. Indeed, we are denied a scopophilic pleasure in seeing the image of Astaire and Rogers's bodies united in embrace, which concludes such dances in earlier films. Instead, Rogers-as-Penny turns abruptly away from Lucky/Astaire's final embrace and vanishes off-screen, with Astaire/Lucky grasping limply after her. As Gallafent has noted, the overall effect of the choreography and direction – by which Stevens cuts several times to an image of Rogers framed alone onscreen – is to "underline [her] importance," indeed her narrative and representational significance, as half this as-yet-incomplete couple.[236] In such a way the number highlights both Lucky's and Astaire's dependence on Penny/Rogers, whose solitary image and overall affect of self-centredness (as noted by Babington and Evans)[237] indicates her self-sufficiency as both character and performer and the consequent tenuousness of their partnership. The denial of erotic satisfaction and pleasure-in-looking to be found via the complete, visualized symbol of the unified pair leaves Astaire to bear the burden of spectacular objectification in a state of utter lack. Thus, "Never Gonna Dance" re-structures the meaning of its central romantic duet counter to similar pre-existing dances in order to refresh or perhaps even disavow the ossification of its classical dance musical formula.[238] In doing so, and despite the reunion of its primary couple in the film's final moments, the syntactic effect (and lingering affective

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[235] It should be noted that the film does posit a romantic duet of sorts, "Waltz in Swing Time," prior to "Never Gonna Dance." It is, however, unconventionally staged, in that it takes place on a nightclub dance floor in the midst of an audience. Whereas in the romantic numbers "Night and Day" and "Cheek to Cheek" the couple move from a public space into a private one, they are actually retained within view of a diegetic audience throughout "Waltz in Swing Time." The effect is one of de-eroticization, in that it removes the sense of the extra-diegetic audience becoming privy to a private moment between the couple. I would argue that the voyeuristic aspect of the romantic duets in previous films is key to their symbolic function as representative of sexual consummation (or at the very least chemistry) between Astaire and Rogers. In *Swing Time*, the erotic affect of the "Waltz in Swing Time" number is undercut both by its staging and by the presence of an actual (though not explicitly visualized) kiss between Astaire and Rogers in Lucky's dressing room. This diminishes the erotic potential between Astaire and Rogers when they *do* first dance as a couple, in that it posits their physical intimacy as something that *could* actually be literalized as sex (as opposed to sublimated into dance). Taken altogether, this contributes to an overall feeling of longing-for-something-that-was-never-had within "Never Gonna Dance."

[236] Gallafent, Op. Cit., 61.

[237] Babington and Evans, Op. Cit., 110.

[238] As Gallafent, again, has posited, the number "address[es] the situation of the couple in the film and in the cycle of Astaire's and Rogers's career together" (Op. Cit., 71).

resonance) of this number is to problematize *Swing Time*'s overall utopian sensibility vis-à-vis gendered paradigms of performance and representation.

As a result, the form of the great romantic duet is altered in *Shall We Dance* in – unsuccessful, I shall argue – efforts to re-establish the narrative and performative subjectivity of Fred Astaire over Ginger Rogers. *Shall We Dance* is the last film in which RKO writers attempted to rehash the plot of Astaire's mistaken identity and subsequent attempt to win Rogers back from an ill-matched suitor. It thereby harkens back to *The Gay Divorcee* and *Top Hat* in casting Astaire as a ballet dancer, "the Great Petrov" (real name: Peter P. Peters), with a penchant for swing, versus Rogers as Linda Keene, a no-nonsense tap dancer. In this case, similar to *Swing Time*, Rogers and Astaire are individuated equally as professional entertainers on the same socio-economic level, though they differ in their stylistic preferences, which functions as a metaphor – however tenuous – for their opposing ideological values. In such a way, *Shall We Dance*'s narrative conceit is as, or perhaps even more, transparent in terms of betraying a syntactic dependence on the principle of ideological integration (notwithstanding Babington and Evans's statement regarding *Swing Time*'s self-conscious integrativeness). It is also the film seemingly most anxious and over-compensatory concerning the feminizing effects of Astaire's self-consciously physical musical performance.

Astaire's solos – "Beginner's Luck," "Slap That Bass," and "They Can't Take That Away From Me" – all present various methods of disavowing and/or demystifying Astaire's self-conscious performance; as theorized by Feuer, this is effected so as to remythicize the seeming spontaneity (and thusly efface the real artificiality and "to-be-looked-at-ness") of his performance.[239] In this sense, they attempt to demonstrate the same "phallic potency"[240] that Astaire's virtuoso performances in "Top Hat" and "Bojangles of Harlem" (from *Top Hat* and *Swing Time*, respectively) had achieved through the various representational strategies of interaction (with chorus, asserting dynamism), bricolage (for spontaneity),[241] and masquerade (in blackface in the latter number, signaling Astaire's ability/authority as a white man to appropriate – then discard – an alternative and crucially self-consciously spectacular performance mode). In "Beginner's Luck," Astaire-as-Petrov is seen to be rehearsing a tap number for his own amusement and recreation, thus denying the fact of the extra-diegetic audience; in "Slap That Bass," he appears inspired by the mechanical rhythm of a ship's engine to break into dance, employing a sort of aural *bricolage*; and in

[239] Feuer, "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," Op. Cit., 1995.
[240] Britton, *Katharine Hepburn*, Op. Cit., 59.
[241] Feuer, "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," Op. Cit., 444.

"They Can't Take That Away From Me" (which *should* be a major romantic duet between Pete and Linda, judging by its narrative situation analogous to such numbers in previous films), the spectacularity of Astaire's solo performance is negated in also denying the image of his dancing body. It focuses instead on Rogers's performed reactions to his singing, a significant deviation in representational tendency.

The entirety of the number takes places across four individual shots – relatively few for a musical number, but in keeping with the unobtrusive shooting and editing technique favoured by Astaire (who had significant input in the direction of his dance numbers). The shot progression follows a pattern of ever-tighter close-up on the faces of Astaire and Rogers as Pete sings his regretful parting song: in shot 1, both framed in medium close-up, Linda turns her back on Pete in conversation, and Pete slips into song ("Our romance won't end..."); 2, Sandrich cuts to a close-up with Rogers slightly more toward centre-frame, and the camera re-adjusts to hold the players in balanced two-shot; in shot 3, after Pete sings "You changed my life," Sandrich cuts to an extreme close-up on Linda's face for a single line of the song before (4) cutting back to the previous two-shot composition. In such a way, Sandrich preserves the spatial and temporal integrity of Astaire's performance up to the point when Rogers's face fills the frame, and the sequence asserts that it has become more about Linda/Rogers's performance in response to Pete/Astaire than it is about the musical performance itself. "They Can't Take That Away From Me" thus avoids spectacularizing Astaire's body, while it resituates the locus of performative affect within – and the burden of signification on – Rogers. The overall effect of the sequence's staging is to heighten the sense of Rogers's agency over its meaning, despite her lack of participation in the physical expression of the music, and despite a significant effort to contain her performance's representational significance within imagistic parameters.

Indeed, the most spectacular image we are afforded is an extreme close-up (shot 3) of Rogers's face with tears in her eyes, her own individuated physicality arguably denied in lingering on her (relatively blank) face. At the same time, Astaire's voice rises to its highest, effeminate register out of shot, proclaiming forcefully, "No, no, they can't take that away from me!" In such a way, Rogers's face stands in for Astaire's body as the signified or referent image that his emotive vocalization bespeaks. Her face could be said to function here in Freudian terms as a fetish object – a stand-in for Astaire's missing phallus, a confirmation that he has not, in fact, "lost" anything – and in yoking Astaire's heightened (and thusly feminized) expression of emotion to a female object, it anchors his performance from drifting towards camp. Thus read alongside the representational paradigm of duets

such as "Night and Day" and "Cheek to Cheek" in which Astaire and Rogers's exchange of glances reaffirms Astaire's active mode of looking and Rogers's passive mode of receiving,[242] Rogers's close-up in "They Can't Take That Away From Me" works against her retaining subjectivity or performative agency. As representative of the overall film, the staging of "They Can't Take That Away From Me" seeks to mend the gendered systems of representation and spectatorship that were partially subverted in *Swing Time*.

Yet in this sequence Roger's performance resists total containment via imagistic representation through subtle gestural means. As Gallafent notes, Rogers's turn from Astaire negates the conventional gaze-exchange that has up until this point been paradigmatic of their duets together (particularly when Astaire sings to Rogers before they dance). This has the effect of "increas[ing] the melancholy of the moment,"[243] but also of heightening its experiential significance *on Linda/Rogers's behalf*. Unlike in previous films' duets, which were predicated on the theme of reciprocity – between Astaire's causational song-as-seduction and Rogers's capitulation-to-dance-as its effect – the dialectic here is broken: Rogers preserves her individuated performance space in rejecting entry into Astaire's.[244] Thusly, when she expresses an emotional response to certain lines in the song, she exercises an agency over the affective quality of her performance that is unmediated (and crucially un-mitigated) by the presence of Astaire's reciprocal gaze. Through subtle variations in expression (the skill of which is compounded by Rogers's remaining in medium-close-up – as opposed to full or extreme close-up – throughout most of the sequence, thus the meaning of her gestures is not telegraphed via the camera but rather rests within and upon her face directly), Rogers transitions with remarkable fluidity between emotional registers ranging from pensiveness to affection, wry amusement to despair, and nostalgia to resignation, all within the space of a minute. In fact, the only point at which Rogers's facial features are *not* consistently in motion/transition is marked by the extreme close-up on her face I have already discussed; in this moment our privilege to Linda's internal feelings is granted externally by the camera rather than by Rogers as performer within the frame. For this reason, Sandrich's cut to extreme close-up registers as jarring within the emotional flow of the number; we are wrenched from a subjective identification with Rogers back to an objective perspective on her image. In such a way, a traditionally gendered politics of viewing predicated on "passive female" acceptance of the gaze is reasserted via

[242] This is encapsulated in *Variety*'s review of *Shall We Dance*: "The best point about Miss Rogers in these films continues to be the way she handles herself when [Astaire] is singing," May 12 1937 (*Shall We Dance*, PCA file).
[243] Gallafent, Op. Cit., 71.
[244] Also, whether this gesture originates with Rogers as performer or Sandrich as director is irrelevant, as its physical manifestation rests under Rogers's authority.

representational means. Nevertheless, Rogers activates agency over her own representation through performative means; this in itself has been facilitated by Astaire's imagistic marginalization, in keeping with the classically integrated musical's phallogocentric representational paradigm. *Shall We Dance* betrays itself as thus profoundly uneasy about the foundations of its system of representation.

From *The Gay Divorcee* to *Shall We Dance*, and notwithstanding their overall syntactic cohesiveness, the classic Astaire-Rogers musicals were inconsistent at certain points in terms of their forced integration of traditionally gendered systems of performance and representation within an established narrative formula. Furthermore, the paradigmatic representation of gendered bodies and the ascription of certain sexual behaviors to stereotype and vice versa shifted throughout the cycle. By the time of *Shall We Dance*, the generic paradigms of performance and representation which had been established to signify key gendered meanings in each text could no longer hold, in view of Rogers's rising star profile, her necessarily augmented narrative agency, and her character individuation in her films with Fred Astaire. Indeed, *Shall We Dance* may not have been only the final film in the classic cycle of Astaire-Rogers dance musicals; it may have also been the last true "Astaire-Rogers" film in that, after 1937, Rogers's films with Fred Astaire would be "Ginger Rogers musicals" in all but name.

Dizzy Females and Dying Men: The End of the Astaire-Rogers Era

Carefree (Mark Sandrich, 1938)

The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle (H. C. Potter, 1939)

In the breakdown and paradigmatic shifting of systems of representation in the classical Astaire-Rogers musical, the phallogocentricism fundamental to its semantic and syntactic structuring was also destabilized. In a final discussion of the last two films of the Astaire-Rogers cycle, *Carefree* and *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle*, I will suggest that this semantic crisis effected a syntactic shift in the Astaire-Rogers – or perhaps more accurately, the Rogers-Astaire – dance musical, by which these later iterations may be categorized more as woman-centric musical comedies (or melodrama, in the case of *Vernon and Irene*) than classically integrated dance musicals. Rather than following a traditionally phallogocentric narrative trajectory, these films invert the traditional gender hierarchy of classical narrative according to an excessively "feminine" logic or sensibility, which is performed through and imposed by Ginger Rogers's female protagonists. This renders the

Astaire-Rogers musical, in its final form, ultimately transgressive of the syntactic structures of the classically integrated musical and thus subversive of traditionally phallogocentric narrative and conservative ideology. And as I will show, *Carefree* attempts to contain Rogers's narrative and performative subjectivity by containing her comic talents within certain screwball sequences (which were nevertheless deemed objectionable by the PCA for their anarchist and irreverent sensibility).

Telling of the degree to which Rogers had surpassed Astaire in industrial power and textual importance by the time of *Carefree*, reviews of the film tended to remark firstly on Rogers's relative narrative centrality, and secondly on the film's overall tonal shift from musical spectacularity to screwball comedy. *Motion Picture Herald*, noting the revelation of Rogers's comic flair and *Carefree*'s corollary generic distinction from the rest of the cycle, declared it "a picture that makes all the previous Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers films look like trailers,"[245] while *Variety* (previously prone to footnoting Rogers's contributions as a byproduct of Astaire's direction) praised her as "one of the gayest of our comediennes, equally practiced with the verbal foil or the slapstick."[246] Indeed, *Carefree* is directed, narratively, by its female protagonist Amanda's (Ginger Rogers) psychological progression from an unnatural aversion to sex to an attraction to Fred Astaire's psychologist, Tony Flagg – a "correction" of her psychic and specifically gendered-female pathology. While the overall meaning-bearing structure of the film is thusly conservative and concordant with the classical musical syntax, its affective pleasures are to be found in Rogers's unruly and hysterical performance – a generic trope of the screwball comedy.

It is further significant that the primary romantic duet between Astaire and Rogers in *Carefree*, which physically manifests their characters' mutual love and sexual desire, takes place as a dream sequence in Amanda's mind's eye. The film thus posits Amanda firmly as its subject, dictating the backwards narrative logic of the "unruly woman" or "dizzy female," as Tony calls her. *Carefree* upends the phallogocentric narrative conventions of the classically integrated dance musical in positioning a female protagonist as its narrativizing subject, with the male as the passive object of her fantasy and desire. In such a way indeed, as Croce has observed, *Carefree* "is more Ginger Rogers's film than Fred Astaire's."[247] At the same time, of course, the counter-integrative imbalance of her narrative subjectivity and character individuation relative to Astaire is arguably disavowed or mitigated in being made the object of comedy. In the extended screwball sequences, such as when a drugged Amanda wanders

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[245] *Motion Picture Herald*, September 8 1938 (*Carefree*, PCA file).
[246] *Variety*, August 25 1938 (*Carefree*, PCA file). In a further amusing reversal of focus, the review notes, "Mr. Astaire's dry humour and liquid grace on the dance floor are almost equally valuable."
[247] Croce, Op. Cit., 140.

the city streets, acting on her formerly repressed impulses to pull pranks on men around her, or when having been hypnotized by Tony (in attempts to reverse her attraction to him) she goes after him with a shotgun, the excesses of Amanda's female libido are indulged to the point of parody. Thus, her performance reads as humorous, as opposed to monstrous: the threatening aspects of her feminine subjectivity are effectively disavowed in a comedic performance-to-excess.

Such a tonal shift nevertheless presented a problem to the PCA in terms of the production and regulation of Astaire-Rogers musicals going forward. In that *Carefree* suggested a semantic and syntactic break in the cycle whereby future iterations might focus more on Ginger Rogers's character as predicated on a feminized screwball-narrative logic, the cycle also appeared poised to address more frequently and explicitly issues of female sexual agency on a directly representational level (as opposed to referencing it obliquely during musical sequences). Tellingly, while past films in the classical mode had thrown up issues for censorship largely relating to the sexual coding of secondary male characters and/or Rogers's visual representation in musical numbers, Joseph Breen took *Carefree* to task for its representation of female sexuality on an intricately narrative level, interrogating certain lines of dialogue and visual jokes relating specifically to Amanda's sexuality and social transgressiveness as a woman. Among his cautionary memos to RKO producer Leo Spitz, Breen warned against using the phrase "biological urge" in direct relation to Amanda, and that she should be shown at all times fully clothed.[248] Further along in production, Breen worried that scenes in which Amanda commits criminal acts under the influence of drugs or hypnosis might be cut by local censorship boards.[249] Finally, Breen confirmed that three lines of dialogue alluding to Amanda's potential loss of virginity to Tony ("I have a feeling I am going to have complete confidence in you;" "That's fine. There's nothing to be afraid of;" "I am not afraid – a little tired – but not afraid!") would have to be cut from all prints prior to the film gaining Code approval.[250] It is thusly apparent that of primary concern to Joseph Breen regarding *Carefree*, as indicative of the trajectory of the RKO dance musical cycle, was its shift in focus towards sex comedy, concomitant with a redress of narrative subjectivity in Ginger Rogers's favour.

Carefree ultimately was not received as well at the box office as previous Astaire-Rogers outings, despite garnering generally favorable reviews. In that Ginger Rogers went on to have considerable success as an actor in comedy and drama in such films as *Bachelor*

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[248] Joseph Breen to Leo Spitz, memorandum (January 28 1938, *Carefree*, PCA file).
[249] Joseph Breen, memorandum (March 11 1938, *Carefree*, PCA file).
[250] Joseph Breen to J.R. McDonough, memorandum (August 8 1938, *Carefree*, PCA file).

Mother (Garson Kanin, 1939) and *Kitty Foyle* (Sam Wood, 1940), for which she won a Best Actress Oscar, I would argue that *Carefree*'s relative failure signals more audience fatigue with the classical formula (*Shall We Dance* having instigated a box office drop-off) than Rogers's inability to carry the film. Beyond that, it represents significantly the culmination of a general trend towards narrative focalization on Rogers within the cycle, alongside the greater individuation of her character, to the point where her performative affect outstripped the syntactic limitations of the integrated dance musical.

It is no surprise that her following film with Astaire both centered on her and signaled at the same time, narratively, the impossibility of continuing a cycle of integrated dance musicals in which Astaire could be seen to play permanently *in support* of his leading lady. The last and least critically examined out of the nine films Astaire and Rogers made together (unsurprisingly, by virtue of its narrative/syntactic discontinuity with the rest of the series and its disposition towards a tragic rather than comic narrative trajectory) *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* is an obvious outlier. It is the only Astaire-Rogers musical that purports also to be non-fiction, narrativizing the biography of the eponymous real-life dancing couple. While it contains comedic elements and musical numbers, it is not so much a romantic comedy like *Carefree* but rather a tragedy (in that Vernon Castle [Astaire] dies at the end, thus physically rending – as opposed to reconciling – the "ideal heterosexual couple"). For all of this, it is even more Rogers's film than *Carefree* was: as the surviving character Irene, she remains the narrative subject and emotional point of identification for the audience. This aspect of her individuation is reinforced consistently throughout the film as Irene/Rogers is often seen looking at Vernon/Astaire performing onstage. In the final shot of the film, Irene, having just received news of Vernon's death, looks out the window and imagines she sees a ghostly image of the two of them dancing in the garden. In such a way, the final narrativizing look or gaze, usually associated with or granted to a male protagonist, is in fact assumed by Rogers, the sole (and crucially female) survivor of the cycle of films. Just as the marriage of Vernon and Irene Castle is dissolved by the husband's death, so too the "marriage" of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers via the classically integrative musical narrative, is dissolved in the death of male subjectivity.

Conclusion

As I have sought to illustrate here via detailed analysis of the nine Astaire-Rogers dance musicals made at RKO between 1933 and 1939, with reference to their production

files and contemporary reviews, Ginger Rogers increasingly became the point of narrative focus and subjectivity within the cycle due, rather counter-intuitively, to the syntactically integrative demands of narrative, as well as – less surprisingly – her increased profile as an individuated star over the course of the decade. Ironically, the very same Code stipulations which Joseph Breen had invoked throughout the Astaire-Rogers cycle in order to close down certain of the more "sexually perverse" meanings associated with pre-Code musicals (particularly relating to the codification-as-homosexual of secondary male characters), actually functioned to destabilize Astaire's individuation and syntactic functioning as a male, heterosexual lead in light of his always already feminized image. Redirecting narrative subjectivity and agency towards Rogers, then, may be seen as an attempt to distract from the problematics of male performance and representation within the integrated dance musical. However, as I have shown, Rogers's corollary ascendancy to Hollywood star status both within and without these texts functioned ultimately to imbue these musical narratives with an excess of feminine, performative affect, which necessitated containment within more comedic narrative forms (as in *Carefree*). Ginger Rogers's performance and representation within this cycle of films thus illustrates a paradigmatic trend towards individuation of the female musical star within the post-Code, classically integrated musical, while it reveals also the paradoxical syntactic conflict at the interface of musical integration and female individuation.

Chapter 3

"That Delightful Jeanette MacDonald": on the regulation and fetishization of individuated female talent in the Hollywood Operetta

As one of the most popular film stars of the 1930s, as well as the face of a unique subgenre of musical – the Hollywood operetta – Jeanette MacDonald (1903-1965) has nevertheless been relatively critically disregarded in comparison to other female musical stars of the decade. Excepting Edward Baron Turk's biographical and psychoanalytic considerations of her work,[251] as well as Susan Smith's study of MacDonald as a "great female singer" in *The Musical: Race, Gender and Performance*, MacDonald's prominence as a female musical star in the 1930s has largely been bracketed in critical theorization. Contributing to this relative lack of attention, I would argue, has been the primacy first of the Mulveyan visual approach to gender representation and performance in the musical, as spearheaded by Lucy Fischer,[252] followed by the post-Mulveyan theoretical turn towards issues of address, objectification and identification in/by female musical performance.[253] Both of these approaches have prioritized the Berkeleyesque backstage musical as an object of study, based on its overtly imagistic representation of female performers. This has perhaps obfuscated those early cycles and subgenres of musical which, along with their stars, present more aurally-directed forms of female musical performance and entertainment (an oversight that both Turk and Smith have sought to redress via theorization of MacDonald's voice-as-threat to the traditionally gendered power structures of the classically integrated musical narrative).[254] Here I intend to further this progression of thought, acknowledging on the one hand that the imagistic representation of the female singing star, vis-à-vis Mulveyan criticism, functions as a mode of performance-containment. On the other hand, I wish to consider how MacDonald's performative affect – particularly through vocal expression – may be seen to have escaped (however transiently at certain points in certain films) a representational paradigm predicated on the repressive, imagistic fetishization of women. This is based on MacDonald's association with an overly aesthetic

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[251] Edward Baron Turk, *Hollywood Diva: A Biography of Jeanette MacDonald* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) and *"Deriding the voice of Jeanette MacDonald: notes on psychoanalysis and the American film musical,"* in *Embodied Voices: Representing female vocality in western culture*, eds. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[252] Fischer's "The Image of Woman as Image: The Optical Politics of 'Dames'," Op. Cit., draws directly from Mulvey's theory of the traditionally gendered politics of viewing.

[253] Mellencamp, Op. Cit. and Robertson, Op. Cit., both take this approach.

[254] Smith, Op. Cit., 54.

(as opposed to functionally narrative) – and thus excessively feminine and/or camp – performance style in operetta.

The theoretical framework implicated in the analysis of MacDonald's performance is admittedly unwieldy, involving deconstructive theories of gender performativity and representation parallel to the historical analysis of Hollywood operetta as a popular musical form. It is as impossible to conceive of Jeanette MacDonald's performance and star persona apart from operetta as it is to discuss the history of the genre without considering the impact of Jeanette MacDonald on its formal and narrative development in Hollywood. Though MacDonald is now best known for her screen partnerships with co-stars Maurice Chevalier and Nelson Eddy, her personal popularity actually flourished beyond her professional engagement with Chevalier and predated her work with Eddy, thus spanning the entire decade prior to World War II. Therefore it is somewhat surprising that in comparison to a peer like Ginger Rogers, whose musical talent was at one stage in her career similarly disregarded in the press, but whose contribution to the musical/comedy genre(s) *in collaboration* with (an)other star performer(s) has nevertheless been historically appreciated – MacDonald is ignored. This speaks perhaps to the relative inaccessibility, from a modern or post-classical perspective, of operetta and the certain modes of performance (especially pertaining to representations of gender and sexuality) associated with it.

In this chapter, I will examine Jeanette MacDonald's performance across two distinct cycles/iterations of operetta, those in which she appeared opposite co-star Maurice Chevalier (for the most part during the pre-Code era) and those in which she starred with Nelson Eddy after 1934 (co-incident – though not coincidentally – with a period of stricter narrative regulation under the Production Code Administration) . Through close textual analysis, examination of how her image was historically regulated by producers, directors and censors, and in consideration of her performances opposite various leading men, I will show how the excessively feminine aspects and affects of MacDonald's performance were (not always successfully) contained and regulated within a phallogocentric paradigm of representation predicated on the visual. Operetta, as a subgenre of the classically integrated musical, may be seen as syntactically attendant on the recuperation of feminine aesthetics and female transgressiveness within conservative/traditionalist ideology. Turk has affirmed that MacDonald's operettas (particularly with Chevalier) functioned narratively to "reaffirm phallic authority," thus following the same "telos [of] cultural normalization" that Altman has ascribed to musicals via the Platonic ideal of integration.[255] It is MacDonald's aurally

[255] Turk, "Deriding the Voice of Jeanette MacDonald," Op. Cit., 105.

affective power, in juxtaposition with the narrative constraints of her films with Nelson Eddy, which Turk argues situates these films outside the strictly repressive system of representation that the operetta, as musical-romantic comedy, adheres to. Notwithstanding the subversive potential of performance from within this representational mode, one of the syntactic demands of operetta, as evidenced in film narratives and confirmed by promotional discourses surrounding MacDonald in the 1930s, is that the unruly feminine excess presented by the spectacle of female musical performance must be balanced and contained by the presence of an equally vocally talented or otherwise strongly individuated male protagonist.

Thus, paralleling Ginger Rogers's bi-cyclical career in Busby Berkeley backstage musicals at Warner Bros. and later dance musicals with Fred Astaire at RKO, MacDonald is distinguished largely by her association with two male co-stars: first, in Ernst Lubitsch's operettas at Paramount made between 1929 and 1934, she starred in all but one opposite Maurice Chevalier; she then made eight films with Nelson Eddy at MGM, which propelled her into super-stardom. MacDonald also made several film appearances sans Chevalier or Eddy throughout the 1930s, most all of which were critically well-received, but none of which reached the dizzying box office heights of her teaming with either onscreen husband. Still, it may be said that MacDonald, nicknamed the "Iron Butterfly" by Hollywood insiders,[256] represented a powerful – and singular – influence within the industry and on the development of the genre.

As quickly as MacDonald rose to Hollywood stardom in the early sound era, however, paralleling the career of Shirley Temple at Twentieth Century Fox, she fell even more quickly into relative redundancy at the turn of the decade. Whereas in 1939, following several years of exceptional success with Nelson Eddy at MGM, MacDonald was crowned "Queen of Hollywood" in a national popularity contest, in the very next year one of her films with Eddy, the aptly titled *Bitter Sweet*, failed to take a profit. Thereafter, MGM would not seek to make another operetta in the narrative mold followed previously in the MacDonald-Eddy cycle, indicating that from 1939 to 1940, operetta's – and MacDonald's – popularity had fallen dramatically. After *Bitter Sweet*, MacDonald and Eddy made one more operetta together, the disastrous *I Married an Angel* (1942), which sought vaguely to contemporize the established narrative formula of operetta,[257] as well as several more films independent

[256] Turk, *Hollywood Diva,* Op. Cit., 179.

[257] Arguably, *I Married an Angel* is not, strictly speaking, an operetta in the traditional Hollywood style. Its score and songs are inflected with more modern rhythms, and it takes place in the present day (albeit in a European location, satisfying one of the optional criteria of Hollywood operetta). It also does not feature the familiar iconography of period costume associated with many of MacDonald's (and Eddy's) films.

of each other. As David Parkinson has noted, such disenchantment with the genre and its representative players was likely catalyzed by an American backlash against "European imports" (such as operetta) in the run-up to World War II: as America "retreat[ed] further into [..] cultural and diplomatic isolation," tastes in music and film thus changed rapidly to reflect a general distrust of such "foreign" and "highbrow" influences.[258] Hollywood largely abandoned operetta as a relevant film form,[259] and MGM dropped the two stars who had made their living almost exclusively off of it.[260] Subsequent attempts to rehabilitate MacDonald's star persona from her previously cultivated image as an operetta queen did not succeed.[261]

That operetta's decline in popularity and relevancy precipitated Jeanette MacDonald's reaffirms Andrew Britton's theory that star vehicles must be taken in the context of the larger genre or genres of film in which they appear: that they do not constitute genres or sub-genres in and of themselves.[262] The operetta form must therefore be seen as "a prior condition of the [Jeanette MacDonald] vehicle", and thusly an exploration of Jeanette MacDonald's star performance necessitates a study of operetta's generic tendencies. MacDonald's film performances throughout the 1930s, which were almost exclusively within this subgenre, and her near-monopolization of female roles within it, are representative of performance paradigms unique to the Hollywood operetta. I will therefore analyze MacDonald's performance of femininity in the context of operetta from

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[258] David Parkinson, *The Rough Guide to Film Musicals* (London: Rough Guides, 2007), 41.

[259] Even in the post-war period of the 1940s and '50s, which saw a resurgence in musical extravaganzas like *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944) and *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), the Hollywood operetta failed to see a sustained revival. Operetta languished in the collective memory of Hollywood as little more than a quaint and even embarrassing historical joke: for instance, the operetta *The Dancing Cavalier*, the film-within-the-film of *Singin' in the Rain*, is supposed to be Don Lockwood's (Gene Kelly) and Lina Lamont's (Jean Hagen) debut in talking pictures as former silent film stars. The fact that Lina Lamont has to be dubbed in order not to appear (and sound) ridiculous highlights the artificiality of the operetta, especially when compared to the "real" talents displayed by Don and Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds). The parody is ultimately an indictment, however nostalgic in tone, of the "primitive" film musical, represented by the operetta, and in particular a certain kind of female performance associated with the sub-genre (and Jeanette MacDonald) in its earliest years.

[260] Turk, *Hollywood Diva,* Op. Cit., 259. It bears noting that over the years, operetta was revived as an aural aesthetic in such Hollywood films as *Show Boat* (George Sidney, 1951), actually a remake of an earlier version from 1936), *West Side Story* (Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, 1961) and *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965). These films feature operatic or semi-classical scores similar in style to those of the Hollywood operetta "proper", but do not qualify fully as operettas themselves in that they fail to meet most of the criteria I set out below for films of this sub-genre.

[261] After *I Married an Angel*, MacDonald owed MGM one more film on contract, which she fulfilled with the operetta retread *Cairo* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1942). She then made *Follow the Boys* (E. Edward Sutherland, 1944) at Universal; her last two films, *Three Daring Daughters* (Fred M. Wilcox, 1948) and *The Sun Comes Up* (Richard Thorpe, 1949), a Lassie film, proving just how far MacDonald had fallen, saw her return to work temporarily for MGM. Nelson Eddy, reading the writing on the wall after *Angel*, bought out his contract with MGM and moved to Paramount where he made *Phantom of the Opera* (Arthur Lubin, 1943), followed by *Knickerbocker Holiday* (Harry Joe Brown, Producers Corporation of America,1944) and the improbable animated film (for which he did lead voice work) *Willie the Operatic Whale* (Clyde Geronimi and Hamilton Luske, Disney, 1946).

[262] Andrew Britton, "Stars and Genre," Op. Cit., 199.

1929 to 1940 with a certain focus on how different screen partnerships in individual films and across film cycles may have altered her performance and representation. In such a way, through the close textual analysis of films and historical documents, and (to a lesser extent) biographical research, I shall examine Jeanette MacDonald's performance(s) of femininity in Hollywood operetta as a complex matrix of internal and external motivating factors, agents and influences.

I would note, however, that in prioritizing consideration of MacDonald's performances across two cycles of films, which are each distinguished from each other semantically by the consistent presence of a male star opposite a single leading lady (thus reflecting and enacting a "dual-focus" approach), I throw into relief those outlying films in which MacDonald appears as a stand-alone star. These films include *The Cat and the Fiddle* (William K. Howard, 1934), *San Francisco* (W. S. Van Dyke, 1936), *The Firefly* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1937) and *Broadway Serenade* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1939), which feature, respectively, Ramon Navarro, Clark Gable, Allan Jones, and Lew Ayres, opposite MacDonald.[263] Each of these films effects narrative closure via the same Classical Hollywood paradigm of heterosexual union that the MacDonald/Chevalier and MacDonald/Eddy cycles adhere to: in such a way, they follow the same narrative model and system of representation. However, as Smith has shown in her analysis of MacDonald's vocal performance and representation in *San Francisco*, these films also offer up moments of subversion via female performance, similar to those which I shall be positing within the two cycles considered here. In some ways, perhaps, these moments within MacDonald's outlying films are more pronounced by virtue of the fact that she is not matched by a familiar partner; her performances thus read as particularly, immediately "phenomenal" by virtue of their semantic exceptionality (again, taking star performance to be a semantic feature of a single genre film). Nevertheless, as my purpose here is to read MacDonald's performative subversiveness from within a repressive system of representation, I will be concerned primarily with examining those texts that abide by such structural codification most closely.

Operetta in Hollywood

First, however, it will be necessary to explicate operetta as one of the lesser-known sub-genres of the Hollywood musical, to establish its narrative and thematic tendencies, and

[263] I am excluding MacDonald's earlier, pre-1934 appearances in films without Chevalier from this list altogether: as it was only after her signing with MGM the same year that she was granted affirmative star billing and treatment. Her previous stand-alone performances were purely functional, evidence of her contract player status, to be trotted out for whatever singing roles were available.

perhaps to revitalize it as a subject for critical and theoretical discourse. Though it has been under-represented in scholarly histories of the American film musical, operetta was one of the most popular and vigorously promoted musical subgenres in the first decade of talking pictures. On the production end, operettas were seen as "light, gay, [and] frivolous,"[264] and presumably less prone to censorship at the level of distribution and exhibition (though like all musicals they were the focus of minute inspection by the SCR and PCA). Hollywood studios in the early sound era thus looked to the operetta as an answer to a growing "call", as Turk puts it, "for cultural as well as moral uplift in [the] movies".[265] Their foreign origins and thus perceptibly "highbrow" (if "frivolous") nature appear to have made operettas a safe bet (with exceptions) for studios under threat of increasing censorship for musicals (particularly of the backstage/Busby Berkeley variety) and musical comedies (like those of Mae West) in the early 1930s.

Ironically, the "original" operetta from continental Europe was a rather more satirical and subversive form than its second-generation iteration on the British and American stage. With its suffix *–ette/etta* signifying the diminutive of a grander form of opera, "operetta" evolved out of Vienna and Paris in the mid-nineteenth century as a lighter, more humorous form of musical theatre than opera, heavily informed by vaudeville and music hall traditions.[266] As Claudia Cohen has observed, the European operetta displayed a "signature hybridity" from its beginning, and a tendency towards "graspy generic borrowing."[267] Though operetta was by no means intended to present a "pure", cultured or highbrow form of entertainment in its original form and context, it was nevertheless treated and promoted as a prestigious, if accessible, art form in Hollywood, to which studios scrambled to lay claim in the early years of talking pictures.

Warner Bros., for instance, chose as its first musical the operetta *The Desert Song* (Roy Del Ruth, 1928), which had been a hit on Broadway.[268] Its success inspired Warners and other studios to adapt other such stage plays, setting a precedent for Hollywood's adaptation of operetta while taking frequent liberties with narrative and score. During the

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[264] Joseph Breen to William Hays, memorandum (October 22 1934, *The Merry Widow*, PCA file). In this memo to Will Hays reporting on the production of Ernst Lubitsch's *Naughty Marietta* in 1934, Breen writes of his dismay that "[t]he picture as it now stands is not the light, gay, frivolous, operetta which it is intended that it should be but rather the typical French farce that is definitely bawdy and offensively – in spots – suggestive," evidence that industry expectations for the film genre were frequently challenged and in some cases effectively subverted by individual filmmakers, such as Lubitsch, with a more "sophisticated" understanding of operetta's form and history.

[265] Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, Op. Clt., 92.

[266] Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History, 2nd Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 9.

[267] Monica F. Cohen, "Noblemen Who Have Gone Wrong: Novel-Reading Pirates and the Victorian Stage in Gilbert and Sullivan's 'The Pirates of Penzance'," *Texas Studies in Literature & Language* 51.3 (2009), 342.

[268] Barrios, Op. Cit., 79.

downturn in musicals' popularity in 1930 and 1931, operetta temporarily declined,[269] and initial attempts to spice up musicals with an added sex element to attract larger audiences mostly failed. However, the success of *The Smiling Lieutenant*, which was Paramount's highest grossing film for 1931, was attributed to the strong partnership between star Chevalier and director/auteur Ernst Lubitsch.[270] Operetta's association with a more sophisticated, "artistic" type of filmmaking was thus confirmed, and studios continued to produce them alongside more conventional forms such as the backstage musical and the nascent integrated musical.

In the way of defining, however cursorily, the narrative and formal characteristics of Hollywood operetta (as distinct from the European and American stage versions), I would note that films of this subgenre first and foremost conform to the major semantic and syntactic structures of the classical Hollywood musical. Specifically, they employ a three-act structure in which multiple musical numbers are integrated into, or otherwise juxtaposed with, a linear narrative; a thematic and potentially self-reflexive emphasis on the pleasures of performance and musical expression; and they assert narrative closure in the heterosexual union of two protagonists symbolizing ideological compromise. In addition to these elements, Hollywood operetta tends to fulfill the following semantic criteria: an aural aesthetic or musical style that is predominantly operatic or semi-classical (usually adapted from the score of an original stage play, though not exclusively so); a setting in the past or in a foreign or otherwise "exotic" location or both; a lightness of tone, nevertheless providing for sudden flashes of melodrama and/or tragedy; and, most significantly for my purposes here, a female central protagonist for whom the primary narrative conflict is essentially domestic in nature. This last semantic feature has important syntactic ramifications, for it locates the socially integrated utopia of the classical Hollywood musical specifically within the home, within the feminine and the female sphere. As a corollary, operetta displays a stereotypically "feminine" aesthetic: it is by turns histrionic, opulent, excessive and superficial – generally satisfying those qualities, often termed "camp", which are associated with "women's pictures" like the romantic comedy or maternal melodrama. Thus, the Hollywood operetta – perhaps more so than any other sub-genre of musical – may be conceived as a generic "hybrid" similar to early musicals such as *The Broadway Melody* and *Applause*,[271] a type of "woman's musical" or musical melodrama.

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[269] Ibid., 327.
[270] Ibid., 346.
[271] Ibid., 98.

Unlike the maternal melodrama, however, the Hollywood operetta does not lend itself easily to the suggestion of ambiguous or potentially subversive meanings opened up by the display of feminine excess.[272] Neither does 1930s operetta (which represents most of the genre) tend to "play" with its own form from a self-reflexive or parodic point of view: Hollywood operetta may be seen rather as taking itself increasingly seriously over the course of the 1930s – counter to what genre theorists such as Thomas Schatz have predicted for individual genres over a similar period of time.[273] This may be due in part to the fact that few operettas by the end of the decade did *not* star Jeanette MacDonald, and her performances in late-1930s operetta were increasingly staid and conservative in tone, influencing popular perception of the larger genre as a whole. In addition, the direct or indirect regulation of MacDonald's (and other stars') image(s) by MGM producers and PCA censors, both of whom had a vested interest in keeping performances of femininity and representations of female sexuality (both onscreen and off) tame and unchallenging and thus within a phallogocentric praxis, limited the scope and variety of performance(s) in operetta. The genre failed to renew itself past the initial and mid-stages of its development, eschewing such devices as thematic ambiguity, irony and self-reflexivity, which, as Schatz has observed, tend to keep later iterations of genre film socially and culturally relevant.[274]

As I have already suggested, the limited number of qualified stars whose image, persona and talents are suited to performance in operetta may be seen as having functioned to hinder the propagation of the genre beyond the 1930s. Unlike standard-issue musicals or musical comedies, in which stars of little-to-no training in singing or dancing nevertheless frequently featured in song-and-dance numbers (such as Joan Crawford's unlikely portrayal of a *Dancing Lady* in Robert Z. Leonard's 1933 musical or Edward Everett Horton's speech-singing throughout many 1930s musicals – their appearances thus satisfying a demand for musical spectacle, if not necessarily prowess) operetta requires a distinct and highly specialized operatic singing style, predicated on vocal range, pitch control and richness of voice.[275] In addition, actor-singers must match or otherwise complement – by adopting a

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[272] Film theorists such as Linda Williams, "'Something Else Besides a Mother': *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), Mary Ann Doane in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) and E. Ann Kaplan in *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 2013) have written extensively on the maternal melodrama from such a perspective, drawing largely on feminist psychoanalysis as a critical framework in the reading of film texts such as *Stella Dallas*, *Mildred Pierce*, and *Imitation of Life*.

[273] Schatz, Op. Cit., 41.

[274] Ibid., 41.

[275] Not *all* singing in Hollywood operettas, however, is necessarily "operatic": Maurice Chevalier's singing, for instance, was more vaudevillian in style, combining elements of singing-speech, or *sprechgesang*, with jaunty rhythms, which left frequent co-star Jeanette MacDonald to bear the operatic standard. Musical scores and

persona tonally dissonant with the rest of the film, mostly for comic purposes – the variably mocking, serious and frequently camp tone of the operetta narrative, eliciting a rather more presentational than representational style of performance from actors in this genre. Thus Hollywood operettas of the 1930s were populated by a small but capable cast of qualified performers, all of whom either doubled or trebled as stage performers and/or recording artists. Major male stars were limited to Lawrence Tibbett at MGM and Twentieth Century Fox, Maurice Chevalier at Paramount and MGM and Nelson Eddy at MGM, while the list of major female operetta stars included only Grace Moore at MGM and Columbia and, of course, Jeanette MacDonald at Paramount and MGM, whose performance as a star – male or female – within the Hollywood operetta may be seen as exceptionally individuated.

Other Broadway or opera stars and singers such as Tibbett and Moore, as well as Allen Jones and Lily Pons, appeared in Hollywood musicals throughout the decade, but they were never sufficiently individuated as "stars" to generate a cohesive cycle of films, with their own semantic tendencies and structure, built around their persona. Furthermore, while Maurice Chevalier appeared in a number of operettas written or adapted specifically for him, most of which also starred MacDonald, he was not necessarily an "operetta" star, in that he appeared in a number of other non-operetta musicals with varying degrees of success in the early thirties. Therefore, Jeanette MacDonald may be seen as providing the Hollywood operetta with significant iconographic/semantic continuity, in that her tenure as a star associative with that sub-genre outstripped all others'.

The "Queen of Song"

As a young woman, Jeanette MacDonald began a promising career on Broadway, appearing in such productions as *Yes, Yes Yvette* and *Boom Boom* (opposite a young Cary Grant). She was whisked away to Hollywood by Ernst Lubitsch in 1929, as studios and directors scrambled to capitalize on the established popularity and sound-tested experience of stage performers. The same year, she starred opposite Maurice Chevalier in her first picture *The Love Parade* (1929), directed by Lubitsch as the first operetta written specifically for the screen.[276] On contract to Paramount, MacDonald then made *The Vagabond King* (Ludwig Berger, 1930), adapted from the stage operetta as an early Technicolor film,

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numbers in their films were thus specifically tailored to Chevalier's persona (and vocal limitations) and MacDonald's complementary talents. For this reason, I would describe the Hollywood operetta's aural aesthetic as incorporating operatic music consistently throughout its narrative, sung by at least one cast member, while allowing/accommodating for other musical modes to exist alongside or in counterpoint to these numbers. Operetta is thus stylistically complex.

[276] Barrios, Op. Cit., 290.

followed by the musical *Let's Go Native* (Leo McCarey, 1930), in which she featured as part of an ensemble leading cast. In quick succession came *Monte Carlo* (1930), again directed by Lubitsch but without Chevalier, *The Lottery Bride* (Paul L. Stein, 1930) and, on loan to Fox, *Oh! For a Man* (Hamilton MacFadden, 1930), *Don't Bet on Women* (William K. Howard, 1931) and *Annabelle's Affairs* (Alfred L. Werker, 1931). She then returned to Paramount for *One Hour With You* (Lubitsch, 1932) and *Love Me Tonight* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932).

In the first half of the decade, MacDonald gained considerably in recognizability on film and consequently in popularity; in the industry, however, she was valued primarily as a foil for Maurice Chevalier in the "Lubitschean" cycle of sex comedy operettas. This cycle of films was distinguishable from other forms of operetta for, in the words of James Harvey, its betraying a sensibility of "obsessive naughtiness,"[277] a preoccupation with sexual content and innuendo throughout narratives predicated on the desire of a sexually frustrated aristocrat (played by MacDonald) for a lower-born, libidinous rake (usually played by Chevalier).[278] The cycle also evinces an implicit theme of sexual transgressiveness and ultimately rehabilitation, as sexual power is redistributed back and forth between male and female, working-class/plebeian and upper-class/patrician, before Chevalier's frank and dominant male sexuality – his phallic agency – triumphs over MacDonald's subordinate female sexuality. In *The Love Parade*, she learns that her husband must be allowed to be king not "consort": to be politically as well as sexually potent, according to the traditional gender hierarchy; in *One Hour With You*, he is forgiven his sexual infidelity; and in *Love Me Tonight*, MacDonald overcomes her class prejudices – thus betraying royal tradition – to marry the man she loves.[279] Parallel to this narrative trend, discourses surrounding the films tended to assert Chevalier's pre-eminence as star, noting Jeanette MacDonald – who was given second billing to Chevalier and received a fraction of his salary – more as a sort of a pleasing accessory, a supporting player in good voice (recalling early reviews of Ginger Rogers in her dance musicals with Fred Astaire). Tellingly, *Photoplay*'s review of *Love Me Tonight* ran:

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[277] James Harvey, *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood: From Lubitsch to Sturges* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 24.

[278] *Monte Carlo* starred James Buchanan, an English vaudevillian actor, instead of Chevalier. In this film, MacDonald's character falls in love with a count masquerading as her hairdresser; the low-born/high-born class dialectic is preserved up until the point MacDonald realizes Buchanan's true identity, thus eliminating the element of sexual transgressiveness inherent in the redistribution of sexual power and agency which is implicit in Chevalier's operettas. Chevalier also appeared in a musical by Lubitsch which did not star MacDonald: *The Smiling Lieutenant* from 1931. In narrative and sensibility, it is comparable to an operetta, but I would suggest that, in failing to meet the criteria of having at least one performer qualified to sing in an operatic style (neither Chevalier, Miriam Hopkins nor Claudette Colbert attempts it), the film does not pass as operetta.

[279] As Turk astutely points out, however, the ending to *Love Me Tonight* is near gender-bending, in that it is MacDonald who rushes heroically on horse-back to stop the train in which Chevalier has been sent away, thus reversing a trope of romantic comedy (Op. Cit., 121).

> What a picture. First, you have Chevalier (and last, you have Chevalier, and all through this riot entertainment you have Chevalier). And adding her beauty and lovely voice, you have that delightful Jeanette MacDonald.[280]

Early reviews of MacDonald's films with Chevalier reiterated the perception of MacDonald's performance as an afterthought, if a pleasing one, to the leading man's starring role. Indeed, her characters reflected this narrative subordination. Despite the industry's willingness to "cash in" on MacDonald as an attraction,[281] by the end of 1933, with her contract up for re-negotiation, MacDonald was languishing at Paramount.

In late 1932 to early 1933, MacDonald sailed for Europe, believing that she could hold out for more money as an equal to Chevalier in star appeal, and that her popularity abroad would show Hollywood what it was missing. Her plan worked, and while abroad, MacDonald was honoured in an official reception by Mayor Gazagnaire of Cannes, such as had only been provided for Charlie Chaplin previously. During her trip, MacDonald was courted for a contract by Irving Thalberg at MGM, though on the advice of her manager Bob Ritchie, MacDonald chose not to alienate studio boss Louis B. Mayer by prioritizing business with other producers. Ritchie thus secured $4000 a month for MacDonald on contract to Mayer at MGM, a salary that was equal to Joan Crawford's and only $1000 less than Norma Shearer's (Thalberg's wife).[282]

At MGM, MacDonald made *The Cat and the Fiddle* opposite Ramon Novarro, and *The Merry Widow* (1934) with Lubitsch and Chevalier. *Widow* was intended as a return to operetta form in the best Lubitsch manner, consequently given the highest budget of any Hollywood film to date: $1,605,000[283] after 88 days of shooting.[284]The film did not, however, return a profit, and thus marked an end to Lubitsch's operetta cycle and Chevalier's decline as a relevant Hollywood film star. MacDonald, interestingly, did not suffer professionally but rather was assigned the title role in the operetta *Naughty Marietta* (Robert Z. Leonard and W.S. Van Dyke, 1935) opposite Nelson Eddy, marking his film debut and the beginning of one of Hollywood's most lucrative partnerships and cycles of film. Press reports and reviews generally noted Nelson Eddy's novelty over praise of MacDonald, yet she would retain for the next seven years of their working together first billing with their names above the title.

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[280] "The Shadow Stage," *Photoplay* (October 1932), 52.
[281] Fox's "Highlights" on *Oh! For a Man* note that one of the film's "exploitation angles" is to "cash in on Jeanette MacDonald" in light of her recent successes. Garvey, "Highlights on 'Oh For a Man'" (*Oh! For a Man*, PCA file).
[282] Turk, *Hollywood Diva,* Op. Clt., 122-132.
[283] Ibid., 149.
[284] Harvey, Op. Cit., 110.

Their second film together, *Rose Marie* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1936), confirmed the smash effect of the MacDonald-Eddy partnership, earning a quarter of MGM's returns for that year,[285] and their next four films together – *Maytime* (Leonard, 1937), *The Girl of the Golden West* (Leonard, 1938), *Sweethearts* (Van Dyke, 1938) and *New Moon* (Leonard and Van Dyke, 1940) – were successful at the box office. It was not until *Bitter Sweet* (Van Dyke, 1940) and *I Married an Angel* (Van Dyke, 1942) that the cycle showed evidence of exhaustion.

In between films with Eddy, MacDonald starred in several operettas outside this cycle, as previously mentioned: the highly successful *San Francisco* paired with Clark Gable, *The Firefly* with Allan Jones, and *The Broadway Serenade* opposite Lew Ayres. It was evidently in MacDonald's best interest (and Eddy's, as he too starred in his own films apart from MacDonald) to appear in films independently, so as to preserve their individuated star images *as* individuated. Nevertheless, MacDonald was most bankable when matched with Eddy, and it is in this context that she became synonymous with the operetta form, of which the MacDonald-Eddy vehicle remains the quintessential example. MacDonald went from 35th to top ten in the list of "Money-Making Stars" for 1935-1936, and after renegotiating with MGM in the summer of 1936, she was granted a nine-month contract at $125,000 per picture with the option to extend at a higher salary. She could also refuse to appear in more than one film per year with Eddy, retaining rights to perform unlimited radio performances at the same time. By 1937, she would be the top drawing power amongst actresses, according to the *National Box Office Digest*, with Greta Garbo her only rival on the foreign market. In *Fortune*, she was ranked third after Norma Shearer and Shirley Temple as "America's Favorite actress", and she was *Variety*'s pick for the industry's "top musical magnet". She was elected "Queen of the Screen" by readers of *Screen Guide* and continued to be hugely popular internationally. Jeanette MacDonald was thus extremely valuable to MGM, where she continued to resist long-term contracts. In every instance, her films without Eddy proved more popular than his without her, so that when entering into contract renegotiations again in 1939, and having been named Queen of the Movies by *New York Daily News*, she again had considerable leverage. With such an upwards trajectory, it would come as a surprise that in the following year, *Bitter Sweet* failed at the box office.[286] Recalling the trajectory of the Rogers-Astaire musicals at RKO, seven films into the MacDonald-Eddy cycle, their narrative formula had become exhausted.

Nevertheless, MacDonald's longevity, up until this point, as a musical star-performer across two distinct cycles of operetta remains remarkable. She is further unique for having

[285] Turk, *Hollywood Diva,* Op. Cit., 172.
[286] Ibid., 175-237.

been individuated, and indeed idolized, for her technical skill in singing. This may be seen as on a level with – if not surpassing – her imagistic objectification as "beautiful," "glamorous," and overall physically attractive, in keeping with the paradigmatic individuation of female stars in popular discourse. I would argue that the latter representational paradigm – the fetishistic reduction of MacDonald as a "star sign" to pure image in visual terms – functioned largely to contain the potentially threatening and affectively excessive aspects of her musical performance and talent within a phallogocentric paradigm of representation (by which the "active male" serves as primary narrativizing agent, and also by which linear narrative is prioritized over overt aestheticism and/or spectacle that cannot be adequately framed/contained within the narrative's logic). MacDonald's operatic and thus highly individuated singing voice is an aural signifier of her physical femininity (and thus her syntactic role-as-female within the operetta musical), in that she is able to hit high notes impossible to reach via the male vocal register (excepting the *castrato*). Nevertheless, MacDonald's voice-as-sign also functions to emphasize her skill as a performer, imbuing her image with a performative agency and subjectivity resistant to containment within the traditionally gendered politics of representation predicated on the visual objectification of women. As Smith has suggested, the aural affect of a "great female singer" such as MacDonald "spill[s] out beyond the parameters" of phallogocentric narrativization,[287] split traditionally between active/male "looking" and passive/female "to-be-looked-at-ness."[288] In other words, MacDonald's voice confirms her femininity in terms of physical sex but challenges containment within the discourse of frivolity and superficial beauty that has surrounded her visual image. MacDonald's aural affect thus exceeds the traditional signifying function of the female image within the musical, a transgression against the traditionally gendered politics of viewing, which the tendency to fetishize her image in the act of musical performance across her films will be seen as seeking to "correct."

I will now consider Jeanette MacDonald's performance and representation as a female musical star-performer across two cycles of operetta – pre- and post-Code – as a means of drawing out the relationship between the fetishization of her image and the (attempted) containment of her excessive aural affect. Each cycle of films posits MacDonald opposite a single male co-star – Maurice Chevalier in the Lubitschean pre-Code operettas and Nelson Eddy in the post-Code era – in keeping with the musical's "dual-focus narrative"[289] and integrative syntax. As I will show in comparing the two cycles of operetta,

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[287] Smith, Op. Cit., 78.
[288] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Op. Cit., 808.
[289] Altman, "The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative," Op. Cit.

implementation of censorship under the Production Code Administration fundamentally altered gendered character representation, and with it the overall tone of Hollywood operetta over the course of the 1930s. Under the relatively lax censorship of the Studio Relations Committee pre-1934, Jeanette MacDonald tended to portray comically hysterical, sexually repressed women opposite Maurice Chevalier's aggressively sexual, excessively phallic male protagonists; post-1934, on the other hand, opposite the contrastively tame Nelson Eddy, MacDonald's characters were divorced from their explicitly sexual function, and enjoyed significantly more narrative agency. Thus, implementation of censorship under the Production Code Administration effected a tonal shift in operetta away from "sophisticated comedy" towards the melodramatic – and perhaps more "excessively feminine" or camp mode associated with the MacDonald-Eddy partnership.

"Sophisticated Sex": the containment of individuated female talent via sexual objectification in Jeanette MacDonald's pre-Code operettas with Maurice Chevalier

The Love Parade (Ernst Lubitsch, 1929)

One Hour With You (Ernst Lubitsch and George Cukor, 1932)

Love Me Tonight (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932)

The Merry Widow (Ernst Lubitsch, 1934)

Grouped together as produced (with the exception of *The Merry Widow*) prior to the implementation and systematization of censorship under the PCA, Jeanette MacDonald's "Lubitschean" operettas with Maurice Chevalier treated sex – the primary object of pre-Code operetta's protagonists – with a degree of lightness and irreverence that nevertheless worked towards the mitigation of its representational directness. Lubitsch himself was generally granted special dispensation by the Studio Relations Committee, precursor to the PCA, when incorporating heavily suggestive content within his narratives, and for this reason the Lubitschean operettas exhibit a franker acknowledgment of sexuality than other contemporaneous cycles (such as the Astaire-Rogers musicals that, as suggested earlier, may be seen to have sublimated sexual content into eroticized dance numbers).[290] However, it should be noted that Lubitsch did not, in fact, direct what has come to be known as one of the most "Lubitschean" operettas of all time, Rouben Mamoulian's operetta *Love Me Tonight*. Employing a similar storyline (MacDonald's virginal aristocrat from a fictional European kingdom falls in love with playboy Chevalier; their ultimate union tempers his

[290] Harvey, Op. Cit., 4.

rakishness temporarily but, more significantly, teaches MacDonald lasting humility and subordination to her husband) as well as setting and style to Lubitsch's operettas, the film presents a lightness of tone that also approaches bawdiness, but with an air of detachment and sophistication.[291] I would argue that these films are made further semantically cohesive in their positing Jeanette MacDonald in a firmly passive role: their narratives are – with the exception of one post-Code iteration, *The Merry Widow* – predicated on making her the sexual conquest/object of an irrepressibly libidinous male protagonist, played (with the exception of Jack Buchanan in *Monte Carlo*) by Maurice Chevalier. Thusly, MacDonald's performance as a "great female singer" is always already contained within phallogocentric narrative parameters and a representational paradigm by which she is made the object of spectacle under view simultaneously of a narrative subject (Chevalier) and an audience subject. She is consistently reduced to her sexual/biological function.

It is particularly telling that throughout this cycle of films, almost all of MacDonald's solo musical performances tend to take place in her boudoir while she is partially dressed. In *The Love Parade*, MacDonald as the spinster Queen Louise awakes from sleep to regale her ladies-in-waiting with a song about her "Dream Lover;" in *Monte Carlo*, MacDonald's Countess Helene flees her wedding ceremony in a negligee to sing "Beyond the Blue Horizon" out the window of a speeding train; in *Love Me Tonight*, Princess Jeanette croons "Lover" from her balcony, clothed only in her nightgown; and in *The Merry Widow*, MacDonald, as the eponymous widow, sings "If Widows Were Rich" and "Tonight Will Teach Me To Forget" in various stages of dress and undress. Indeed, MacDonald gained a reputation during the first half of the 1930s for appearing in scenes dressed in little more than her underwear, thus earning the title of the "lingerie queen" of Hollywood, or as she became known (disparagingly) to industry insiders, the "boudoir warbler".[292] This aspect of her star image was referenced frequently in early promotional material and press photos of MacDonald, such as in the August 1930 issue of *Photoplay*, which featured a full-page picture of MacDonald in a typical "cheesecake" pose, smiling open-mouthed and wearing a bathing suit, and in which her statistics are given (without age) as 5'5", 122 lbs., with "red-gold hair and greenish-blue eyes. Unmarried."[293]

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[291] Tom Milne has called *Love Me Tonight* "the Lubitsch film that Lubitsch was always trying to pull off but never quite did." *Rouben Mamoulian, 2nd Edition* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 41. It should be noted, of course, that such a favourable comparison of Mamoulian's direction to Lubitsch's is not generally held by those critics and historians who have studied Lubitsch from an auteurist perspective. Generally, those historians and biographers of Lubitsch see *Love Me Tonight* as flawed, while historians and biographers of Mamoulian see the film either as an improvement on Lubitsch, or a tour-de-force of his style.

[292] Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, Op. Cit., 79.

[293] *Photoplay* (August 1930), 23.

The purpose of her scanty dressing on film was, of course, to maximize the amount that MacDonald's body is imaged/objectified onscreen as a visual spectacle. Specifically, this may be seen to have reduced (and thus mitigated) MacDonald's performative affect to an imagistic and sexual function: as Nadine Wills has argued, the seemingly incidental revelation of a woman's body as almost-nude points both literally and figuratively to her actual sex organs and her biological female-ness, which is ostensibly the referent of a star's performative "femininity."[294] Thus the image of Jeanette MacDonald as "lingerie queen" exploits, whilst it also ultimately contains, the potential sexual significations of her body within a phallogocentric paradigm of visual representation. I would argue this functions ultimately to de-emphasize the spectacularity of MacDonald's vocal skill and aural affect – which was overwhelming compared to Maurice Chevalier's (he could not actually sing very well, but rather spoke-sang throughout most of his musical numbers) and re-focus attention on her body in alignment with the male subject's gaze. Indeed, this is borne out in analysis of a single musical sequence between MacDonald and Chevalier, "Anything to Please the Queen," from their first appearance together in *The Love Parade*:

Queen Louise of Sylvania (MacDonald) meets Count Renard (Chevalier) in her private office intending to reprimand him for his scandalous, sexual indiscretions. Louise, a spinster, has awoken that morning with a song on her lips and MacDonald commences "Dream Lover," an operatic aria, clad in a partially see-through nightshift as she flits about her room, attended by a chorus of maids. In such a way, the emotional sincerity of MacDonald's vocal performance is purposely and ironically undercut by her objective spectacularity. When Louise is shortly thereafter introduced to Renard, she is immediately attracted to him, noticeably lightening her magisterial demeanor and formality in order to communicate. Transitioning from spoken dialogue into a lilting *sprechgesang*, she inquires:

Louise: I've got a bad report of you. I wonder what I ought to do with you?

Renard: You really can't be too severe, when my regret is so sincere - and true.

Louise: If you were on probation – could I depend on you?

Renard: To make you think more kindly, let me obey you blindly.

Louise: [singing] You mean you'd really do – Anything to please the queen?

Renard: [suggestively, reverting to *sprechgesang*] *Everything* to please the queen!
Morning, noon and night, [singing] I'm yours to command me!
[reverting to speaking] You want me good, then I'll be good.
You want me bad, then I'll be bad!

[294] Nadine Wills, "'110 per cent woman': the crotch shot in the Hollywood musical," *Screen*, 42.2 (Summer 2001), 124-130.

I mean, I would be bold, [singing] if you demand me!

Louise: [sprechgesang] Understand me: What if I demand your head?

Renard: Perhaps you'd like my arms instead.

Thus, in order to communicate with Renard/Chevalier on the same narrative and syntactic (in the sense of meaning-bearing) level, Louise/MacDonald has to modulate her vocal style – which has been previously established as predicated on a lyrical or aesthetically elevated level via "Dream Lover" – to one somewhere between speech and singing, and thus more accessible to Chevalier. This allows for the verbal significance of the "song's" lyrics to take precedence over its melodic flow, thus highlighting the suggestiveness of Renard's words and re-affirming Chevalier's "phallic authority"[295] over the meaning of the musical sequence.

Thus, the emotional impact of MacDonald's previous musical number, "Dream Lover," which has also been crucially associated with the feminine space of her boudoir, is undercut and literally invaded by Chevalier's entrance into the musical portion of the film. Indeed, the "Anything to Please the Queen" number concludes with Renard marching boldly after Louise through the curtains into her living quarters. Here Lubitsch cuts away to a shot of Louise's butler peering through the keyhole, underscoring the significance of Renard's physical invasion of Louise's space: it is an act of literal passage and symbolic transition. Cutting, then, to Louise and Renard within the interior of her (up to this point) markedly feminine space, they revert back to a-rhythmic speaking, as if to confirm Renard/Chevalier's assertion of phallogocentric authority over the progression of the narrative; this is at the expense of Louise/MacDonald's control over space and vocality – both of which are gendered feminine and thus "excessive" to Chevalier's performance style and to the film's phallogocentric narrative logic (which is confirmed in Queen Louise's capitulation to her husband/king's rule). Chevalier's overtly phallic authority over MacDonald, enacted by the film's prioritization of visual/symbolic narrativization over aural or pre-linguistic expressivity, is hereby established in this – their first – onscreen meeting, and Renard's sexual conquest of Louise.[296]

However, the explicitness of sexual conquest, which would become paradigmatic of the Chevalier/MacDonald cycle of operettas, would prove to pose problems for its leading man regarding his participating in its continuation. While censors appear not to have taken

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[295] Turk, *"Deriding the voice of Jeanette MacDonald,"* Op. Cit., 105.

[296] I reference the "pre-linguistic" here in acknowledgment of Turk's Freudian reading of the affective pleasures of MacDonald's voice (Op. Cit., 112). Turk describes the visceral impact of MacDonald's vocal expression as inhering to an "acoustic authority," rather than the phallogocentric authority of the spoken word and linguistic order – associative with the "Symbolic" – that Chevalier represents and imposes.

issue with the Lubitschean operettas' blatant sexual objectification of the female form (in evidence from the very beginning of *The Love Parade*), they were in fact increasingly concerned with the regulation of *male* sexuality in these early operettas. Interestingly, this echoes the PCA's concerns with the representation of secondary male characters in the Astaire-Rogers dance musicals at RKO. In a memorandum on *The Love Parade* from October 1929, censor James Fisher in fact praised the film for what he considered to be its discreet handling of a scene in which MacDonald appears in a bath, as well as the décolleté gown she wears, proclaiming, "the picture is entirely free from vulgarity" [297] (notwithstanding Chevalier's promise "to be bad [...] morning, noon and night"). In the transition from SRC- to PCA-directed censorship in 1934, however, the previously-assumed "light, gay, frivolous" operetta was increasingly seen as seriously transgressive – particularly for the directness with which it posited an unrestrainedly phallic expression of desire via Chevalier's performance. Joseph Breen's concern over the handling of then-ongoing production *The Merry Widow* speaks to the degree to which Maurice Chevalier's aggressively sexual persona perceptibly guided the tone of operetta up until 1934. In Joseph Breen's memorandum to Will Hays from October 1934, reporting on his recent viewing of *The Merry Widow* (then in post-production), he complained,

> The picture as it now stands is not the light, gay, frivolous, operetta which it is intended that it should be but rather the typical French farce that is definitely bawdy and offensively – in spots – suggestive."

In light of the overall perceptibly offensive tone of the film, Breen insisted on certain deletions previously waived to producer Irving Thalberg, especially concerning the portrayal of Maurice Chevalier's character as a "coxsman". Of most concern to him was

> the offensive characterization of Danilo [Chevalier's character] which the film now has. In the present version he is made to appear not as a light, carefree, happy-go-lucky fellow, but rather as a definitely amoral person.[298]

Chevalier's (not-so-)implicit "amorality" remained in this picture – but crucially as mitigated by the affective power of the widow's (MacDonald) reforming, monogamous love (a

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[297] James B.M. Fisher, memorandum (October 19 1929, *The Love Parade*, PCA file). However, when the film came up for re-issue in January 1936, Breen was not similarly impressed with this "discretion" and advised that Paramount withdraw its application. Joseph Breen to John Hammell, memorandum (January 4 1936, *The Love Parade*, PCA file).

[298] Joseph Breen to William Hays, memorandum (October 22 1934, *The Merry Widow*, PCA file).

significant shift in representational paradigm, which I shall explicate below). Despite the salvaging of *The Merry Widow* for release, Chevalier's by-then established persona was deemed too confrontational to be incorporated into musicals in a satisfying way, and he did not stay long in Hollywood thereafter. By 1935 Breen had made his stock roué all but unrepresentable under the strictures of the Code. Chevalier returned to Europe, not to reappear in Hollywood until 1958 with a self-referential role in Vincente Minnelli's *Gigi*.

Where an operetta *did* posit such a lecherous male protagonist after 1934 – as in *San Francisco* in 1936 – Breen continued to protest vociferously. Commenting on a version of the script from November 1935, in which Clark Gable's character attempts (for a second or third time) to seduce MacDonald's, Breen wrote, "We [...] would like to suggest that some way be found not to characterize Blackie definitely as an immoral man" – quite purposely undermining his overall narrative function.[299] Having previously cautioned producer Louis B. Mayer to take care with the scene in which MacDonald shows her legs to Blackie,[300] Breen went on to question the necessity of a line in which MacDonald's virginal Mary Blake admits to never having had a "love affair;"[301] in such a way, Breen emphasized his concern regarding the theme of masculine corruption of feminine virtues. On the other hand, Breen would express barely any concern over aspects of Nelson Eddy's performance and representation in his post-Code operettas with Jeanette MacDonald. Notably, PCA censors never complained about Eddy's (or any other male lead's, aside from Chevalier and Gable: only their characters may be seen to have consistently sexually objectified MacDonald's female protagonists – excepting in *The Merry Widow*) characterization as corruptive of MacDonald's image.

As Turk has argued, Chevalier's performance of masculinity throughout the Lubitschean cycle of operetta may be characterized as unrestrainedly phallic to the point of monstrosity.[302] I would go further to suggest that the very same reason Chevalier initially balked at starring in Lubitsch's operettas – he felt that he was not "elegant" enough[303] – also made him perfectly, diametrically opposed as a foil to MacDonald according to the traditional dual-focus narrative of the musical. His untrained voice, vaudevillian singing style, tendency towards grotesque vocal exclamations (such as his characteristic "Ah-*haw*" interjection) and his similarly distorted facial expressions (particularly his jutting lower lip, connotative of animalistic sexual openness) all may be seen to have aligned him with a

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[299] Joseph Breen to Louis B. Mayer, memorandum (November 12 1935, *San Francisco*, PCA file).
[300] Joseph Breen to Louis B. Mayer, memorandum, (June 26 1935, *San Francisco*, PCA file).
[301] Joseph Breen to Louis B. Mayer, memorandum (November 12 1935, *San Francisco*, PCA file).
[302] Turk, *"Deriding the voice of Jeanette MacDonald,"* Op. Cit., 105.
[303] Michael Freedland, *Maurice Chevalier* (London: Arthur Barker Ltd., 1981), 112.

sexually liberated, working-class milieu – to which MacDonald's repressed and high-born ladies are distinctly antithetical. In Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight*, Chevalier is thus called upon to perform a vulgarized musical number almost as an antidote to each yearning, romantic number sung by MacDonald: they duet ironizingly on "Isn't It Romantic?" and "Love Me Tonight", while Chevalier's "Mimi" (in which he devolves into little more than grunting) effectively tempers the excessively mannered and feminine romanticism of MacDonald's dream number, "Lover." The juxtaposition is purposely comic and equally purposely designed to restrain the operetta from becoming waylaid by female expressions of subjective desire.

Tellingly, this balance between excessive femininity and performatively phallic desire is *not* struck by the only Lubitschean operetta in which Chevalier does not appear: *Monte Carlo* from 1931. The male lead in this film is played by Jack Buchanan, whose physical presence, semiotically speaking, is less convincingly "dominant male" than he is himself camp and excessively effeminate. His face is thin and delicately featured, reminiscent of a woman's, while his singing voice is light and high. When he duets with MacDonald on such numbers as "Give Me a Moment Please", "Always in All Ways", and "Whatever It Is, It's Grand", his voice does not register in counterpoint to hers (as does Chevalier's) so much as it complements it. In such a way, Buchanan does not appear diametrically opposed to MacDonald but rather performatively *similar*. Thus, despite MacDonald's character's ultimate and humbling capitulation to Buchanan's in marriage at the end of the film, *Monte Carlo* fails to contain the excess aural affects of MacDonald's performance in a symbolic manner, though this is the male protagonist's narrative *raison d'être* within the operettic musical syntax. In such a way, Buchanan's performance throws into relief Chevalier's crucial semantic and syntactic function as representative of male sexual agency within pre-Code Hollywood operetta.

As MacDonald's popularity and relevance as a Hollywood star began to eclipse Chevalier's towards the middle of the decade, however, co-incident with the implementation of the Production Code in 1934, consequent changes in her relative narrative agency and representation may be seen to have altered her dynamic with her leading men, Chevalier in particular. In *The Cat and the Fiddle* and *The Merry Widow*, the first films in which she appeared after the establishment of the Production Code, MacDonald's performance is distinctly less exaggerated and hysterical in her representation of desirous female sexuality in the narrative/non-musical portions of the film. This is the result both of her growing popularity (and thus her characters' increasing tendency to be

portrayed sympathetically on film) and of the implementation of Code regulations against the physical display of the body. As one review of *The Merry Widow* noted, she may be seen to express in the film "a heretofore unsuspected grace and warmth:"[304] hers is a performance of femininity on a human (as opposed to comically elevated and excessive) level. In contrast, Chevalier comes across as less sympathetic, less likable a performer, than he had previously; his character, promiscuous and self-involved, clashes with MacDonald's patiently loving and morally superior widow. It is therefore not surprising that *The Merry Widow* might have seemed a redundant exercise in the Lubitschean operetta form to audiences in 1934: it performed poorly at the American box office, as did Chevalier thereafter.

At the same time, by virtue of Chevalier's decreased narrative centrality in *The Merry Widow*, it presents - for the first time in the cycle - MacDonald in a role of significant narrative agency and subjectivity. As Babington and Evans have noted (despite their criticisms of Altman's system of generic classification elsewhere) the film's sympathies are divided between Chevalier's pragmatic rogue count and MacDonald's romantic widow according to a classic dual-focus narrative structure.[305] In sympathizing with MacDonald-as-Madame Sonia's character, the film opens up a space of performance with subversive potential for its leading lady. In order to illustrate this slippage in representational tendency, as effected by MacDonald's performance, I will now analyze one of her key musical sequences within *The Merry Widow*, her rendition of the Rogers and Hart aria "Vilia." The number functions as MacDonald's introduction within the film; but based on the transformative quality her character is intended to have on Chevalier's, it also marks a significant narrative break, a point of transition between the focus of emotional attention and identification from male to female protagonist.[306] This is effected through a number of intersecting performative and representational techniques.

Madame Sonia, recently widowed but on the cusp of re-entering romantic life, overhears the villagers of Marshovia celebrating in an inn beneath her balcony. Count Danilo (Chevalier), having been sent by King Achmet to seduce and induce Sonia into re-marriage (thus to keep her wealth within the kingdom), observes from below. Compelled by the music, MacDonald-as-Sonia moves to the edge of the balcony and breaks into song, taking up the melody in a slower, contemplative tempo. The villagers stop abruptly to listen – save

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[304] "The Merry Widow," *The Hollywood Reporter* (1 September 1934, *The Merry Widow*, PCA file).

[305] Babington and Evans, Op. Cit., 80.

[306] As such, I agree with Babington and Evans's reading of MacDonald's function in the narrative, "entail[ing] a constant interplay between stereotype and individual" (Op. Cit., 83): she transcends her role as "object" of the narrative (and the extra-diegetic gaze) into a narrativizing agent, herself.

for the violinist who moves to accompany Sonia softly on his instrument – as Sonia expresses her heartfelt longing for a lover (not *her* lover, as she does not yet have one; Sonia's is a desire *to desire*). The sequence's narrative framing is therefore subtly but nevertheless significantly different from MacDonald's performance of "Dream Lover" in *The Love Parade* (which is more light-hearted and parodic in tone, viewed with an ironizing eye analogous to Renard's ideological perspective): "Vilia" is literally show-stopping both within and without the diegesis of the film: At the same as Sonia forces the Marshovians to bear witness to her emotional turmoil, MacDonald's performance breaks the narrative continuity of Danilo's quest; she thus re-adjusts the film's narrational perspective, asserting a strongly feminine – as opposed to phallic – authority over its meaning.

In this instance, MacDonald's imagistic representation does not supersede her exercising an aurally narrativizing control over the musical sequence, as, importantly, she is not seen to be "watched" by the villagers or Danilo but rather "listened to." Separated spatially from both parties, and framed in medium- to long-shot by Lubitsch, the aural integrity of MacDonald's performance is prioritized over her imagistic spectacularity. Unusually for a diegetic audience in a musical, the villagers are actually seen to *turn away* from her direction, as if overcome with emotion and in order to better experience her song. In emphasis, Lubitsch cuts to a shot over MacDonald's shoulder to reveal – from Sonia's perspective – the empty courtyard below and the overall *absence* of spectatorship. Subsequently, MacDonald's tremulous soprano alights over shots of her immobilized listeners, becoming a purely aural expression of female desire, "decorporealized" from the significatory limitations of her visual icon.[307] This is significantly anachronistic for the female musical performer, who as Cohan has shown, tends to perform "to be looked at" first and listened to secondarily.[308] MacDonald's performance thus proceeds more as an affective phenomenon *to be experienced* than objective spectacle *to be seen*. Her performance transcends the phallogocentric system of representation predicated on the visual to indulge in what Turk has termed the "incantatory:" her performance is "disengaged from the hegemony of the spoken word" and the referent image of woman *as image*.[309]

Thus, Sonia/MacDonald's performance escapes (however transiently) phallogocentric conceptualization. This is confirmed by Chevalier's notable absence – both aurally and optically – almost entirely from the sequence (despite his ostensible presence according to the film's narrative logic). Save for one insert shot, Chevalier does not appear at

[307] Turk, "Deriding the Voice of Jeanette MacDonald," Op. Cit., 111.
[308] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man," Op. Cit.
[309] Turk, "Deriding the Voice of Jeanette MacDonald," Op. Cit., 110-111.

all, and he therefore recedes as a subjective point of identification for the audience. When he *does* appear, the effect is rather more to undercut his authority over the musical event than to confirm it: as Sonia pauses for a moment from her lyrical complaint, a bodiless tenor voice takes up her tune in response; for a brief moment, in the context of the romantic plot (despite the common knowledge that, for all essential purposes, Chevalier cannot sing), it would seem, logically, to emanate from Danilo/Chevalier. Cutting to the source, however, the voice is revealed to belong to one of Danilo's subordinate soldiers, singing under Danilo's conduction. In this moment, Chevalier's vocal inferiority – representative of his fundamental un-matched-ness to MacDonald – is driven home: he has to resort to a vocal masquerade in order to communicate with her on the same emotional/affective level, and in so doing, the line between spoken/sung word and "true" referent meaning is broken. The musical number, as performed by MacDonald, thereby prioritizes a visceral experience of pathos, as channeled through her vocalization, over the phallogocentric mode of narrativization that Chevalier represents.

This is significant in the context of MacDonald's later appearances in operetta, as it lays bare the subversive potential that female musical performance insufficiently contained within phallogocentric representational context presents. MacDonald's vocal expression of female desire through "Vilia" disturbs the narrative logic of *The Merry Widow*, otherwise predicated on Danilo's "getting" of Madame Sonia (along with a fair degree of moral chastisement). Chevalier, unable to perform his usual wolfish musical-comedy gags under the watchful eye of the PCA, becomes passive audience to – rather than active participant within – Sonia/MacDonald's sonic universe in the musical sequences. Indeed, later when the widow (in disguise) and Danilo have met for the second time, they dance to the "Merry Widow Waltz," neither of them singing – presumably to cover for the fact that Chevalier could not match MacDonald emotional register to suit the tone of the scene – as if moved physically to action by the force of the music. The moment enacts Danilo's emotional capitulation to Sonia, as well as Chevalier's relative subordination to MacDonald's performance. In *The Merry Widow*, MacDonald is thus established as a musical star in her own right, her image having outgrown reliance on Chevalier for its referent meaning.

Not So "Naughty": the containment and transgressiveness of individuated female talent in Jeanette MacDonald's post-Code operettas with Nelson Eddy

Naughty Marietta (Robert Z. Leonard and W. S. Van Dyke, 1934)

Rose Marie (W. S. Van Dyke, 1936)

Maytime (Robert Z. Leonard, 1937)

The Girl of the Golden West (Robert Z. Leonard, 1938)

Sweethearts (W. S. Van Dyke, 1938)

New Moon (Robert Z. Leonard and W. S. Van Dyke, 1940)

Bitter Sweet (W. S. Van Dyke, 1940)

From their first film together, *Naughty Marietta* in 1934, Jeanette MacDonald's musicals with Nelson Eddy were actively promoted as romantic (as opposed to sexy), adventurous (as opposed to sophisticated), and psychologically realistic (as opposed to parodic). This was largely due to a shift in narrative focus away from the libidinous, phallic male embodied by Maurice Chevalier in the Lubitschean pre-Code operettas and onto the swashbuckling hero embodied by Nelson Eddy in the post-Code operetta era. "Relative[ly] passive," as Turk has argued, Eddy's sexual energies were channeled more innocuously into a robust singing style and forthright persona that had the effect of "eroticizing [MacDonald's] nonvocal interactions" and compounding (as opposed to counteracting) her aural affectivity and incantatory effect in song.[310] As *Screenland* put it in review of *Naughty Marietta*,

> Mr. Eddy is very new, very handsome – and different. You've never seen a movie hero like him before. He has a really splendid voice, but he appeals first of all as a manly figure, romantic but believable.[311]

Nelson Eddy's star image and persona were thus constructed as antithetical to the excesses of sexuality and sophistication that were attributable to the Lubitschean, pre-Code hero of operetta. As a result, MacDonald's aristocratic prima donnas post-1934 were liberated, to a certain extent, of their objectively sexual function: their prerogative, essentially, to have sex with Maurice Chevalier was replaced by more dramatically and psychologically motivated quests, often purposely counteractive to and/or protracting a romantic conciliation with Nelson Eddy. In *Naughty Marietta*, for instance, MacDonald's heroine flees an arranged marriage to take on the identity of a casquette girl, thus necessitating her avoidance of Eddy's soldier's romantic overtures; in *Rose Marie*, her allegiance to her fugitive brother prevents her from entering into a relationship with the Canadian Mountie (Eddy) in his pursuit; *New Moon* posits MacDonald as a spoiled French aristocrat ideologically opposed to

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[310] Ibid., 105-106.

[311] *Screenland* (*Naughty Marietta*, PCA file).

Eddy's revolutionary politics; and in *Maytime*, *The Girl of the Golden West*, and *Bitter Sweet* their love is hampered by a disparity in their cultural and/or socio-economic backgrounds. In such a way, the push-and-pull of MacDonald's and Eddy's sexual attraction to one another is translated into ideological conflict in accordance with the classically integrative musical narrative and syntax.

In highlighting the dual-focus aspect of the MacDonald/Eddy cycle, I make a departure from Turk's psychoanalytic reading of the same films, whereby he elevates MacDonald's vocal performance as a source of affective pleasure in each text over the ideological implications of narrative.[312] However, it is possible to perform a simultaneously structuralist analysis of these films' attempts to contain the affective excesses of MacDonald's individuated musical performance as a female star alongside a more subversive reading of certain instances of performance. If, as I have suggested, MacDonald's characters' narrative centrality and psychological individuation were augmented in/by post-Code operettas in the absence of explicitly sexually predatory male protagonists, I would argue that her post-Code musical performances also, however, become increasingly melodramatic in their stylization and, in terms of her visual representation, increasingly ostentatious as a means of fetishizing, and thus attempting to contain, MacDonald's aural affect within a phallogocentric paradigm of spectacularity. This is strategically effected through MacDonald's costuming (which is rendered ever-more visually spectacular and over-the-top in musical numbers), her framing (which focuses on her face in close-up while singing) and in the narrative motivation/bracketing of her musical numbers (by which her major emotive solos are generally "explained" as performed for a diegetic audience, thus re-establishing her to-be-looked-at-ness from both within and without the filmic text). If MacDonald's performative affect opposite Nelson Eddy in these later operettas is, then, ostensibly more "human," natural and "freely feminine", as Susan Smith has put it,[313] at the narrative/representational level, her musical performance nevertheless functions to re-ascribe spectacularity to her image in being made a fetish object. Her subjective/narrativizing "voice" is thus disavowed, if not wholly denied, in its relegation to/containment within instances of self-conscious performance.

As I have shown, the enduring image of Jeanette MacDonald from the pre-Code era was that of a semi-dressed lingerie queen, reduced to her sexual, biological function. From 1934 onwards, however, as a result of censorship regulations (as well as MGM production values, which tended towards ostentation) MacDonald was seldom shown in such stages of

[312] Turk, "Deriding the voice of Jeanette MacDonald," Op. Cit., 105.
[313] Smith, Op. Cit., 76.

undress. Her full-length image was thereafter usually costumed in the elaborate period dresses for which MGM designer Adrian was famed: throughout most of her films post-1934 – *The Merry Widow, Naughty Marietta, San Francisco, Maytime, The Firefly, The Girl of the Golden West, New Moon* and *Bitter Sweet* – MacDonald appears for the most part in some version of a hoop-skirted or bustled dress accessorized with ruffles, feathers, lace, glitter and/or sequins, usually wearing a complementary elaborate coiffure, while her jewelry, hats and accessories are almost always ostentatious and glittering. Thus, the composite image of woman in operetta, as exemplified by Jeanette MacDonald in the post-Code era, may be seen as comprised of symbols of wealth, beauty, and overall excess.[314] Where she was once under-dressed, she was now over-dressed.

Whereas MacDonald's physicality/sexuality may further be seen as having been denied – almost to the point of over-compensation – via elaborate costuming, I would argue that her framing, particularly during musical performances, worked simultaneously to de-mystify – to re-image and to re-physicalize – the source of her aural affect, which is her individuated talent in singing. When performing either in duet with Nelson Eddy or solo, MacDonald tends to be framed in close-up, thus focusing optic attention on the physical contortions of her face as she emotes. In such a way, MacDonald's visual representation in the act of singing seeks to narrativize her performance – to investigate and ascribe emotional motivation – thus to "expose the mysterious workings" of her voice,[315] and to link it back to a visual/tangible – and thus more stable, according to a phallogocentric paradigm of representation – referent. In such a way, recourse to the close-up bridges the spatial gap between MacDonald and the viewer – and MacDonald and Eddy – as a means of relocating and refocusing feminine expressiveness and female desire onto the physical body, so that it does not fully transcend into the amorphous "incantatory" as argued by Turk.[316]

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[314] This is not to say, however, that the image of MacDonald's naked body is disavowed in entirety via her visual representation in post-Code operetta; indeed, it is frequently referenced throughout these later films. In *San Francisco*, for instance, MacDonald's ingénue goes in for an audition with a lecherous nightclub owner played by Clark Gable. He asks her what she does, and she replies that she is a singer. He growls, "Let's see your legs;" she reiterates that she is a singer, and he repeats his command. Dutifully, MacDonald hikes up her dress, though she is just out of frame, preventing the audience from actually seeing MacDonald's by-now famous legs. Similarly in *New Moon*, MacDonald is heard just off-screen while taking a bath: the audience is not privileged with a cut-away shot to MacDonald – such as would have happened under Lubitsch's direction – but the image of her naked body is nevertheless suggested. In such a way, the *absence* as much as the actual presence of MacDonald's flesh refers to the physical/sexual body underneath the trappings of post-Code operetta costume and decorum. Thus these visual signifiers of her femininity serve to confirm MacDonald's essential physicality and sexuality as female in a more oblique manner.

[315] Jennifer Fleeger, "Deanna Durbin and the Mismatched Voice," *Camera Obscura*, 27:3 (2012), 76.

[316] Through a reading of MacDonald's performances with Eddy, which focuses particularly on their last film *I Married an Angel*, Turk ("Deriding the voice of Jeanette MacDonald," Op. Cit., 106-112) argues that their musicals shift "emphasis from the logocentric to the incantatory" through "vocal symbiosis," and that this effectively "decorporealizes" their coupling's erotic affect into an "ever-renewable postponement." In such a way, MacDonald's vocal performance "reactivate[s] the hallucinatory pleasures of acoustic omnipotence associated

Two of MacDonald's and Eddy's most famous duets – "Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life" from their earliest feature *Naughty Marietta* and "Wanting You" from one of their later films *New Moon* – exemplify this representational paradigm. In both instances, song functions to reveal desire: via "Sweet Mystery," Marietta (MacDonald) publicly reveals her love for Captain Warrington (Eddy) by bursting into song during the Governor's Ball; in "Wanting You," the Duc de Villiers confesses his feelings to Marianne alone in the bayou. In the former, MacDonald is framed alone in close-up at the beginning of the number; in the latter case, Eddy is framed in two-shot with MacDonald, firmly establishing Marianne/MacDonald as the object of his/the audience's desirous gaze. Eddy is framed in close-up towards the end of "Sweet Mystery," but this is balanced in two-shot by the presence of MacDonald within and towards the centre of frame. Again, while Eddy is framed in close-up listening to MacDonald's portion of "Wanting You," he is not granted a single close-up whilst singing; MacDonald, however, is. The visualization of MacDonald's singing face is therefore privileged over Eddy's in capitulation to a traditionally gendered politics of viewing that seeks to investigate the source of female vocal authority – to bring it back to the imagistic source.

However – and in acknowledgment of Turk's theorization in this regard – through subtle strategies of performance, MacDonald manages actually to transgress these constraints (if not to transcend them) and the passivity of her overall role as object of Eddy's diegetic and our/the audience's extra-diegetic gaze. In such a way, her performance is not fully contained within the operetta's gendered paradigm of representation. Whenever MacDonald is framed in two-shot with Eddy, for instance, as when at the beginning of "Wanting You" she listens to his declaration of love, her face is in almost constant motion – she nods, smiles, closes her eyes, opens them, points – responding to his vocal inflections so as to convey an active discursive response, as opposed to passive submissiveness (similar, it should be noted, to Ginger Rogers's active-listening to Astaire when he sings, as previously discussed). Though her gestures register on the one hand as histrionic and/or excessive to the signifying function of the lyrics – her clasped hands, for example, as she sings "Every night I am longing to/Hold you close to my eager breast" thus literalize the line's signified meaning unnecessarily – she nevertheless communicates her own visceral response to the words and melody, which translates as establishing a certain agency over her own

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with prelinguistic, infantile narcissism," thus subversive of the phallogocentric narrative paradigm associable with classical Hollywood cinema (as per Mulvey) and predicated on the imagistic representation of women. I do not deny that this decorporealization is also in effect (without entering into the more speculative aspects of psychoanalytic reception theory) but it is purposely constrained by traditionally imagistic means of female representation, which prevent MacDonald's performances from becoming fully transcendent in the way Turk has argued.

performance. In this instance, MacDonald could not be farther away from the contrastively posed and plastic faces of Busby Berkeley's chorines.

It is this very "unnecessary-ness" of MacDonald's gestural performance in her films with Eddy, and particularly her solos therein, that indicate her transgressiveness within the traditionally gendered paradigm of representation, as she enters into a perceptibly camp mode of performance. Her vocal performances are exaggerated, histrionic, and thusly excessive, but without a sense of irony in mitigation of its "innocence" or naiveté.[317] This is borne out particularly in her more operatic performances in the MacDonald-Eddy cycle, particularly *Maytime* and *Bitter Sweet*, in which she performs arias that express her devastation at the loss of her lover ("Czaritza" and "Les Huguenots" in *Maytime*, "Zigeuner" in *Bitter Sweet*). In their staging, the numbers work towards containing MacDonald's aural subjectivity within the bounds of one or two discreet solo performances. As such, they are not balanced by a male vocal presence and thus disturb/interrupt the duality of focus set out by each film's narrative. To compensate, therefore (as in MacDonald's duets with Eddy and in any of her earlier solos throughout the Lubitschean operetta cycle, with the exception of *The Merry Widow*), there is a constant, fetishistic return to her face in close-up, as if to re-affirm her imagistic value over her aural affect.[318] Notwithstanding this imagistic return, however, MacDonald's performance(s) arguably transgress the "good taste" and self-effacement of style which is paradigmatic of Classical Hollywood Cinema, offering pleasures in viewing/listening that may be experienced outside a (phal)logocentric framework as camp.

In all three numbers, MacDonald is costumed in fantastical fashion: in "Les Huguenots" she wears the embellished version of the kit of a 17th-century cavalier,[319] while in "Czaritza" and "Zigeuner," she is outfitted to outlandish effect in exaggeratedly feminine clothing: voluminous skirts, excessive jewelry, and large and glittering headpieces that effect a double-framing of her face in close-up. In such a way, *Maytime* and *Bitter Sweet* insist on *looking at* MacDonald sing, but the insistence is excessive to the extent that it reads as flagrant, ostentatious, and altogether "too much." Beyond these representational factors, MacDonald's vocal performance registers as similarly emphatically mannered and precise.

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[317] Sontag, Op. Cit., 282, has argued that "pure camp" is naïve: it is not aware of itself as camp and affected.

[318] As a representational strategy, this recourse to the close-up need not be read as a strategy of containment – but rather a functional documentation of performance – were it not for the overt aestheticization of her face (she is heavily made up and consistently facially framed by a hat or headpiece) at the same, thus fetishizing her face-as-image.

[319] Admittedly, this could be read as an instance of female-to-male cross-dressing, which, as Nadine Wills ("Women in Uniform," Op. Cit.) has shown, often functions rather more ironically in musicals to underscore the fact of a female star's biological sex than to offer the subversive potential of her essential re-gendering.

MacDonald hits each note exactingly, extending the trilling high notes (of which there are many, suitable to her soprano voice) in aural signification of the intensity of her character's feeling. She further punctuates such notes gesturally – often by tilting her head, raising her eyebrows, small gestures that take on added significance under the tight camera's magnification – thus doubling (in visually reiterating) the emotive affect of her vocalization. As such, MacDonald's operatic performances lack subtlety; they draw attention to themselves as such, though crucially not as self-parody but rather more sincerely as purposeful and significant set pieces. In thus over-determining their own meanings within a strict representational paradigm, MacDonald's operatic performances are accessible as camp: "more than" what they have to be, stylistically, and certainly excessive to narrative logic.

It is telling of MacDonald's solo numbers' threat to the linear and phallogocentric flow of narrative that they are staged as performances within performances. In bracketing these moments of emotional expression as thus also self-consciously performative, the subjective resonance of MacDonald's aural performances is strategically disavowed via her recuperation within a traditionally gendered politics of viewing. It is no coincidence that out of the eight films she made with Nelson Eddy between 1934 and 1942, in five she plays professional singers/prima donnas – *Rose Marie*, *Maytime*, *The Girl of the Golden West*, *Sweethearts* and *Bitter Sweet*. Thus, when she is not dueting romantically with Nelson Eddy – her performative motivation there ostensibly contained within a phallogocentric construct of heterosexual female desire – MacDonald's solo vocal performance in the post-Code/classically integrative operetta is denied a subjective and narrativizing function. In these ways, Jeanette MacDonald's performance of femininity in her post-Code operettas with Nelson Eddy is constrained – if not always effectively contained – within a traditionally gendered paradigm of representation.

Yet MacDonald's performance style is liberated and naturalized to a certain extent on the narrative level of representation – that is, in her non-musical sequences – in that she is "empowered, through Eddy's relative passivity, to project genuine warmth, commitment, and sentiment" [320] in embodiment of the characters she plays. This performative "naturalness," however, registers ultimately as incongruent or discordant with the excessive aestheticization of her image within her musical performances. Ironically enough, the juxtaposition of these two modes of performance may be seen to imbue MacDonald's post-Code operettas with an overall camp sensibility for their insistence on imagistic excess,

[320] Turk, "Deriding the voice of Jeanette MacDonald," Op. Cit., 106.

compounded by MacDonald's emotional delivery and gestural histrionics.[321] Indeed, there is no more camp image than that of Jeanette MacDonald as Sarah Millick in *Bitter Sweet* performing "Zigeuner," the opera her recently deceased husband (Nelson Eddy) wrote for her: outfitted in a diaphanous white gown trimmed garishly in rusty orange, sporting layers of beads and a headdress three times the size of her actual head – hair tucked away so as to focus attention squarely on the emotive contortions of her face as she sings her lover's words – she is an unknowing parody of a fetish object, an over-determined symbol of desire indefinitely deferred on behalf of the female (a "living emotion" as Marcia's husband Nazaroff remarks in *Maytime*). If Sontag is correct in positing that the "purest" camp is innocent of its own subversiveness,[322] then MacDonald's performance of "Zigeuner" is indeed pure camp: so heavily adorned in recourse to the imagistic representation of woman that it exceeds believability within narrative logic. The affective pleasures in viewing this performance, particularly in light of the possibility of their camp readings, destabilizes the phallogocentric paradigm of representation by which the post-Code operetta ostensibly operates. This speaks to the subversive potential of female performance and representation in the classically integrated Hollywood musical, even under strategies of containment and regulation. It further proves MacDonald's – intentional or not – transgression of such representational limitations via performance.

Conclusion

As I have argued, operetta, as an iteration of the classically integrative Hollywood musical, sought to re-contain the threateningly subversive excesses of performative affect and female subjectivity represented by MacDonald's classically trained, and thus highly individuated, singing voice within a fetishistic paradigm of visual representation. Whereas pre-Code Lubitschean operettic narratives precluded recourse to the fetishization of individuated female performance (always already narratively predicated on the juxtaposition of active male sexual agency versus passive female sexual objectification), MacDonald's aural affect in post-Code musicals with Nelson Eddy was contrastively un-chained and un-mitigated by a referent, objective (sexual) function. Thus her aural spectacularity threatened subversion of the traditionally gendered politics of representation predicated on the *visual* spectacularity of the female image. As Turk has offered via

[321] Dyer in *Heavenly Images*, Op. Cit., 177, has compared MacDonald to Judy Garland in terms of having an overall camp affect, positing the former as "well established as a camp queen [in] an already pretty camp genre."
[322] Sontag, Op. Cit., 282.

psychoanalysis, MacDonald's vocal performance may be seen to have asserted a sonic paradigm of signification beyond the traditionally imagistic, potentially privileging pleasures of the incantatory – the intangibly affective – over phallogocentric narrativization, which is rooted in the visually symbolic. The fetishization of the image of MacDonald in the act of musical performance functioned, therefore, as a strategy for containing the individuated female voice – a defining semantic feature of the operetta – within a phallogocentric paradigm of signification, though not always with lasting effect.

Chapter 4

"Babysexy": Shirley Temple and the containment of femininity within the child narrative musical

Between 1935 and 1938 (or when she was between the ages of six and ten), Shirley Temple was the most popular film star in Hollywood. In less than a decade, she generated hundreds of millions of dollars in box office receipts and merchandise and almost single-handedly rescued Twentieth Century Fox from bankruptcy during the Depression.[323] Nevertheless, she was one of few established female musical performer-stars of the late 1930s whose popularity and box-office appeal did not survive Hollywood's transition into the war and post-war eras (Jeanette MacDonald was another example). It would seem that as Shirley Temple outgrew her childish body and persona, so too did the American public outgrow – or lose interest in – Shirley Temple.

Film theorists and historians have tended to take Temple's rampant popularity during the mid- to late-1930s, which was followed by her subsequent rapid decline in the run-up to World War II, as indicative of a certain mass-cultural obsession with childhood and children in Depression-era America. For scholars Karen Lury, Lori Merish, Nadine Wills and child psychologist James Kincaid, this trend towards "child-loving", or fixation on childhood and children as subject matter/objects for contemplation in art and popular culture bordered on the latently paedophilic. Such an obsession with, and desire for, children, images of children, and/or childlike attitudes and behaviours was derived, these theorists have argued, from their real or imagined association with innocence, freedom, and vulnerability – qualities which are deemed "Other" to physical (that is, sexual) maturity and are thereby made paradoxically eroticizable in being constrained as "different." As Gaylyn Studlar has argued in analysis of Mary Pickford, whose broad appeal as an early female star may be traced back to a sort of performative juvenation or tendency towards child-impersonation, her willful and protracted performance of youth and innocence – both within her films and without in promotional discourses – functioned as a means of disavowing the potentially threatening aspects of her success as a powerful woman within the film industry and popular culture more broadly. In such a way, Pickford may be seen to have invoked a "paedophilic gaze" self-consciously in order to re-contain and thus make "safe" and accessible for male and female audiences alike her spectacular affect and female

[323] Temple put her studio $30 million into profit by the end of 1940. Anne Edwards, *Shirley Temple: American Princess*, (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1989), 129.

sexuality through seeming vulnerability, innocence, self-effacement and self-objectification within a traditionally gendered – and now also age-attendant – politics of viewing.[324] Using the example of Mary Pickford, Studlar has thus illustrated the links between juvenility, vulnerability and femininity as performative codes and representational modes, evocative of the erotic, and convergent in the figure of the female child/child impersonator.

Interestingly, Studlar has gone on in her most recent work to disavow that an invocation of the paedophilic gaze may thus be ascribed to Shirley Temple, willfully or not, via her representation in films from the 1930s. Studlar claims that her films, in positing Temple's character most frequently opposite a father or father figure (sometimes as part of an unbalanced triangular relationship including both maternal and paternal figures, nevertheless weighted narratively in favour of the father-daughter relationship) function syntactically to reclaim "masculinity for domesticity" in the context of a Depression-era socio-economic upheaval that generated a nationwide crisis of familial stability.[325] "[T]he whole point of Temple's films," Studlar avers, "is their textual attempt to construct the love between a little girl and a man (a father, a grandfather, a father-in-the-making) as being of a different order than that of paedophilia."[326] While I do not argue that Temple's films may *attempt* to disavow the paedophilic connotations implicit in their obvious narrative and visually spectacular objectification of Temple, I would disagree that Temple has no meaningful sexual function in her musical films. I would argue that the erotic aspects of her performance as an extraordinary female talent are fetishized within her musical numbers in keeping with the musical's structural method of containing individuated female talent within specifically designated-as-spectacular sequences. However, in keeping with post-Code dictates against the explicit or perceptibly implicit sexualized depiction of the female musical performer, the fact of Temple's physical immaturity – thus her ostensible pre-sexuality – functions to disavow (if not effectively discount) her erotic significance.

In order to integrate Temple's spectacular musical performances into the narrative of her films according to a classical Hollywood musical syntax predicated on the Platonic ideal of integration, however, it was nevertheless necessary that Temple's role as female protagonist be posited and read in diametric opposition to a paternal figure's symbolic masculinity. The narrative solution to this syntactic problem was solved via the musical narratives developed by Twentieth Century Fox around Temple – and perfected in that sub-cycle of starring vehicles that I shall term "classic" Shirley Temple features – by which a

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[324] Gaylyn Studlar, "Oh, 'Doll Divine': Mary Pickford, Masquerade and the Pedophilic Gaze," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, eds. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002.
[325] Ibid., 58.
[326] Gaylyn Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 65.

maternal or surrogate-mother figure stands in to perform/embody that sexual function which is ostensibly denied to Shirley Temple in heterosexual matrimony with her father. Thusly, the narrative – which I shall term the "classical child narrative" – built around Temple may be seen to posit her as a sort of "Little 'Miss Fix-It' who, as Studlar observes, "solve[s] adult[s'] problems through childish machinations," engineering the marriage (or re-marriage) of her mother (figure) and father (figure).[327] However, I would argue that Temple's characters' narrative agency in this respect, as a willful problem-solver, is purposely mitigated in her films for two reasons: firstly, to preserve the tenuous syntactic coherence of the musical, which would have been destabilized in Temple's exercising considerable narrative agency as a female protagonist *in addition* to being the primary source of affective spectacular pleasure (which, as I have shown, was the case for Ginger Rogers in the later RKO dance musicals); secondly, to preserve the myth of Temple's "spontaneous immanence" as a force of nature and source of entertainment. In a sense, then, Temple's films may be seen to posit her less in terms of narrative subjectivity (in that her agency and autonomy is negated through her seeming cuteness and vulnerability and the presupposition of her "cosseting" by other characters, according to Studlar)[328] and more in terms of an objective correlative function. Temple's character's presence unites others around the common purpose of her protection: she is both symbol for and site of the ideological conciliation on which the musical syntax is predicated, just as Temple's presence as star lends semantic and syntactic cohesion the cycle overall. This aspect of Temple's representation, as I will show, worked to reinforce her image as a "priceless child" and crucially to efface the constructedness of her image as a performance and further as a work of labour.

As Studlar has noted, the emergence of the female child and/or the juvenated female star as an iconic figure within Hollywood cinema may be traced back to a Victorian tradition of "child watching" and the development of the "priceless child" archetype in 1920s American cinema.[329] As defined by Studlar, the priceless child "was valued for his or her emotional rather than economic value,"[330] a sign that would come to carry even more ideological weight in the fall-out of the Great Depression, as embodied by Shirley Temple. Charles Eckert, one of the first historians to consider Shirley Temple in terms of her socio-economic context and ideological significance, has argued that Temple's smiling visage was employed actively in popular discourses to disavow the realities of child labour and suffering

[327] Ibid., 93.
[328] Ibid., 58.
[329] Ibid., 4.
[330] Ibid., 5.

in Depression-era America; at the same time, she was confirmedly, paradoxically, a working child and heavily implicated in the relative economic successes of her studio. Further, Temple may be seen to have represented the "exuberant optimism" of what John F. Kasson has called the "emotional regime" (using a term borrowed from William Reddy) of the Great Depression, performing "conspicuous demonstrations of confidence, cheerfulness, and optimism" in the face of crippling depression and doubt.[331] Thus arguably Shirley Temple, or the image "Shirley Temple", has been over-burdened with paradoxical meanings and ideological significations in cultural discourse since the 1930s. Even President Roosevelt's pronouncement on Temple at the time of the release of *Baby Take a Bow* in 1934 managed simultaneously to demean Shirley Temple (by over-simplifying her appeal) and demand an impossible social responsibility from one small child: "When the spirit of the people is lower than at any other time during this Depression," he pronounced, "it is a splendid thing that for just fifteen cents, an American can go to a movie and look at the smiling face of a baby and forget his troubles."[332]

It should be noted, of course, that Shirley Temple was not the first or only child star to enjoy a large fan following by the 1930s. Jackie Coogan, for instance, had become internationally famous for his acclaimed role in *The Kid* with Charlie Chaplin in 1921, while Jackie Cooper was one of the most recognizable and popular child actors in the popular *Our Gang* series of the early 1930s. As of March 1935, Cooper still just outstripped Temple's salary of $1250 a week with an income of $1350 (though if Shirley's mother Gertrude Temple's salary of $250 a week had been counted out of Shirley's earnings, as she was employed by Twentieth Century Fox as Shirley's on-set guardian, Shirley Temple would have out-earned Jackie Cooper by $150).[333] Indeed, trade and fan magazines frequently featured spots on child actors such as Baby Leroy and Jane Withers (who appeared with Temple in *Bright Eyes*, and whom Gertrude Temple and Shirley's management viewed as a threat to her unique appeal). Cecil Morrison proclaimed a "golden age of youthful endeavour on the screen [...] [in] the present child-conscious era," and the January 1935 issue of *Photoplay* featured an article on "Big Pay Babes", including David Holt ("he knows just what to do when he goes before the cameras"), Virginia Weidler ("a big bet at the box office"), June Preston ("cherubic" and looking very much like Shirley Temple), and Baby Leroy ("The Scene Stealer [...] he's that big a draw").[334] Child performers other than Shirley Temple were therefore a significant draw at the box office throughout the 1930s and part of a trend traceable back to

[331] John F. Kasson, "Shirley Temple's Paradoxical Smile", *American Art* (25:3, Fall 2011), 16.
[332] Shirley Temple Black, *Child Star: An Autobiography* (London: Headline Book Publishing PLC, 1989), 83.
[333] Cecil Morrison, "Just a Bunch of Babies," *Photoplay* (March 1935), 50.
[334] "A Quartet of Big Pay Babes," *Photoplay* (January 1935), 6.

the 1910s when Mary Pickford and other such "juvenated" stage-to-screen stars as Mary Miles Minter and Lillian Gish emerged as a few of the first major Hollywood stars. What makes Temple unique in this regard, however, was her extraordinary salary, the sheer volume of fan material and merchandise in/on which she appeared at the height of her fame, and her enduring reputation as a cultural icon.[335]

Despite this tendency to speak of Shirley Temple in representational terms – to address her symbolic image as opposed to the "actual" performer – it remains that Shirley Temple, as an actor-dancer-singer, was one of the most unconventional performers and personalities of the 1930s, bracketing even the fact of her extreme youth. In 1938, Temple led popularity polls, followed by Clark Gable, Sonja Henie, and Mickey Rooney, and two years later in 1940, she was still fifth most-popular, trailing only Rooney, Tyrone Power, Spencer Tracy, and Gable. As Temple would later write, touching on the preponderance of male stars and male-driven narratives and genres in the run-up to World War II, Hollywood had become a "masculine world,"[336] but even against the testosterone-heavy star-scape of 1940, twelve year-old Shirley Temple (however tenuously) held her own. Exceptionally, Temple had never been promoted as of one half of a starring, dichotomously-gendered performance team as had every other major musical female star established during the early, pre-Code era, including Ruby Keeler and Joan Blondell (both associated with Dick Powell), Ginger Rogers (with Astaire), Jeanette MacDonald (first with Maurice Chevalier, then Nelson Eddy). Though Temple partnered several times with certain male performers, including James Dunn, John Boles and, most famously, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, she never shared top billing and seldom appeared in publicity shots with a co-star.[337]

Temple relied heavily on certain ascribed qualities of cuteness and precocity where other pre-Code female musical performers had drawn upon an aggressive, homosocially-situated sexuality and, after the implementation of the Code under the PCA, on highly specialized talent in singing or dancing (as in the cases of Eleanor Powell, Ginger Rogers, and Jeanette MacDonald) to establish themselves as individuated performer-stars within the musical genre. Indeed, where the need to *work* on performance, to prove individual talent, had been seen thematically in other musicals from *42nd Street* to *Follow the Fleet* and *Shall We Dance*, Shirley Temple's precocious talents in her classic films were consistently

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[335] At the height of her fame from the latter half of 1935 to 1939, Temple earned $307,014 a year in salary alone before commercial use of her name, compared to Darryl F. Zanuck's $265,000, Fred Astaire's $266,837 at RKO, and Rogers's $208,767, also at RKO according to biographer Anne Edwards in *Shirley Temple: American Princess* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1989), 92.

[336] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 297.

[337] Temple's mother and studio in particular avoided having Shirley photographed with other children so as not to "dilute [her] aura of uniqueness and thereby diminish [her] professional potential." Ibid., 90.

distanced from their system of production. As I will expand on later, reference to work or labour in her films and fan discourses surrounding Shirley Temple tended to be elided, thus denying her a certain degree of agency over the construction of, and labour behind, her image/performance.

In this chapter I will therefore partially be concerned with rehabilitating Shirley Temple's reputation as a female musical performer beyond her over-determined image as a cultural icon, political symbol, and sex object. As far back as their original release, Temple's films have been criticized for their blatant sexualization of her precocious female body for the amusement and/or titillation of mature male audiences. Certain aspects of Temple's star persona and image – particularly those pertaining to her body as a white, working, pre-pubescent female at the height of her popularity from 1934-1939, and those pertaining to her near-universal perception as the embodiment of "cute"– have been deconstructed at length by film theorists, but perhaps at the expense of analyzing her actual, individual performances in films. Here, I intend to catalogue for the first time in an academic study Shirley Temple's musical films from 1932 to 1940, periodizing her films into three categories – early, classical, and late – while analyzing her performance of femininity throughout. In particular, I will highlight the ways in which her filmic representation was rendered to associate femininity with childlike behaviour, innocence, vulnerability and "cuteness," associations that have historically acted to fetishize and delimit the acceptably safe parameters of performative femininity so as to contain its potential to exceed phallogocentric constructs of meaning. This will be seen as a direct consequence and in support of the implementation of censorship under the Production Code in 1934, which directly conservatized paradigms of female performance and representation in musicals in the second half of the decade – during which time Temple rose to prominence as a star.

Pricing the "Priceless Child": in review of critical theory on Shirley Temple

Film historians have tended to analyze Shirley Temple as a symbol/site for the confrontation of Depression-era ideologies, at the same time she has been the subject of considerable psychological and psychoanalytic theorizing built on the discernible Oedipal and paedophilic subtexts of her films. There are three main and frequently overlapping strands of analysis in relation to Shirley Temple: Temple as a locus for the combative ideologies of work and play in the context of the Great Depression; the semiotic analysis of race and ethnicity within Temple's films, readable on or through her body and the bodies of

her co-stars, and finally Temple's sexual objectification as "cute." Each of these critical frameworks has depended on the confrontation of Shirley Temple as *other* to the subject of phallogocentric, heteronormative discourse, that being the adult white male. Here, I provide a brief history and discussion of the main strands of academic research into Shirley Temple, which I shall draw upon later in my textual analysis and historicization of her films.

Despite the fact she has long been recognized as an international symbol for American optimism and good cheer, representing "childhood and reborn hope as antidotes to the personal despair and disillusion of the Depression,"[338] Shirley Temple did not become the subject of significant academic study until Eckert's article, "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller" in 1991. In his essay, Eckert relocated the films of Shirley Temple in the context of Depression-era ideological conflicts, reading the determinants of political and economic policy back into the "finished object" of Shirley Temple.[339] Specifically, Eckert has argued that Temple's films' expository fixation on her persona functioned to divert attention from the presumable economic realities of the day, thus eliding the fact of rampant unemployment and the struggling proletariat in the "real" world at large.[340] In Temple's world, gestures of spontaneous love replace charity, and the economic and political responsibilities of the individual to society are repressed.[341] Thus Eckert has argued that traces of conservative ideology, which he links to the political and economic policies of Herbert Hoover and Walter S. Gifford, Director of the President's Organization on Unemployment Relief, in the early years of the Great Depression (1929-1932), are discernible in the films of Shirley Temple.

Perhaps the most significant point that Eckert has introduced is the fact that Shirley Temple, and all those who collaborated with her, systematically censored, concealed, and/or obliterated traces of "work" in films.[342] As Diane Negra has noted, "[f]ilm history has tended to celebrate male labor as genius while rendering women's labor invisible, natural or simply a reflective facet of the male authoring process."[343] Touching on the distinct similarities between Sonja Henie and Shirley Temple in her work on ethnic female stardom, Negra has also suggested that Henie and Temple served similar ideological functions during the Great

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[338] Ibid., 59.

[339] Charles Eckert, "Shirley Temple and the House of Rockefeller," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 60-61.

[340] Ibid., 67.

[341] Eckert goes on to postulate: "So strongly over-determined is Shirley's capacity for love that she virtually exists within it. In Freudian terms she has no id, ego or superego. She is an unstructured reification of the libido, much as Einstein in popular myth reified the capacity for thought." Ibid., 67-68.

[342] Ibid., 71.

[343] Diane Negra, *Off-White Hollywood: American Culture and Ethnic Female Stardom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 14.

Depression – specifically that the employment of their highly skilled bodies towards popular entertainment promoted an "ideology of individual merit that reflect[ed] glory on the group."[344] This again implies an elision of labour from the representation of Shirley Temple, and that in admiration/objectification of Temple's unique talent, audiences appropriated her performances as confirmation of their own potential for greatness. Her "work" is therefore translated into generous entertainment, or treated as incidental to the spontaneous desire to perform or "play" which is more befitting of a child[345] – a myth which, ironically, Temple's studio worked hard to perpetuate.[346] As Temple's contemporary biographer Jerome Beatty once put it, "At most, she 'works' only six hours a day;"[347] and "she looks on it all as a "glorious game" which she "insists [...] be done "right."[348]In my catalogue and analysis of Temple's films, I will return to this discussion of work and labour, as allusions to such recur in the star discourses surrounding Shirley Temple in the 1930s. Forensic textual analysis will also provide greater insight into how myths of work, juxtaposed with myths of play and entertainment, insinuate themselves throughout her body of work.

From the very beginning of her career, Temple's appeal as a star-performer was indeed reliant on the performance or expression of her sexuality. Intensifying this image of Shirley Temple as a sexual (or sexualizable) object while in recognition of her physical immaturity, contemporary star discourses frequently referenced her *potential* to become sexually available when grown – ironic, given that Temple's actual pubescence proved concurrent with her decline in popularity. The evident link between issues of sex and youth and the appeal of Shirley Temple to adults (particularly at issue: *male* adults) has led theorists Lury, Merish, Kincaid, Wills, and DuCille to examine Shirley Temple's films through the lens of a paedophilic gaze, which objectifies the young for sexual pleasure. They suggest that at the very heart of baby Shirley's appeal has always been a profound, pronounced, and perhaps even self-consciously performed sexuality: a "babysex aesthetic", as termed by

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[344] Ibid., 92.

[345] The image of the working child – the child of the Depression who needed to work to survive – was successfully dispelled and replaced by the image of the playing child, whose leisure bespoke its health and happiness. Negra alludes to this in her observation that the image of a white girl's body "displaced the spectre of the wan, malnourished child of the Depression," speaking to the interconnectivity of race/ethnicity and work/labour in popular culture. Ibid., 89.

[346] Temple Black writes: "In order to intelligently maximize its economic returns from me, the studio found it critical to clarify the answers to two questions: first, was my public image an extension of myself or one created by the industry; and second, did my popularity stem from acting, dancing, or singing and in what combination?" In answer to the first, Twentieth Century Fox decided to turn Temple into a "natural", as previously mentioned. The second question reveals the studio's industrial approach to star-making and performance (Op. Cit., 164).

[347] Jerome Beatty, *Shirley Temple* (New York: The Saalfield Publishing Company, 1935), 64.

[348] Ibid., 23.

Wills, that is "based on the sexiness of sexual innocence,"[349] a theory that psychologist James Kincaid supports in his study, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child-Molesting*.[350] As explained by Emma Wilson, this innocence-cum-sexiness is strongly tied to the perception of children as vulnerable, with their need to be protected from sexual contact necessarily leading to their perception by adults as sexual (or sexualizable) objects in turn.[351] For this reason, Lury and Merish posit, the problematic issue of child sexuality has been "domesticated" in the objectification of children as "cute."[352] In other words, "cuteness" has been attributed to children via fetishistic means to contain aspects of their sexuality which would otherwise be destabilizing to normative constructs of adult sexuality. Children are "Other" to adults, and therefore their sexuality functions similarly to queerness: if left unregulated and uncontained, their sexuality is "perverse, uncivilized, odd, sterile and excessive."[353] As theorized by Merish, Lury, and Wilson, the cute is therefore possessed, or made possess-able, in its having "invite[d] ownership"[354] by the adult. Thus to illustrate their studies, Lury, Merish, Wilson, and Kincaid have all drawn upon Shirley Temple as the embodiment of the cute, as if cuteness as an affect were the "normative aesthetic response" to her image.[355] Further, Merish astutely notes, crucial to audiences' perception of Shirley Temple as cute has always been the image of her transgression of patriarchal authority on the one hand, contradicted by her recuperation within patriarchal authority on the other.[356] Throughout my discussion of Shirley Temple's films to follow, I will therefore address this tension between Temple's sustained performance of female transgressiveness versus her constant association with/recuperation within a family unit by paternal male authority figures. Further, it will be helpful to draw on issues of gendered perspective and audience identification with reference to contemporary star discourses and biographies of Shirley Temple as evidence of how Temple was marketed to, and received by, the public as a female performer.

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[349] Nadine Wills, "Women in Uniform: Costume and the 'unruly woman' in the 1930s Hollywood musical", *Continuum* (14:3), 319.

[350] James R. Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 7.

[351] "[I]nnocence emerges as the dominant fantasy in whose terms children have been variously represented, protected and desired. This fantasy in itself has been seen as in part responsible for the very disempowerment of the child." Emma Wilson, "Children, emotion and viewing in contemporary European film," *Screen* (46:3, Autumn 2005), 331.

[352] Lori Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 188.

[353] Karen Lury, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairytales* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 1-57.

[354] Merish, Op. Cit., 188.

[355] Anne DuCille, "The Shirley Temple of My Familiar", *Transition* (73, 1997), 19.

[356] Merish, Op. Cit., 194.

In the following sections, I will therefore consider the evolution of Shirley Temple's performance and representation as a female musical star over the course of four generic cycles and/or stages of her career: her short films at Educational Pictures when, her early features at Twentieth Century Fox, followed by her classical features (Temple's heyday of popularity), and finally the late features of her decline. Shirley Temple famously burst onto the international stage of stardom when, as Shirley Dugan in the 1934 film *Stand Up and Cheer*, she crawled through James Dunne's legs in a little polka-dotted dress, fifty-five ringlets and one spit curl atop her head, and demanded that her daddy take a bow. This was by no means the first time Temple had appeared on film, however. Since the age of four, Temple had been featured or starred in numerous short films and made cameo appearances in a great many feature-length films. In a catalogue and analysis of Temple's performances in musical film/musical comedy throughout the 1930s, it is necessary to consider as well these early appearances, despite the fact that Temple does not always appear in them singing or dancing. They nevertheless offer a key insight into the development and evolution of Temple's star persona on film, and provide us with the earliest site on which the syntactic ramifications of her performance as a musical female star would be negotiated in her later career.

Short Films, 1932-1934

Baby Burlesks series (Educational Pictures)

Runt Page (Ray Nazarro; April 11, 1932 distributed by Universal Pictures)

War Babies (Charles Lamont; September 11, 1932)

The Pie-Covered Wagon (Lamont; October 30, 1932)

Glad Rags to Riches (Lamont; February 5, 1933)

Kiddin' Hollywood (Lamont; March 14, 1933)

The Kid's Last Fight (Lamont; April 23, 1933)

Polly Tix in Washington (Lamont; June 4, 1933)

Kid 'in' Africa (Lamont; October 6, 1933)

Dora's Dunking Doughnuts (Harry Edwards, 1933 for Educational Pictures)

Frolics of Youth series (Educational Pictures)

Merrily Yours (Lamont, 1933)

What's to Do? (Lamont, 1933)

Pardon My Pups (Lamont, 1934)

Managed Money (Lamont, 1934)

In her earliest films, Shirley Temple learned to "play" femininity to the camera, negotiating and performing a repertoire of gestures that signified cuteness within a feminine mode of representation. Interestingly, these films, and the *Baby Burlesks* most of all, offer a glimpse of pre-fame Shirley Temple in which her labour – her work behind each performance – is neither willfully elided nor obfuscated. This presents a contrast with her representation in later films and supports the theory that connotations of work and labour were elided in representations of, and discourses on, Shirley Temple's star persona in the 1930s. This was effected in order to smooth over the potentially subversive connotations of the image of a working, white female child in her feature-length musicals and preserve the "myth of spontaneity" surrounding the image of Shirley Temple which would make possible her syntactic functioning.

The *Baby Burlesks* series was comprised of eight one-reel shorts, which were produced by Jack Hays and directed by Charles Lamont (with the exception of *Runt Page*) at Educational Pictures, as satires of contemporary major motion pictures. The first, *Runt Page*, spoofed *The Front Page* (1931), Lewis Milestone's adaptation of Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's play about tabloid news reporters, while *War Babies* took off from *What Price Glory?* (Raoul Walsh, 1926, about rival war veterans); *The Pie-Covered Wagon* satirized *The Covered Wagon* (James Cruz, 1923, a silent Western); *Glad Rags to Riches* and *Kiddin' Hollywood* played on *What Price Hollywood?* (George Cukor, 1932) and other "fallen woman" films; *The Kid's Last Fight* was based on contemporary boxing melodramas and *Polly Tix in Washington* on political "social problem" films; finally, *Kid 'in' Africa* took off from *Tarzan the Ape Man* (W. S. Van Dyke, 1932). All parts were played by children of toddler to early childhood age, in costume from the waist up and diapers from the waist down.[357] Shirley Temple appeared in each of the *Baby Burlesks*, and spoke her first line in the second of the films, *War Babies*, as the nightclub singer "Charlene." She would play several more floozies throughout the series: *La Belle Diaperina*, a chanteuse, in *Glad Rags to Riches*; Morelegs Sweetrick, a parody of Marlene Dietrich, in *Kiddin' Hollywood*; and the eponymous Polly, a prostitute, in *Polly Tix in Washington*; all of which characters were coded in explicitly sexual terms. Also throughout the *Baby Burlesks*, Temple may be seen frequently embracing and even kissing her male co-stars on the lips, in addition to performing what Temple herself would later describe as "nondescript kootchy dances,"[358] such as in *War Babies* and while singing the song "She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" in *Glad*

[357] According to Temple, her own mother made all her costumes for the series (Op. Cit., 20-21).
[358] Ibid., 22.

Rags to Riches.[359] The comedic aspect of these scenes is ostensibly derived from Temple's innocence/ignorance of the meaning behind the actions she is made to perform, which simultaneously makes safe their motivation in positing the impossibility/ridiculousness of Temple's sexual agency/subjectivity, thus re-ascribing a passive and objective sexuality to her body.

In such a way, the *Baby Burlesks* negotiate a sort of "freak show aesthetic."[360] This, combined with the fact they referenced popular films directed at adults, supports Anne Edwards's claim that the *Baby Burlesks* "were meant to titillate male matinee audiences."[361] In her autobiography,[362] Shirley Temple has described the lessons she learned as a performer on the set:

> It is not easy to be a Hollywood starlet. Starlets have to kiss a lot of people, including some unattractive ones. Often, starlets are knocked down to the floor or pricked by their diaper pins. The hours are long. Some of the positions that are assumed are downright uncomfortable. Your hair and teeth must always be clean, and the same goes for your white socks.
>
> Often starlets are required to wear scanty costumes and suffer sexist schemes, such as walking around with a silver arrow stuck through your head.
>
> Like a Girl Scout, starlets must be cheerful and obliging, particularly to directors, producers and cameramen. Like a Boy Scout, starlets must always be prepared, whether to recite lines, give a benefit performance, or become the butt of a joke.[363]

Temple's account is valuable in that it exposes the reality of hard graft and labour that Temple and her juvenile colleagues performed as child actors, as well as the sexual connotations of that work. Illustratively, Temple has also described how the children were coerced into labour, separated from their mothers on set and subjected to harsh

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[359] Throughout the *Baby Burlesks*, Temple is frequently depicted embracing and even kissing her male co-stars on the lips, in addition to performing "nondescript kootchy dances" (Shirley Temple Black, Op. Cit., 22), such as in *War Babies*, and singing the song "She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" in *Glad Rags to Riches* in a perpetual state of half-nakedness.

[360] Lury, Op. Cit., 67.

[361] Edwards, Op. Cit., 29.

[362] In this chapter, I will continue to reference Shirley Temple's own reflections on her career as a child actor. Temple's autobiography was written almost five decades after her decline in Hollywood popularity and subsequent to her entry into politics as an older woman. I wish to bracket that Temple should not be taken as a definitive word or authority on the events she recounts – taking into consideration the time passed between the events and her recalling them, as well as any potential ulterior motives in casting such events in a particular light – yet hers represents a unique and alternative perspective on Shirley Temple, the Performer, and one of the only sources from which it is possible to glean her "intentions" as (an) author of her own performance.

[363] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 21.

punishments when they did not cooperate with director Lamont.[364] Indeed, the labour necessarily entailed in the act of performing – and particularly by child actors – is visibly apparent in Temple's portrayal of female characters in the *Baby Burlesks*. As the earliest surviving records of Temple performance (when she was barely four years old), it is to be expected that they show an actor only just learning and coming to terms with a repertoire of gestures and mannerisms which, altogether, may be taken to signify the certain aspects of femininity and female performance which she has been employed to satirize. Particularly in those scenes in which Temple performs musical numbers or interacts with her male co-stars, she is often seen glancing off-screen, as if unsure of her next move or "how she should be acting".[365] This draws attention to the artificiality and constructedness of her performance, unwittingly perhaps effecting a sort of distanciation between Temple, the performer, and the actors and audiences with whom she ostensibly interacts. Of course, it was probably Hays and Lamont's intention to juxtapose the ostentatious performativeness of Temple's portrayal with her professional inexperience (and indeed incompetence) as a means to elicit and objectify the "cuteness" of her persona; thusly, her precocity is made safe in its ridiculousness.[366]

Nevertheless, the very constructedness, the heavy labour, behind Temple's performance is very much at the fore of her appearances in the *Baby Burlesks*. Beyond the quality of her performance style, it is significant that within the texts themselves, Temple portrays "working girls," whose job performance impacts directly the development of narrative, in five of the eight *Burlesks*: *War Babies* (nightclub singer/dancer/prostitute Charlene), *Glad Rags to Riches* (nightclub singer La Belle Diaperina), *Kiddin' Hollywood* (actress Morelegs Sweetrick), *Polly Tix in Washington* (prostitute Polly), and *Kid 'in' Africa* (explorer Madam Cradlebait). Both textually and extra-textually, therefore, the image of Temple in the *Baby Burlesks* is an image of the self-consciously to-be-looked-at female, which implies a corresponding politics of viewing with which to view these short films, predicated on an active male (or male-orientated) gaze. This gaze is also paedophilic,

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[364] According to Temple Black, the children were each assigned a "child welfare supervisor" who disappeared on set, and that they were made to sit in "Lamont's black box", in which they were shut with an ice cube, when they got out of line (Ibid., 22).

[365] Temple has said of her stints as the promiscuous Charlene and Polly Tix in *War Babies* and *Polly Tix in Washington*, respectively, that she "rather enjoyed all the international flirtation," but did not yet understand what it was: "Nipples and castor oil I understood, but seduction I took on faith" (Ibid., 32-34).

[366] It also bears repeating that Shirley Temple, at four years old and straight out of Meglin's Dance School, was as yet relatively inexperienced as an actress and cannot be "blamed", as such, for her bad performance: as Temple astutely notes, "If my filmed expression occasionally was vague, perhaps I was unsure where I was, who I was supposed to be, and who all these strange people were" (Ibid., 41).

positioning as its object the female body of Shirley Temple/Charlene/La Belle Diaperina/Morelegs Sweetrick/Polly Tix/Madam Cradlebait.

A labour of performance is however less explicitly referenced in Temple's other early films for Educational, the *Frolics of Youth* series and *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts*. Here, we may perceive a growing tendency to obfuscate the nature of Shirley Temple's "work" behind the camera, offering up her unique persona as charmingly "natural" and spontaneously occurring. It is as if (or is supposed to be as if) her range is "limited to parts consonant with [..] her personality."[367] Shirley Temple is therefore presented as a personification of "herself", as opposed to the impersonation of another character, which thereby elides the "work" performed in the transmission of information regarding that self or persona. From *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts* to the *Frolics of Youth*, the apparent personas of Shirley Temple the performer, "Shirley" from *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts*, and Mary Lou Rogers (*Frolics of Youth*), increasingly overlap and intersect.

Compared with her performances in the *Baby Burlesks*, Shirley Temple appears to be in these later films (at the age of five) more comfortable in front of the camera;[368] she seldom breaks the fourth wall, so to speak, by looking off-screen or at the camera without narrative justification. Her performance style is also consistently energetic, her personality (as performed) often bordering on the mischievous (as opposed to her frequently lethargic or confused demeanour in the earlier *Burlesks*). Perhaps most significantly, she is always smiling, her future-famous dimples signifying indexically her health and happiness, and distancing her image further from that of the Depression-era child labourer. This may be due partially to Temple's greater familiarity with the apparatus of filmmaking after her experience on the *Burlesks*, but it would also seem, given Temple's recollection of not understanding the concept of "seduction" which she nevertheless frequently mimicked in the *Baby Burlesks*,[369] that Temple's persona in these slightly later films is more consistent with her personality and behaviour "as a child." In the *Baby Burlesks*, Shirley Temple displays all the appearance and demeanour of a child, but with the behaviour of a sexually alluring adult woman, thus contributing to her objectification by the adult subject as Other and

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[367] Barry King, "Articulating Stardom," in *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 168.

[368] It should be mentioned that the production and release of the *Baby Burlesks, Dora's Dunking Doughnuts,* and the *Frolics of Youth* series overlap each other. *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts* and the first *Frolics of Youth* film, *Merrily Yours*, were both made between the penultimate and final *Baby Burlesks* (*Polly Tix in Washington* and *Kid 'in' Africa*). *Merrily Yours* was released before *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts*, but all subsequent *Frolics of Youth* were made after *Kid 'in' Africa*.

[369] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 32-34.

heightening her certain cuteness as female sex-specific.[370] In *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts* and the *Frolics of Youth*, on the other hand, Temple looks *and* acts like a child. Here, her perceptible cuteness stems from her display of a precocious energy that must be contained by her long-suffering family (the *Frolics of Youth*) and a bumbling schoolteacher (Andy Hyde, *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts*). Crucially, Shirley Temple plays against the stereotypical performance of femininity as quiet, passive, and obedient according to a "Madonna" archetype; but neither is she sexually available, aggressive, or threatening, as a "Whore."

In both *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts* and the *Frolics of Youth*, Shirley Temple performs a juvenile femininity that resists stereotypically Victorian/romantic images of feminine youth as physically weak and domesticated; in such a way, Temple's star image is established via these early shorts as incorporative of certain male-coded behaviours and iconography. I would argue this functions, as Gaylyn Studlar has argued regarding Temple's later films, to disavow or draw attention away from Temple's "sexiness" as the female object of the gaze. In *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts*, "Shirley" (Temple's character in the short film) is a precocious little girl, a lovable troublemaker who keeps scuppering her schoolmaster's attempts to broadcast a radio commercial in aid of his sweetheart Dora (Ethyl Sykes). Temple's part is relatively small, compared to Hyde's and Sykes's, though she receives top billing (already having proven herself saleable material in the *Burlesks* and *Merrily Yours*); as in the *Frolics*, however, she commands frequent close-ups and camera time. Though Temple is given second billing after Frank Coghlan, Jr. (the ostensible hero) in the *Frolics of Youth* series, it is telling that the first shot in *Pardon My Pups* (the third in the series) is a close-up of Temple's face: these films rely heavily on the spectacularization of Shirley Temple's cuteness for entertainment value. An important distinction between the two is that Temple is dressed in typically feminine short dresses in *Dora's Dunking Doughnuts*, while she is, notably, pictured in overalls or otherwise stereotypically masculine, or boyish, clothing in the *Frolics of Youth* – a reflection of her clownish, precocious persona but also a complement to her contrastive gender. Such vacillation between the employment of feminine versus masculine clothing and iconography in the imaging of Shirley Temple will be seen as significant in consideration of Temple's later films at Twentieth Century Fox.

Within just a year of working in short films at Educational Pictures, Shirley Temple's performance of femininity experienced a paradigm shift by which Temple was increasingly represented in the context of "play" and spontaneity, as opposed to self-conscious parody. In addition, her imaging in terms of gendered iconography and clothing changed to

[370] "Shirley enacts the fundamental *ambivalence* of mimicry: her precocity both instates her resemblance to adults and her crucial difference from them," as argue by Lori Merish, Op. Cit., 194.

emphasize significations of precocious childhood (coded perhaps more specifically in the case of the *Frolics of Youth* as boyhood) over the over-determined feminine "sexiness" of the characters she played/satirized in the *Baby Burlesks.* This may be read as her explicit de-sexing on the part of producers and directors at Educational Pictures in accordance with tightening strictures regarding the representation of female sexuality and children under the Production Code Administration.

As we have already seen in the regulation of backstage musicals and Ginger Rogers's dance musicals with Fred Astaire at RKO, the PCA often prioritized consideration of female costuming in the application of Code policy to musicals after 1934. The same Code proscriptions against female nudity that made Ginger Rogers's low-cut gown in *Swing Time* give pause to Joseph Breen also ensured that after 1934, Shirley Temple would not appear topless (as she had in the *Baby Burlesks*) on film again. In the "Addenda to the Code," it was clearly stipulated that "Children's sex organs are never to be exposed,"[371] and while the *Baby Burlesks* had only ever shown Temple naked from the torso up – conventionally acceptable at face value due to her physical immaturity – the heavily sexualized roles she played problematized the seeming innocence of her state of undress, and were thusly unacceptable post-1934. For this reason, I would argue, she was always dressed from then on in one of two "cute" ways: in the short skirts of *Dora's Dunking Donuts* and/or in the boyish outfits of the *Frolics of Youth* series. The former functioned to disavow the "sexiness" of Temple's overt femininity in confirming her young age (signified in the brevity of her hemlines) and thus her difference from adult women, the latter to disavow her sexual objectification in dressing her like a boy – which nevertheless underscored, in her physical/sexual difference from *actual* males, her gender difference while crucially never telegraphing it past the acceptable limits of signification under the Code. These representational tropes would thereby be repeated in her earliest features at Twentieth Century Fox, in which the standard child narrative formula of the Shirley Temple musical would also be tested and concretized.

Early Features at Twentieth Century Fox, May-November 1934

Stand Up and Cheer! (Hamilton MacFadden; May 4, 1934)

Little Miss Marker (Alexander Hall; June 1, 1934)

Baby Take a Bow (Harry Lachman; June 30, 1934)

Now and Forever (Henry Hathaway; 1934)

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[371] "Particular Applications of the Code and Reasons Therefore [Addenda to 1930 Code]," reprinted in Thomas Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 364.

As of 13 January, 1934, five-and-a-half year-old Shirley Temple was going back in time: when she turned six in April, her mother Gertrude told her she was five, and the studio told the world that she was four. Temple's re-juvenation was part of Darryl Zanuck's master promotional plan for the star, who was newly signed to Twentieth Century Fox:[372] in augmenting the extremity of Temple's youth, the studio was able to promote her talents as simultaneously extraordinary and all the more "natural," in that Temple's years of dancing lessons and on-the-job training at Educational Pictures were erased. By 1935, Temple would become the eighth most-popular film star in Hollywood, according to the *Motion Picture Herald*,[373] and as the only Fox star on that list, instantaneously her studio's most valuable player. Between 1934 and 1935, Shirley Temple starred in four feature-length films, beginning with *Stand Up and Cheer!* It was not Temple's first appearance in a feature, as she had been contracted to appear in bit parts in films since her days at Educational Pictures, but it was the first time she made an impact: *Variety*'s review of *Stand Up and Cheer* called Temple its "unofficial star," claiming she was destined to be a "female Jackie Cooper and Jackie Coogan in one, excepting in a more jovial being"[374] – in hindsight, an astute observation. For the rest of the decade, Shirley Temple would be promoted as a "natural", discovered without any formal training in acting, singing, or dancing. Her (exaggerated) youth and (thus exaggerated) talent would, combined, mark her out as intriguingly freakish, while her small stature, round face, and stocky body allowed Shirley Temple to be recuperated into the fold of the domestic, familiar, and cute. Based on the recognizability of her image and bankability, she would be the most powerful female star in Hollywood for the next four years.

Shirley Temple's four films from 1934 – *Stand Up and Cheer!*, *Little Miss Marker*, *Baby Take a Bow*, and *Now and Forever* – would see the concretization of narrative formulae and gendered paradigms of performance in Temple's musical comedies – impacted, most significantly, by the concretization of Shirley Temple's persona as a "Daddy's little girl," the juvenile female in love (ostensibly platonic, implicitly sexual or at least predicated on Oedipal constructs) with her father and thus integrated and contained within a patriarchal/phallogocentric social structure and classical musical syntax. While Studlar has rejected that Temple's image may be read as constructed under a paedophilic gaze, I would

[372] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 39.
[373] Ibid., 114-115.
[374] Edwards, Op. Cit., 53.

argue that consideration of Temple's films in the generic context of the classically integrated musical entails a reading of her semantic and syntactic function as a sexual object.

Temple's appearance in *Stand Up and Cheer* makes this plain, with a degree of directness perhaps that her following films would more forcefully disown. Three quarters of the way through the film, down-on-his-luck song-and-dance man Jimmy Dugan (James Dunn), having just won the opportunity to perform for the "Secretary of Amusement" on the charms of his daughter Shirley (Shirley Temple), sashays across the stage crooning a love song, "Baby Take a Bow", to a shapely blonde. They join in a Berkeleyesque formation of scantily-clad chorines before Shirley Temple suddenly bursts through the splayed legs of her standing father (played by James Dunn) to claim the focus of the frame and her father's attention. Dugan sings the rest of the song to her: "I'm presenting her right now" – Shirley strikes a series of poses – "She's cute, she's sweet, she's swell, she's grand! [...] I'm presenting the future Mrs. Hemingway!" and the star Shirley Temple is thus born, sprung from the loins of her filmic father. In such a way, *Stand Up and Cheer* posits Shirley Temple in direct, diametrical opposition to her father: it is supposed to be a joke, of course, that Jimmy Dugan sings of marrying his own daughter; nevertheless, Shirley Dugan/Temple is represented as his ideal – if platonic – match, in contrast to the more overtly sexualized and mature women onstage.

Temple appears much earlier (albeit briefly) in the film in a non-musical sequence, which is perhaps equally telling of how Temple's star image would continue to be represented in films, promotional material, and star discourses. Shirley Dugan, in the short skirts that would become synonymous with and indexical of Shirley Temple's babysex image, is lifted from her father's lap, thus exposing the underwear beneath her feminine dress. Smiling at James Dunn, as would an adoring daughter, Shirley Temple reaches down and adjusts her hemline to re-cover her rear. As noted by Nadine Wills, this is a recurring image throughout Temple's films: the "accidental crotch shot" that serves to remind the viewer of the essential, biological female-ness of the performer – to "reduce" the female to her biological function – which, when Temple attempts to combat its inevitable occurrence (due to the fact that her skirts are purposely designed to show off her crotch, thus of course undermining the "accident" in the "accidental crotch shot"), merely draws attention to the fact of its happening, and thusly the inescapability of femininity (the private, the domestic)

being marked in/onto the female body in the form of its genitalia.[375] Wills argues further that while this type of crotch shot is "supposedly accidental,"

> the matching panties of Temple's costume define her crotch as public rather than private. [...] [This] serves to reduce Temple to an essentialist position of universal female sameness where all female bodies are constructed in like democratic manner."[376]

Thus, while Temple's function as explicitly sexual in diametric opposition to her partner/father Jimmy Dugan is denied, however tenuously, via the presence of contrastively "sexy" chorines, nevertheless Temple's feminine image is constructed, voyeuristically, according to a traditionally gendered politics of viewing. Her to-be-looked-at-ness is confirmed in the visual affirmation of her biological femininity.

For the most part, Temple's early features thereafter position her as a pretty object, the valuable property of her father or father figure, whose worth he comes to appreciate by the end of each film. In *Little Miss Marker*, Temple is adopted, grudgingly, by a cantankerous gangster (Adolphe Menjou) who gradually comes to appreciate her love rather than her numerical value as a "marker" or bartering tool; in *Baby Take a Bow*, Temple is saved by her father (James Dunn) from being kidnapped by a murderous gangster, teaching him that familial love is more important and redemptive than financial gain; and in *Now and Forever*, Temple takes slightly more narrative agency, being the innocent child who convinces her criminal father (Gary Cooper) to go straight, thus saving him from a life in jail (though her father ultimately saves her from a parentless existence, giving her a mother in the form of his girlfriend Toni (Carole Lombard).[377] In each of these four films, the focal relationship lies between Temple and her father. However, in each of these three films post-*Stand Up and*

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[375] Nadine Wills, "'110 per cent woman': the crotch shot in the Hollywood musical", Op. Cit. Wills's project in this article is not merely to point out the objectification of women through the visualization of accidental or posed crotch shots in the Hollywood musical: "The female body carries the heavy burden of femininity in the American musical genre. Whatever its apparent narrative concerns, the musical begins and ends with the female body, and not with the heterosexual couple whose union, represented through their final embrace, is supposedly at its core. Thus the musical is not only concerned with ideals of community represented by the heterosexual couple but more specifically with gender ideals represented by the female body."[...] [M]usical films specifically attempt to naturalize the often unstable relationship between gender (femininity) and sex (female) through the convention of the crotch shot [...] reprivileg[ing] musical spectacle as a site of femininity rather than of heterosexuality. [...] I assert that the crotch shot convention shifts theorizations of the overall structure of the musical genre from the static image of female 'to-be-looked-at-ness' to the continual creation and recreation of the '110 per cent woman'," 122.

[376] Ibid., 130.

[377] It did not escape the public's notice that these early films were, to a large degree, generic cross-overs between musical comedies and gangster films. In a letter to *Photoplay* published in March 1935, "Mrs. Grace Winings, Reading, Penn." Expressed her concern: "Why is Shirley Temple cast in so many gangster pictures? Most small children simply adore her, and it just breaks their hearts to see her involved in such heart rending situations. It is over-stimulating and their little minds cannot digest the fact that what they are seeing is really acting." "Letters", *Photoplay* (March 1935), 12.

Cheer!, a mother or maternal figure stands in as a site for the displacement of the potentially incestuous and paedophilic aspects of love and desire between Temple's character and her father.[378] This desire is thereby fetishized and contained within Temple's musical number directed at her father, "On Account-a I Love You" in *Baby Take a Bow* and, in the case of *Little Miss Marker*, mitigated vis-a-vis a musical number between Temple and her surrogate mother (Dorothy Dell, who also sings a solo – an instance of a secondary female character taking spectacular focus off of Temple, which would not be repeated in her later films).

Overall in these four early films, we may observe Shirley Temple's utilization as a site for the displacement – and also effacement – of certain narrative aspects which might have exceeded the generic boundaries of the integrated Hollywood musical and/or the limits of signification as dictated by the Production Code Administration. In that each of these four films displays a significant degree of generic hybridity – with *Stand Up and Cheer* and *Now and Forever* functioning as musical melodramas of sorts due to their syntactic predication on the preservation of the family unit, and *Baby Take a Bow* and *Little Miss Marker* functioning as further hybridized musical-gangster-melodramas for their dependence on certain semantic features of the gangster/crime film – they are arguably excessively syntactically structured and thusly overly narratively determined. Shirley Temple's placement at the center of each text as an almost personality-less cipher, individuated nevertheless superficially by her cuteness and precocity, thus functions as a sort of objective correlative to unite the disparate or contradictory aspects of narrative around a single character with an immediately discernible affect. Furthermore, Temple's perceptible youth and innocence may be seen to have disavowed or obfuscated certain potentially censorable aspects of each text. Tellingly, in a report back to Will Hays, Joseph Breen boasted of how

> *Baby Take a Bow* [...] was rewritten so as to throw the major interest to the child actress Shirley Temple. This change, along with others which we suggested, have made the picture, we believe, a highly acceptable piece of entertainment."[379]

Cognizant of how gangster films and generic references to such had become a sticking point for the Production Code Administration,[380] Breen was evidently pleased with Temple's

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[378] Ironically, on the set of *Little Miss Marker*, Temple did not get on well with her leading man, Adolphe Menjou (Sorrowful Jones), but made close friends with Dorothy Dell, who played his gangster's moll, Bangles. Dell died tragically in a car accident while Temple was shooting *Now and Forever*; according to Temple, she found out about her death just before shooting a crying scene, and director Alexander Hall took full advantage of her tears. Temple Black, Op. Cit., 61.

[379] Joseph Breen to Will Hays, letter (June 7 1934, *Baby Take a Bow*, PCA file).

effective distraction away from the film's crime narrative and syntactic structure, by which Temple's father is redeemed for a past life of crime. Similarly, Breen praised *Now and Forever* a few months later for its absence of "offensive salacious or sex details,"[381] implicating his hope that Shirley Temple's presence within its text would mitigate the erotic affect of Gary Cooper and Carole Lombard's pairing as leads.[382] In such a way, at this early stage in her career, it was established that Shirley Temple's professional role as a female musical star had the potential – and indeed the intent, on Breen's part – to manifest a paradigm shift in terms of female performance and representation in musicals of the post-Code era.

Overall, Temple's first four films at Twentieth Century Fox in 1934 established Shirley Temple's star image as a "priceless child," and her narrative function as a "Miss Fix-It" whose very presence, without even having to do anything, inspires protectiveness in her guardians/parental figures. From *Little Miss Marker* onwards, Temple's early features also established the maternal surrogate/secondary female lead as a recurring narrative/semantic feature of the child narrative format developing around Temple as a means of channeling the erotic affect of Temple's spectacular objectification. Distinguishing these films from her classic features, however, is Temple's relatively diminished screen time, and the tenuousness with which her musical numbers are integrated into narrative. This would be ironed out in her films to come, between late 1934 and early 1937.

The Classics, December 1934-September 1937

Bright Eyes (David Butler; December 28, 1934)

The Little Colonel (David Butler; February 22, 1935)

Our Little Girl (John S. Robertson; June 7, 1935)

Curly Top (Irving Cummings; July 26, 1935)

The Littlest Rebel (David Butler; November 22, 1935)

Captain January (David Butler; April 24, 1936)

The Poor Little Rich Girl (Irving Cummings; July 24, 1936)

Dimples (William A. Seiter; October 16, 1936)

Stowaway (William A. Seiter; December 25, 1936)

Wee Willie Winkie (John Ford; July 30, 1937)

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[380] Gregory D. Black has detailed in his book *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), how "gangster films cut to the very center of what was acceptable on screen," 108, thus receiving particularly close attention under Joseph Breen and the PCA.

[381] Joseph Breen, memorandum (March 6 1934, *Now and Forever*, PCA file).

[382] In March, the *Motion Picture Herald* would note, "As far as Shirley Temple is concerned the mere publication of her name is now apparently enough to create much interest," (August 4 1934, *Now and Forever*, PCA file).

The release of *Bright Eyes* in 1934 ushered in what I consider the "Classical Era" of Shirley Temple filmmaking, when Shirley Temple was at the height of her popularity in Hollywood, and her star image/persona was at its most cohesive and recognizable. In films from this era, Temple is afforded the full star treatment: narrative and secondary character development revolve around her (though again, as Miss Fix-It she does less problem-solving than needing protection), and in each film she makes a grand (and sometimes delayed, as in the case of *The Little Colonel* and *Stowaway*) entrance into the story. In this section, I wish to consider Shirley Temple's performance and representation within her classic films and in surrounding extra-textual discourses in the context of the child narrative musical, which I have suggested was created out of the established integrative musical syntax to accommodate her particularly individuated, juvenated persona. In particular, I want to look at how Temple's representation as "cute" and "priceless" – that is, objectifiable but not explicitly "sexy," and effortlessly and spontaneously talented – was integrated into the established syntax of her films. Nevertheless, as I will show, certain aspects of Temple's performance and representation may be seen as residually excessive to generic, textual constraints, and thus subversive of the phallogocentric logic on which the narratives of her classic films are predicated, foreshadowing the crisis of representation that would occur in her later films.

It is at this point in Temple's career that the phenomenon of her popularity became a frequent subject of popular and critical discourse, and I believe theorizing the source of her objective appeal to viewers will also bear certain digressive exploration here. Overall, discourses surrounding Temple at the time of her films' release contributed to a mythic construction of her star image as spontaneously immanent and naturally-occurring, if almost mysteriously so. Indeed, it was with some degree of wonder that, in review of *Our Little Girl*, the *Motion Picture Herald* noted that Temple's excessive precocity was attractive to audiences, and that they seemed to respond so positively to the affect of "what is generally termed 'cute.'"[383] Similarly, Gilbert Seldes wrote an article in *Esquire* attempting to come to grips with the source of Temple's appeal, touching on her "rude and rowdy" behaviour, her "boisterous laugh", and the special attraction she appeared to hold for men looking for the "mocking and contemptuous."[384] *Photoplay*'s review of *Our Little Girl* in particular spoke to a popular view of Temple's persona:

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[383] *Motion Picture Herald* (June 15 1935, *Our Little Girl*, PCA file).

[384] As quoted in Temple Black, Op. Cit., 107-108. Seldes concluded that she would be "good for two more pictures;" he was off by approximately twelve.

> Made to order for you Shirley Temple fans, Shirley is cuter than ever, refreshingly natural and talented enough to carry the trite story. [...] Shirley keeps the home intact, with the triangle problem glossed over in favour of cute youngsters, led by Shirley, behaving with natural charm. No harrowing emphasis on pathos, and the proper spirit is maintained to make it a suitable vehicle for the little star. [...] Human and pleasant picture – and it's all Shirley's.[385]

The key qualitative words in this review are "cute" (twice), "natural" (twice), "talented", "spirit", "human", and "pleasant": evidence that what contemporary audiences talked about or admitted to finding appealing in this (and other) Temple film(s) was her benign, approachable quality of seeming "naturalness." It would therefore seem probable that pleasures in viewing Shirley Temple were not necessarily channeled through exclusively paedophilic or voyeuristic perspectives, and it is possible that Shirley Temple's performance of juvenated femininity as a young female actor elicited also identificatory responses, however transitory, from her adult audiences.[386]

The possibility of such an alternate perspective on Shirley Temple recalls Jonathan Bignell's theory that "the adult audience can partake in [an] experience of childhood [represented onscreen] and remove the apparent boundary that separates their experience from [...] childhood," provided the adult audience is able to follow a "logic of dissolution."[387] It is particularly significant that two of the words consistently used to describe or refer to Shirley Temple in academic and/or popular discourse are "human" and "natural", connoting, specifically, the familiar and non-alien. Perhaps one of the potential sources of adult pleasure in viewing Shirley Temple is the possibility of recognizing shared humanness, which would partially negate Merish/Lury's theory on Temple's freakish difference from the adult subject as child/female/prodigy. In this case, an adult's identification of Shirley Temple as or with the "cute" serves not so much to recuperate *her* dangerous freakishness within the domestic setting – to make it safe – but to recuperate within society the alienatedness of the self – particularly in the context of the Great Depression – which may be identified and mutually recognized in the paradoxically freakish and familiar body of Shirley Temple. Wherever or from whichever perspective "pleasure in viewing" Shirley Temple may be seen

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[385] "The Shadow Stage", *Photoplay* (August 1935), 69.

[386] Studlar has recently theorized, on the other hand, that Temple's representation as a juvenated female is intended to "construct the love between a little girl and a man (a father, a grandfather, a father-in-the-making) as being of a different order than that of paedophilia," to domesticate and de-sexualize male desire as parental/paternal. *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 65.

[387] Jonathan Bignell, "Familiar Aliens: *Teletubbies* and postmodern childhood," *Screen* (46:3, Autumn 2005), 384.

to have been derived, it would appear that both the narratives of her classic films and corresponding promotional and discursive material worked towards the construction of a myth of naturalness and spontaneity surrounding her image/persona. As I have already suggested, this functioned to disavow some of the more problematic aspects of Temple's real labour as a child star and to mitigate her narrative agency within the texts of her films, in addition to capitalizing on the attractive features of her persona and image.

With the exception of *Wee Willie Winkie*, Temple's classic films posit her in a firmly passive role; that is, her mere presence within a family or prospective family unit is seen to inspire feelings of protectiveness on the part of a male paternal figure who thereby creates/preserves a home for his priceless child. In *Bright Eyes*, *Curly Top*[388] and *Stowaway*, Temple plays an orphan adopted by a single male benefactor, which brings about his meeting with and/or marriage to a secondary female lead who, it is understood, will step into a maternal role. In *The Little Colonel* and *Dimples*, the threat of Temple's being taken away from her grandfather effects either ideological conciliation between him and his daughter/Temple's mother (*The Little Colonel*) or direct ideological conciliation between himself and Temple (*Dimples*), which is mirrored in the heterosexual union of two temporary adoptive parents. Both *Our Little Girl* and *The Poor Little Rich Girl* see Temple's disappearance effecting reconciliation between divorced parents (*Our Little Girl*) or between various sets of parents and surrogate parents (her father and a co-worker and the couple with whom Temple's character briefly performs a radio show during her absence from home in *The Poor Little Rich Girl*). Only *The Littlest Rebel* and *Captain January* dispense with a secondary female lead/mother figure on which to displace the romantic subtext of the narrative, thus transgressing the boundaries of the traditional semantic/syntactic structure of the classically integrated/child narrative musical. However, both films are predicated on ideological conciliation between her father/adoptive father and a secondary male character who is also a pseudo-father to Temple, thus satisfying to some degree the dual narrative focus of the musical. Finally in *Wee Willie Winkie*, Temple is seen to earn the affections of several surrogate fathers, including her grandfather, her mother's suitor, and a the gruff sergeant McDuff (Victor McLaglen), but for the first time narrative resolution is achieved not through Temple's passive (re)adoption into a family unit, but by her direct and willful manipulation of events: she saves her colonel grandfather from death at the hands of an Indian rebel, which inspires a ceasefire between them. In such a way, *Wee Willie Winkie* may

[388] Interestingly, *Curly Top* is an adaptation of the *Daddy Long Legs* story, by which the orphan becomes the ward of an anonymous benefactor. Whereas in the book and multiple other film adaptations the orphan then marries the benefactor, in *Curly Top* Temple's benefactor's sexual desire is channeled towards her older sister, thus narratively mitigating any inference to an explicitly paedophilic love on the part of the male lead.

be syntactically structured more akin to an adventure film than a musical, but I will return to a discussion of this film as a hybrid/transitional text later. Overall, I would argue that the classical child narrative developed around Shirley Temple may be seen to have been predicated on the preservation of the nuclear family unit as natural necessity, which is catalyzed by the spontaneous immanence of the priceless child Shirley Temple within each text. Heterosexual love and female sexuality are thus firmly contained and domesticized within the family unit, made less the object of spectacle than of narrative context.

Considering Temple's performance and representation in films from this era, however, it is interesting to note that in the concretization of Temple's image as corollary to significations of spontaneity, naturalness, and play appears to have emerged an attendant and performative (that is, inconsistent and ritualistic) tendency towards the masculinization of her image. As Studlar has also noted,[389] Temple tends to appropriate certain masculine gestures and iconographic signifiers of masculinity, or perhaps more specifically boyhood, throughout her Classical Era films. Most notable perhaps is Temple's characters' appropriation of male or masculinized clothing. In each of these eight films – most consistently in *Bright Eyes*, *Captain January*, *Dimples*, and *Stowaway* – Temple appears frequently dressed in masculine-styled clothing like trousers, overalls and pajamas. This may be seen as a reflection of her characters' association with male homosocial societies: an aviators' club in *Bright Eyes*, sailors in *Captain January* and street urchins in *Dimples*, while her Chinese-style pyjama pant suit in *Stowaway* marks her out clearly from other little girls her age. Further, at the end of *The Poor Little Rich Girl*, Temple, James Dunn, and Alice Faye all appear in the final musical number wearing military uniform. Throughout *Wee Willie Winkie*, in which Priscilla (Temple) becomes an unofficial soldier within a British regiment in India, Temple wears a kilted military uniform identical to that worn by the adult male soldiers. In each case, Temple's appropriation of masculinized clothing appears to lend her a degree of freedom of movement and associative playfulness more stereotypically ascribed to male children.

Nadine Wills, elaborating on the significance of Temple's tendency towards a cute and/or contained form of cross-dressing in her films, has pointed out that while women-in-uniform costume and masculinized dress had been common to burlesque, revues, vaudeville, opera, and ballet from at least the mid-19th century in America, in the 1930s, the costuming of women in uniform and trousers in the 1930s had come to represent "the

[389] "Temple's dominating child heroines are always engaged in an oscillation between stereotyped masculine and feminine bahaviors": Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 80.

instability and contestability of gender during the Depression era." Whereas previously women-in-uniform had served comedic and/or erotic purposes on film, to highlight the "truth" of gender binaries, in the 1930s (in the context of widespread male unemployment) such cross-dressing could be read as a potentially subversive act.[390] Wills makes a distinction, however, between women wearing military-*influenced* fashions (such as Temple's aviator costume in *Bright Eyes*), a sort of hybridized costume more insidiously subversive of patriarchal culture and gender binaries, and women-in-"actual" uniform costume (such as Temple's outfit in *Poor Little Rich Girl*'s "I Love a Military Man" musical number), as parodic and implicitly critical of women's *actual* physical femininity under the facade of masculine clothes.[391] In this context, the signifying potential of Shirley Temple's costumes emerges.

Temple's tendency to appear wearing iconographic signifiers of masculinity – especially masculine or military-style clothes – may be read as transgressive of traditional gender binaries and critical of phallogocentric discourses on the semiology of clothing. However, in that when Temple inevitably appears in frilly, short dresses and skirt suits in each of the eight films from this classical period the contrast between her previously masculine and now-feminized appearance is drastic, I would argue that her purposeful association with iconographic signifiers of masculinity throughout her classic films functions more to fetishize her individuatedness, precocity, and "naturalness" as a female protagonist and to re-affirm her implicit sexual function as a female, nevertheless. For example, early on in *Bright Eyes*, Shirley Blake's (Temple) boyish clothing (aviator togs and overalls) is contrasted with the overtly, even exaggeratedly, feminine clothing worn by Joy Smythe, a bratty child played by fellow child actor (and sometime rival) Jane Withers, whose dainty costumes clash harshly with her needling and abrasive (not to mention violent) personality. When Shirley and Joy play dress-up in Joy's clothes, the two look comically overdressed in their trappings of femininity – Joy, because her costume reflects the outlandishness of her behaviour, Shirley because her costume contrasts with her down-to-earth, tomboyish persona. Shirley is evidently much more at home in the "natural" environment – which is also a male homosocial one – of the aviator's club, where she does not have to perform to a heightened level of femininity. Of course, it is not so simple as to conclude that Shirley Temple/Blake is "one of the boys;" in fact her "naturalness" within a homosocial environment is, in this film, seen to elicit or bring out her own innate femininity by virtue of

[390] Nadine Wills, "Women in Uniform: Costume and the 'unruly woman' in the 1930s Hollywood musical", Op. Cit., 317-318.
[391] Ibid., 320-321.

her sexual difference from the men around her. In her performance of "The Good Ship Lollipop", in which Shirley struts up and down the main aisle of an airplane, gazed upon rapturously by the all-male chorus, she wears a typically feminine (and very short) party dress. When she is inevitably picked up by one of the men, her skirt is also hiked, an instance of the "accidental crotch shot" identified by Wills that effectively reframes the spectacle of her performance as a display of Temple's *sexuality*, as opposed to her independent/active (male-oriented?) *skill*.[392] Despite Temple's evident attempts to cover herself, to repel the gaze upon her exposed female body (she hastily pulls at the hem of her dress, recalling earlier gestures in similar situations), she is literally dressed up and revealed to be female in the same instance. She is thus presented in the text to be the sexual complement, rather than equal, to men in a homosocial society, which is both gendered and sexed "male" dichotomously to Temple's femininity.

The narrative and form of *Bright Eyes*, then, as directed by David Butler, seeks to re-iterate Temple's essential femininity while also critiquing femininity as performable to excess: Shirley is naturally, desirably feminine; Joy is performatively, excessively feminine. This is a recurring theme of Butler's direction throughout others of Temple's "classic" films such as *The Little Colonel* (1935), *The Littlest Rebel* (1935), and *Captain January* (1936).[393] Each of these films charts, in one way or another, Shirley Temple's "progression" from tomboy, as represented by her masculinized clothing, towards rehabilitation as appropriately and positively female; this is evidenced by her appearance at the end of each film in feminized dress.[394] Indeed, the narrative of each of these films is predicated on answering the Colonel Lloyd's (Frank Morgan) question to little Lloyd (Temple) in *The Little Colonel*:[395] "When am I gonna see you look the way a little girl *should* look: fresh and dainty as a flower?" Butler's films therefore seemingly seek to re-gender Shirley Temple as female according to her female sex and in opposition to her male co-stars, thus satisfying a familiar

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[392] Wills, "'110 per cent woman': the crotch shot in the Hollywood musical", Op. Cit., 131-132.

[393] Bracketing also that "Butler's direction" could, or perhaps should, be qualified as "Butler's direction under the aegis of Twentieth Century Fox, Darryl Zanuck, etc.

[394] In *The Littlest Rebel*, Temple is first seen in an elaborate party frock; as her Southern family's fortune declines due to the Civil War, so does Temple's appearance and identity as appropriately female and, indeed, properly "white". In one scene, Temple appears in black face and rags while hiding from Northern soldiers, thus concealing her identity as a well-to-do, white female. By the end of the film, her identity and status has been regained and reaffirmed. Similarly, Shirley Temple is restored to her proper gender and social status during *Captain January*'s denouement: brought back into the fold of her re-adoptive, well-to-do kin, but still able to live near to the eponymous Captain and his homosocial society of sailors, Temple is outfitted in fine clothes and short skirts in place of the naval-themed outfits she has previously worn.

[395] In the film, Temple is named after her grandfather. He refuses initially to recognize her as kin on the grounds that he disowned her mother for marrying a Yankee. The film therefore follows Temple/Lloyd's rehabilitation into patriarchal society as she wins her grandfather's love and protection.

trope of Hollywood musicals, yet simultaneously positing femininity as fluid – negotiable as a performance – when ascribed to the female body.

However in the films *Curly Top* (1935) and *The Poor Little Rich Girl* (1936), both directed by Irving Cummings, and even to a greater extent in *Dimples* and *Stowaway*, directed by William A. Seiter in 1936, we may observe more ambivalent renderings of Temple's gender and sexuality at work. These four films follow the same narrative pattern as the rest of Temple's feature-length films: Temple is rescued or befriended by/reunited with a benevolent male authority figure, whom she manages to match with a suitable love interest/stand-in for herself. Yet Temple's gender is not ultimately closed as diametrically opposed or complementary to that of the central male or other character in the film. Significantly, *Curly Top* sees Temple embodying those same elements of excessive femininity which had been ridiculed previously in the figure of Joy Smythe. In the number "When I Grow Up", Temple sings about and performs as "herself" at various stages of her future life: as a debutante, as a bride at the age of twenty-one, and finally as an elderly woman. In the first two parts of the song, as debutante and bride, Temple appears to be playing to what could be construed as the paedophilic gaze, dressed in lovely gowns designed to highlight both her youth and her potential sexual maturation simultaneously. Yet when she appears as a grandmother, her "sexiness" as an object of desire is immediately undercut, highlighting the performative nature, indeed the manufactured-ness, of those other instances of femininity represented. Temple dances offstage in her granny costume only to reappear tapping and skipping rope in more appropriately juvenile clothes. Thus ironically, Temple's "essential" femininity is deconstructed, is called out as being excessively performative. This is despite (or because of) the sequence's insistence on "imaging" Shirley Temple at various stages of female life.

Further, Temple as the eponymous "Curly Top" is neither rehabilitated nor restored to femininity as counterpart to the central male in (pre-sexual) heterosexual union at the end of the film. She remains an individuatedly impish character throughout, a clown of sorts, whose precocity and physical freedoms – expressed, quite literally, in her wearing of pants in the film – precludes sexual objectification. And while Temple's matching of her paternal benefactor Edward (John Boles) with her older sister Mary (Rochelle Hudson) – "I asked Uncle Edward to marry us," she tells Mary – has been read by others as Edward's marriage to Curly by proxy,[396] I would argue that the structure of this triangular relationship

[396] Kincaid, in his discussion of Shirley Temple in *Erotic Innocence*, notes that "Curly longs to marry 'Uncle Edward'" (Op. Cit., 121). Similarly, in *Our Little Girl*, Temple sings to her father (Joel McCrea), "Let me marry you and be your wife." In such cases, of course, Temple's expressed desires are to be taken as cute and innocent, in

effectively diffuses Curly/Temple's sexual potential in the film. Curly offers up Mary as an appropriate mate for Edward (realizing herself to be *in*appropriate), rather than as a surrogate or stand-in until such time as Curly is sexually mature. Curly/Temple, thus emptied of sexual signification and potential, exists as the embodiment of play and misrule. The film closes on Temple's face, lips pursed and eyebrows raised in mock surprise at Edward and Mary's embrace. "Oh my goodness!" she exclaims, Temple's signature closing line: like Puck's "apology" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "If we shadows have offended, [...]", it is an expression of mischief and glee from an objective and narrativizing perspective, but also at a remove from the narratively meaning-bearing structure of the heterosexual couple who affirm the film's syntactic function as a musical. In such a way, Temple's functioning as an individuated female presence is narratively and affectively excessive.

Similarly, in *The Poor Little Rich Girl*, *Dimples*, and *Stowaway*, Shirley Temple is imaged less in terms of stereotypical female roles and feminine iconography than she is imbued with a certain subjective narrative agency, particularly evident in her musical performances. I have already suggested that in *The Poor Little Rich Girl* Temple's final appearance in military uniform may be read as an equation of Temple's narrative agency with the identically-dressed male-female team of James Dunn and Alice Faye (counter to Nadine Wills' argument that military uniform, as worn by females in 1930s musical performances, necessarily underscores and even ridicules their essential feminine sexuality). The closing number of *Dimples* again images Temple in male-oriented uniform/costume, as she appears for a time alone onstage in white top hat and tails, ostensibly as part of New York's first minstrel show. This is the first instance of Temple closing a film with a solo musical number, and the added responsibility reflects both her increased maturity (by this time, Temple's capabilities as a dancer are markedly improved) and the centrality of her character/persona both to narrative closure with*in* the film and to audience responses from with*out* the film.[397] Temple's mimicry of male African-American performance styles throughout her own performance also highlights her growing sophistication as an impersonator of characters, and Temple displays these talents to greater effect in *Stowaway*, which was released shortly after *Dimples* at the end of 1936. As part of the

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that she is understood to be ignorant of the distinction between certain male-female relationships, yet therein lies her sexualizable potential to learn. Such instances of semi-incestuous desire – or what then appears to be semi-incestuous desire – must be taken within narrative context however: in both films, Temple's character is terrified of losing her father (figure) (in *Our Little Girl*, to divorce from her mother; in *Curly Top*, by being adopted by somebody else). Marriage, relative to such Temple characters, therefore functions rather more as a protective tie than sexual relationship.

[397] Like many musicals, particularly of the "backstage" variety, *Dimples* functions as entertainment in defense of entertainment: "Dimples" Appleby (Temple) rises to the top of Broadway in part by convincing her benefactress Caroline Drew (Helen Westley), initially a staunch theatre-hater, of the virtues of the stage.

number "You Gotta S-M-I-L-E To Be H-A-Double-P-Y", Temple performs competent impressions of Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor, as well as Ginger Rogers (dancing out with a tuxedoed dummy "Fred Astaire").

Merish detects within Temple's mimicry of such adult performance styles a "fundamental ambivalence", in that "her precocity both instates her resemblance to adults and her crucial difference from them."[398] Indeed, such instances of mimicry may be seen to spectacularize, to objectify, Temple's precocity for the sake of domesticizing and "making-safe" her freakish exceptionality on behalf of the adult subject. However, this view automatically favours Cummings/Seiter/Twentieth Century Fox's, etc., control over Temple's image (*they who have "made" Temple perform this way*) while negating Temple's agency as a performer (*she performs nevertheless skillfully*). Throughout this "classic period" of films, Shirley Temple consistently – and increasingly – performs variations on character and performance style, particularly in her musical numbers, which suggest a mature understanding of performance as craft, and an even more advanced understanding-cum-practice of gendered personas as performance/performative in and of itself. It should not be overlooked that Temple most frequently mimicked male performers and/or parodied traditionally male-oriented performance styles in her song-and-dance numbers (impersonating Cantor and Jolson, mimicking – and often copying step-for-step – Bill "Bojangles" Robinson), and ever-increasingly dressed in their attire.

With this in mind, *Wee Willie Winkie*, the last of Temple's classical-era films, may be considered the point of intersection for these aspects of performance, and as a turning point in Shirley Temple's career. Beyond the signifying potential of Temple's military uniform and her mimicry of masculine behaviours throughout *Wee Willie Winkie*, certain key moments in its text may be seen to invert the systems of gender signification and identification apparently at work in her earlier films, thus (re-)emphasizing Shirley Temple's agency as a performer. Arguably, these moments, literally imaged at the directorial discretion of John Ford, speak as much to Ford's auteurist rendering of actors' performances in his films as they do to those actors' authoring of their own images and developed personas. Nevertheless, the way(s) in which Ford presents (images, frames, etc.) Shirley Temple and other actors in *Wee Willie Winkie* offer an unusually complex representation of femininity for a Shirley Temple film.

Temple herself would later describe *Wee Willie Winkie* as a "watershed" event in the history of her films:

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[398] Merish, Op. Cit., 194.

> Until 1937 my film image had been someone cuddlesome and cute, a matchmaker and problem-solver, a child unsinkable and indestructible, always a paragon of purity. For years I had been almost immune to exacting criticism, except at moments there seemed too much of me.
>
> Now I had begun to turn one shoulder on childhood, although some people contrived to cling tenaciously to their own perception of what I should be. In their own time warp they were not changing much; therefore, neither should I.[399]

Perhaps it is as a result of Temple's increased maturity, both in years and in temperament and competence, as Temple here suggests, that in *Wee Willie Winkie* she is afforded a degree of narrative agency and emotional complexity/character individuation unprecedented in previous films. While *Wee Willie Winkie* conforms to one of the main plot devices of the child narrative musical – that being her uniting of the paternal/authoritative male with a love interest (often a surrogate mother figure, and in this case Priscilla's actual mother) – *Winkie* deviates from the classical child narrative norm in positing two men as potential father figures to Temple's character – Lieutenant "Coppy", her mother's suitor (Michael Whalen), and Sergeant MacDuff (Victor McLaglan) – before killing one off, thus necessitating an unusually complex and nuanced performance of grief from Shirley Temple.

Of course, Temple's effective communication of pathos has been central to an understanding of her persona and affect from the very beginning of her career in feature-length films. As much as then-contemporary fan magazines and current theoretical discourses have focused on her symbolic potential as the embodiment of optimism, sweetness and light, so too have they consistently referenced and returned to the image of Shirley Temple as weeping child. In at least one scene in every one of her films, Temple is shown crying; her realistic, even naturalistic, performance of such is frequently referenced in contemporary star discourses: for example, biographer Jerome Beatty's praise for Temple's being able to cry on cue (whilst simultaneously stressing that she does not really feel sad),[400] and Adela Rogers St. Johns's maternal, naturalizing response to Shirley Temple, "[She] belongs to me as she belongs to every mother [...] I have laughed and wept with her and loved her as humanity must love kids if it's to go on at all."[401] Temple's performance of grief is thus consistently removed of its very performative nature, and her skill consequently

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[399] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 182.
[400] Thus, at once affirmation and denial of Temple's skill as a performer: Jerome Beatty, Op. Cit.
[401] Adela Rogers St. Johns, "Shirley Wants the Quintuplets for Christmas", *Photoplay* (December 1935), 23.

replaced with a seemingly natural proclivity towards tears and emotiveness. Temple herself later recounted how gravely important it seemed, even to herself, that in preparing for crying scenes she not be seen "acting": "I recognized [I had] a good technique, yet that telltale dry nose always reminded me that my performance was imperfect."[402] The irony is, of course, that Temple's labour in the production of tears was necessarily self-effacing and self-denying in order to be affective.

Karen Lury has suggested that the need to image/imagine Shirley Temple's tears as "real" stems from the subject/observer adult's tendency (need) to objectify (fetishize) children's grief:

> In witnessing children cry, we are being reassured of their (and our own) humanity, whether this is in everyday life, or as a performance: as a sign, tears are doubly potent – they are both essentially and performatively evidence of the humanness of the animal.[403]

Temple's performance of grief, turned into a real expression of grief (literally, the expressing of tears), therefore reminds us of her essential vulnerability and, aesthetically, her cuteness,[404] thus mitigating her freakish precocity. In such a way, this fetish for visualising Shirley Temple's tears has served to victimize her as the object of a domesticating, paedophilic gaze rather than to reflect her prowess as a performer. She appears always already affective; her talent is incidental.

In *Wee Willie Winkie*, however, Temple performs a complex negotiation of grief which is not obfuscated in favour of imaging her "real" tears. Temple's nuanced performance here is perhaps the natural culmination of years of learning on the job. While filming *The Poor Little Rich Girl* some months earlier, Irving Cummings had told Gertrude Temple that he found her daughter to be losing some of her "baby quality" and gaining a new-found "emotional understanding." [405] Ironically, Temple communicates such "understanding" in *Wee Willie Winkie* through the performance of *mis*understanding: during Sergeant MacDuff's death scene – for which, in an earlier film, Temple would have been imaged crying – Winkie/Temple, oblivious initially to the gravity of the situation, sings "Auld Lang Syne" to the dying soldier, the lightness of her tone and expression juxtaposed with the pathos of the lyrics and setting. As she perceives MacDuff to be slipping away, Temple

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[402] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 69.
[403] Lury, Op. Cit., 181.
[404] Merish, Op. Cit., 187.
[405] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 129.

modulates her expression to reflect her perplexity at the situation – as she says, she does not "understand death" – instead of dissolving into tears. While Ford's influence here on Temple's performance style should not be discounted, nevertheless Temple's affective communication of emotion is perceptibly complex, a sign of her maturity as a performer that was noted in contemporary reviews and star discourse on *Wee Willie Winkie*.[406]

It is in this context that I wish to consider Graham Greene's infamous review of Shirley Temple in *Wee Willie Winkie*, published 28 October 1937:

> The owners of a child star are like leaseholders—their property diminishes in value every year. Time's chariot is at their back; before them acres of anonymity. Miss Shirley Temple's case, though, has a peculiar interest: Infancy with her is a disguise, her appeal is more secret and more adult. Already two years ago, she was a fancy little piece. (Real childhood, I think, went out after *The Littlest Rebel.*) In *Captain January* she wore trousers with the mature suggestiveness of a Dietrich: her neat and well-developed rump twisted in the tap dance: her eyes had a sidelong, searching coquetry. Now in *Wee Willie Winkie*, wearing short kilts, she is a complete totsy. Watch her swaggering stride across the Indian barrack-square: hear the gasps of excited expectation from her antique audience when the sergeant's palm is raised: watch the way she measures a man with agile studio eyes, with dimpled depravity. Adult emotions of love and grief glissade across the mask of childhood, a childhood skin deep. It is clever, but it cannot last. Her admirers, middle-aged men and clergymen, respond to her dubious coquetry, to the sight of her well-shaped and desirable little body, packed with enormous vitality, only because the safety curtain of story and dialogue drops between their intelligence and their desire.[407]

Shortly after the review was published, Twentieth Century-Fox successfully sued Greene for libel, resulting in the collapse of *Night and Day*, the British magazine in which his review appeared. Since then, scholars have largely taken Greene's review, and Twentieth Century

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[406] Another moment potentially attributable to Ford as a director, and nonetheless telling of a confusion of gender binaries in relation to Shirley Temple as *Wee Willie Winkie* is as follows: In a key shot, Sergeant MacDuff (Victor McLaglen), who has been teaching Priscilla how to be a soldier, spins around to attention; with his back briefly to the camera, his kilt flares, revealing scanty white underwear beneath his skirt – an accidental *male* crotch shot. This shot literally images the male genitals which, though the source and symbol of patriarchal culture, are typically elided from the text of Hollywood films and notably absent in the musical which is otherwise predicated on the "spectacle of femininity" and the imaging of the female crotch. It is further significant that Temple's wearing of male military costume, which is identical to that worn by adult male soldiers, is consistent throughout *Wee Willie Winkie*, not limited to a single musical number; her outfit thereby loses its spectacular effect and therefore its supposed dissonance with Temple's physical gender. Temple and McLaglen are equally spectacular in their military kilts; their relationship to one another – little girl to paternalistic, authoritative male – is not predicated on their sexual difference, but their essential *similarity*. Indeed, in this film more than any other heretofore, Temple is presented as *equal to* the male society with which she associates herself, as opposed to *dependent on* their paternalistic protection.

[407] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 184-185.

Fox's response, to be the culmination-cum-vocalization of building concerns and anxieties over Shirley Temple's signifying power and the source of pleasure for her adult audiences in the mid-1930s. Almost since the very beginning of her career, rumours had surrounded Shirley Temple regarding her real age (grounded in the truth considering Temple was older than publicized, though the rumour that she was in fact a thirty year-old little person with children was nothing short of ridiculous), the veracity of her sweet nature (almost all behind-the-scenes "reporting" on Shirley Temple, such as Adela St. Johns's article "Shirley Wants the Quintuplets for Christmas" in the December 1935 issue of *Photoplay*, strove to prove how identical Temple's personality was to her onscreen persona), and the source of her talent (similarly, fan discourse tended to stress Temple's "naturalness" as a performer, yet at the same time show how serious she was about doing things "right").[408] Even to Shirley Temple evidently, Greene's disparagement of *Wee Willie Winkie* was not wholly unfounded: in her autobiography, Temple notes Greene's remarks to be consistent with an earlier review of *Captain January*,[409] thus indicating a traceable history of debate concerning her performance style and star persona. The fact that Temple's mother suddenly became sensitive to such critiques (which she previously would have ignored) following the publication of Greene's review is further indication, writes Temple, that her then-rapid maturation necessitated a re-evaluation of her performance from a critical perspective, which is what Greene sought to initiate.[410] Greene's review has thusly been celebrated as a timely critique of the system of production, distribution, and exhibition by which Shirley Temple's persona has been manipulated and received.

However, Greene's response has served not so much to "liberate" Shirley Temple from this ostensibly paedophilic and abusive system of production (which film scholars such as Lury and Merish have continued to critique) as it has compounded the problem of her objectification. In casting Shirley Temple as a "complete totsy [...] [who] measures a man with agile studio eyes, with dimpled depravity", Greene manages only to consider Shirley Temple from the perspective of the mature heterosexual male, quite disregarding those alternative subjective positions of the homosexual male, the hetero/homo-sexual female, the male or female child, and so forth, who might be disinclined to view Temple's body (and his critique is very much about her *body*, as opposed to her *persona*) from a sexually

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[408] Adela St. Johns, "Shirley Wants the Quintuplets for Christmas," Op. Cit., 22-25.

[409] "*Captain January*, the latest Shirley Temple picture, is sentimental, a little depraved, with an appeal interestingly decadent. [...] Shirley Temple acts and dances with immense vigour and assurance, but some of her popularity seems to rest on a coquetry quite as mature as Miss Colbert's and on an oddly precocious body as voluptuous in grey flannel as Miss Dietrich's." Graham Greene, *The Pleasure-Dome: The Collected Film Criticism 1935-1940*, ed. John Russell Taylor (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 92 (from *The Spectator*, 7 August, 1936).

[410] Temple Black, *Child Star: An Autobiography* (London: Headline Book Publishing PLC, 1989), 186-187.

desirous point of view (though other forms of – potentially paedophilic – desire are still very much possible from these perspectives). Ultimately, Greene's review manifests the same obfuscation of Temple's agency as a performer and the elision of labour and skill from discussions of her "work" evidenced in contemporary fan discourses, and enacted by the narratives of her classic films. Greene rationalizes audience responses to Temple from a heterocentrist and phallogocentric point of view, effectively delimiting the significations of Temple's performance of juvenated femininity according to an adult male fantasy and ignoring the possibility of other subversive readings.

Wee Willie Winkie was indeed a watershed event, and from this point on, Temple's features may be seen to have become increasingly self-reflexive and more explicitly concerned with the construction of Temple's performance style, persona and image. In Temple's classic films, moments of transgressiveness – Temple's subversion of gender roles through the appropriation of male or masculinized iconography and/or modes of performance, as well her increasing tendency to impersonate characters (thus showcasing her skill and labour) through and beyond her cute little white girl persona – erupted from the linear narratives of her films. Nevertheless, often such transgressiveness was disguised in or mitigated by the stylistic excessiveness of the musical numbers in which such moments occurred or subsumed into the generic plot. At the same time, Temple's agency as a performer continued (and continues) to be obfuscated and elided in star discourse and critical theory. It is only in her later, less critically and popularly regarded films, that Shirley Temple's performance of juvenated femininity may be seen fully to have subverted the hetero-, phallogo-centric constructs within which Graham Greene et. al. have typically considered Temple's work.

Late Features, October 1937-1940

Heidi (Allan Dwan; October 15, 1937)

Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (Allan Dwan; March 18, 1938)

Little Miss Broadway (Irving Cummings; July 29, 1938)

Just Around the Corner (Irving Cummings; November 11, 1938)

The Little Princess (Walter Lang; March 10, 1939)

Susannah of the Mounties (Walter Lang and William A. Seiter; 1939)

The Blue Bird (Walter Lang; January 19, 1940)

At the time of *Heidi*'s release in 1937, Shirley Temple, still number one in star popularity rankings, was being actively promoted as the future star of MGM's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. In a promotional reel from 1938 following Temple's return home from a family holiday in Bermuda, she announces to the camera, "It's good to be home – After all, there's no place like home!" Yet the part of Dorothy Gale would, famously, go to Judy Garland, who was already a contract player at MGM and did not therefore require loaning out. Her singing voice was also quite plainly better than Temple's. But even without the loss of Dorothy, as biographer Ann Edwards has detailed, Twentieth Century-Fox was predicting Shirley Temple's decline.[411]

From the end of 1937 to the beginning of 1940, when Temple's tenure at Twentieth Century Fox ended, Temple appeared in seven films for the studio. I have identified these as belonging to her "Late" period. These films, by virtue of their lateness in her career – that is, their association with its effective demise – have been afforded relatively little attention by audiences and critics alike since their release. It was not until 1939 that one of Temple's films (*Susannah of the Mounties*) failed at the box office, but beginning in 1937 her films began to return fewer box office receipts than anticipated while receiving less public attention in fan magazines. Film critics increasingly took issue with the staleness and sentimentality of her films' plots,[412] with Temple herself later describing *Just Around the Corner* as a "political inanity". The prevailing critical opinion has been that after *Wee Willie Winkie*, Temple's films declined in quality, both as a result of and causing further diminished popularity.

With the exception of *The Blue Bird* (Twentieth Century Fox's fantasy film answer to MGM's *The Wizard of Oz*), Temple's late films conform to the same narrative formula played out in her previous films: Temple's character negotiates being reunited with an authoritative male/father figure whom (excepting *The Little Princess*) she pairs romantically with a secondary female character/surrogate mother. Yet these later films are formally more complex than their predecessors, employing an unprecedented degree of self-reflexivity, especially within their extended musical sequences. Such formal variations on the narrative theme of Temple's films ultimately serve to highlight her performance qua performance: her skill – her work – at manufacturing a certain image and persona within a given film. It is in these later films that we perceive Temple's self-conscious performance of femininity at its most transgressive of traditional representational paradigms of gender and sexuality.

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[411] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 190.
[412] Ibid., 120.

Before detailing these more subtle changes in Temple's performance style throughout her Late Period, it is first necessary to identify certain visible alterations of Shirley Temple's image towards the end of her career at Twentieth Century Fox. Until *Heidi* and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, Temple's appearance had changed little since her 1934 appearance in *Stand Up Cheer*. With the exception of banishing a single spit curl from her forehead,[413] Shirley Temple had worn the same hairstyle of fifty-six perfectly rolled curls on her head and the same exaggeratedly short (exaggeratedly juvenile) skirts in her films (when she was not dressed/fetishized in masculinized costume) and in publicity material off-screen. For the first time in *Heidi*, Temple consistently wears below-the-knee skirts, and in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, her hair is parted in pigtails. These are the first visible signs of maturation in the "Shirley Temple" image promoted by Twentieth Century Fox (changes which were evidently a source of great anxiety for studio executives and Gertrude Temple).[414] Temple's look would revert back to a more juvenated image in *Little Miss Broadway* and *Just Around the Corner*,[415] in which she once again appeared in short skirts (which were by this time age-inappropriate: Temple was ten and quite evidently approaching pubescence), though she did not revert to a baby-doll hairstyle, before returning to a more mature image presented in *The Little Princess* and *Susannah of the Mounties* (again in longer skirts with hair pulled back from the face). Overall, these changes reflect Twentieth Century Fox executives' efforts to respond to the reality of Shirley Temple's maturing body. It could no longer be argued that Temple's star image and persona, which had been constructed through her films/characters and promotional material as natural, spontaneous and innocent/pre-sexual, was an accurate and direct reflection of her "real" self: a rift of signification had developed between her maturing body and her juvenated image/persona as referent. Evidently then, the more apparent it became that a performance of juvenated femininity was, in fact, performative within, as opposed to essential or inherent to, the imaging of "Shirley Temple", the less attractive Shirley Temple became to audiences in the latter half of the 1930s.

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[413] According to Temple Black, the spit curl was a last-minute solution devised by Gertrude Temple to cover a bump on her daughter's forehead, which had been accrued immediately prior to shooting *Stand Up and Cheer*'s musical finale (Op. Cit).

[414] Ibid., 193.

[415] Both films were directed by Irving Cummings, whose films had been, in the context of her Classical Era films, relatively forward-thinking in imaging Shirley Temple (as discussed above). During her Classical Era, Temple's image was very much evocative of a young child. It is perhaps by no coincidence that *Little Miss Broadway* and *Just Around the Corner* appear to be the most stilted of her Late offerings: Cummings was likely more used to treating (and directing) Temple as a child than as an adolescent – he quite evidently did not know what to do with her in these later films.

In terms of formal developments within Temple's later films, and despite its otherwise traditional narrative trajectory, *Heidi* is also the first Shirley Temple vehicle to employ an extended musical number within a dream sequence – a formal technique that Jane Feuer has linked to avant-garde or experimental filmmaking practices due to its contradiction of linear, classical narrative.[416] *Heidi*'s one musical number, "My Little Wooden Shoes", occurs approximately halfway through the film, located in Heidi/Temple's dream of dancing with a boy in wooden clogs.[417] The number is narratively discontinuous with the rest of the film, existing as it does outside the spatio-temporal context of plot and without any significant (ostensibly, "sufficient") psychological motivation on the part of Heidi. For this reason, it seems, the "Little Wooden Shoes" number (like many such narratively discontinuous numbers in musical films) has been maligned by critics and by Shirley Temple herself for "mark[ing] the collapse of any studio resolve to build on the purely dramatic momentum first evident in *Wee Willie Winkie*."[418] Similarly narratively discontinuous and seemingly un-motivated by plot are the musical numbers stacked at the end of *Little Miss Broadway* and *Just Around the Corner* (these films may be considered to be part of the arguably more archaic genre tradition of the "let's-put-on-a-show" backstage musical, or the musical in defence of entertainment). Like "My Little Wooden Shoes", these numbers appear to be designed for the sole purpose of showing off Temple's precocious talent as a singer and dancer; and as they are largely unmotivated, either psychologically or emotionally, by plot (except as the aural/visual manifestation of Temple's characters' work), they do not provide further information on Temple or her characters' personalities/persona, and are thus un-integrated within their narrative and syntax. Rather, these numbers highlight the constructed-ness and performative nature of Temple's appearance on film, distancing her singer-dancer image from her "sweet little girl" persona.

More interesting, even, is the tendency in these later films to employ the self-reflexive technique of referencing previous Shirley Temple performances within a given performance at hand. This may be seen as an attempt on behalf of the studio to recuperate her modulated (matured) image within the context of an earlier, critically respected and popularly regarded body of work. The most obvious example is Temple's rendition of "Come and Get Your Happiness" in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, in which she launches into a

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[416] Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, Op. Cit.

[417] This is the first instance of Temple dancing with a partner on equal footing – that is, with a peer of the same race and opposite sex – in a film; it thus implies romantic potential between the two, an inference made possible because of Temple's advanced age and relative maturity. The sequence ends with Heidi/Temple resting her head on the boy's shoulder in close-up, framed as a romantic couple would traditionally be framed in a Hollywood film.

[418] Temple Black, Op. Cit., 193.

medley of hits from other, earlier films: she sings bars from "The Good Ship Lollipop" (*Bright Eyes*), "Animal Crackers in My Soup" (*Curly Top*), "When I'm With You" (declaring aside, "I used to sing this on my daddy's lap, thus intertextually referencing a scene from *Our Little Girl*), "Oh My Goodness!" (*The Poor Little Rich Girl*), and "Goodnight, My Love" (*Stowaway*), all the while staring directly into the camera, thus announcing her performance *qua performance*. During the musical finale, in which Temple appears with Bill Robinson dressed in military costume, they allude to a previous famous dance sequence in *The Little Colonel* by dancing briefly on prop stairs. In *Just Around the Corner*, Penny Hale (Temple) is complemented on her "bright eyes", and she repeats the by-now familiar refrain: "Oh my goodness!", which is also referenced in *Little Miss Broadway*. This repeated allusion to previous works has the distanciating effect of positioning the audience in a self-consciously subjective position to Shirley Temple, the performing object. Her performance here demands a gaze, demands objectification, whereas previously Temple's performance in front of the camera was posited as "natural", as merely incidental to recording. Temple's work in this Late Period is thus firmly placed and located in the spatio-temporal context of the time in which it is recorded. This version of Shirley Temple is therefore no longer the "eternal child", but an active performer/labourer for the camera: hers is now a presentational, more than representational, mode of performance. That is, Temple may be perceived as self-consciously constructing character and significations in these later films, rather than merely referencing (or attempting to look like she is referencing) her own "natural" persona and proclivities in front of the camera. Temple's later films are, therefore, first and foremost "about" her work as a performer.

Temple's last three films made during the 1930s – *The Little Princess*, *Susannah of the Mounties*, and *The Blue Bird* – are perhaps less explicitly self-reflexive or self-aware, but her performances in each are no less predicated on the expression of her craft as a performer. Interestingly enough, two of these films (*The Little Princess* and *Susannah of the Mounties*) largely eschew musical numbers in favour of a more realist style and performance from Temple (*The Blue Bird*, on the other hand, is highly stylised and indeed expressionistic in its *mise-en-scène* as a fantasy film – Twentieth Century Fox's answer to *The Wizard of Oz*). Reviews of Temple's performance in *The Little Princess* were generally positive – Edwards attributes this to audiences' sympathetic responses to themes of war and death in the family in the run-up to World War II[419] – while *Susannah of the Mounties* was a dismal failure at the box office and largely panned by critics. I would argue, however, that in both films, Temple

[419] Edwards, Op. Cit., 125.

offers a complex and nuanced portrayal (an "impersonation" as opposed to "personification") of a girl on the cusp of physical and emotional maturity – a maturity that has been imposed upon her and negotiated in response to an external and/or internal/psychological conflict. In *The Little Princess*, Sara Crewe (Temple) must confront societal prejudices and injustice after the apparent death of her father, while in *Susannah of the Mounties*, the orphaned Susannah/Temple must come to grips with an unrequited love for her rescuer Captain Monty (Randolph Scott) and sexual competition in the form of Margaret Lockwood.[420] Even *The Blue Bird*, for all its fantastical imagery, requires of Shirley Temple a psychologically complex portrayal of a spoiled girl who learns to appreciate what she has (which is the first-ever instance of Shirley Temple beginning a film as an unsympathetic character). The emphasis in these films, then, is on Temple's dramatic performance, on her abilities as an *act*or, as opposed to her "playing out" amusing tendencies and talents onscreen. Her persona has effectively been emptied of the "cute" and imbued with actorly skill, agency, and overall maturity fundamentally excessive to her syntactic function within the child narrative musical.

Overall, concomitant with Temple's physical maturation towards the end of the 1930s, her syntactic function in musicals appears to have suffered a crisis of representation and narrativization. In the process of becoming an adolescent before the public's eyes, of transitioning from one state and function of femaleness (child) to another (woman), Temple threatened to bely those myths of spontaneity and naturalness that had been developed around her image and persona as a star, by which she had been made a passive fetish object, a cute and priceless child. Furthermore, her sexual function in her texts – previously displaced onto secondary female/maternal characters, however tenuously – could no longer be disavowed by her rapidly maturing body. Thus, later features developed for Temple resorted to referencing her performances in past films as a means of distracting from the realities of her maturation, and of preserving the syntactic integrity of the child narrative musical as long as possible. When Twentieth Century Fox failed to renew her contract in 1940, it was obvious that musicals no longer knew what to do with Shirley Temple.

Conclusion

[420] *Susannah of the Mounties* is the first film in which Temple expresses a real libidinous desire for the authoritative male in the text – a desire which he explicitly rejects in favour of a mature love rival; this may be read as a final rejection of Temple's babysex aesthetic in light of her now physical and emotional maturity.

In this chapter I have provided a comprehensive catalogue and periodization of Shirley Temple's films from the beginning of her career in motion pictures in 1933 until the end of her contract with Twentieth Century Fox in 1940. Though often neglected by critical theorists, she stands as one of the most important, if not *the* most important, female performer in Hollywood musicals of the 1930s. Not only was Shirley Temple the most popular star of the decade, whose subsequent decline in popularity warrants exploration unto itself, she was also perhaps the most successful Hollywood performer in terms of her establishment of a cohesive image and star persona during her early career, which was refined and at times challenged during her Classical Period and subsequently deconstructed in her later features. This was co-incident with her (and her studio's likely unwitting participation in the) assertion of her agency as a performer and the subversion of her image as a "cute" little girl.

Highlighting in particular the growing significance, indeed the increasing visibility, of her "work" and the performativity inherent to her various expressions/characterizations of femininity throughout the 1930s, I have offered an alternate reading of Shirley Temple's films according to a logic of musical semantic and syntactic dissolution, by which Temple may be seen to have successfully transgressed traditional paradigms of female representation in the rejection of the paedophlic gaze, and to have overcome a tendency (on behalf of both studio executives and critical theorists) to elide "work" and creative agency from her films. Nevertheless, in transgressing these limitations, which had functioned as means of containing/disavowing both Temple's excessively performative affect as "cute" and thus fetishizing her precocious talent, and which could no longer be denied by virtue of her physically maturing body, Shirley Temple's function within the overall integrative and phallogocentric structure of the musical was effectively exhausted.

Chapter 5

"Just a Voice and Youth": Deanna Durbin, Judy Garland, and the performative juvenation of the late 1930s female musical star

By virtue of her own physical maturation, Shirley Temple's signifying function within the overall meaning-bearing structure of the female child narrative musical had been rendered all but irrelevant by the end of the decade. As a Little Miss Fix-It whose very presence spontaneously appeared to mend the broken relationships of others,[421] thus effecting the "Platonic ideal of integration" that Rick Altman has assigned to the musical's syntactic function, Temple's performative juvenation depended on the perceptible and imagistic "Otherness" of her physical and sexual difference from a mature female mother figure. Her spectacular feminine affect was thus disavowed as erotic (at least on the explicit level of text) and contained within a discourse of "cuteness." Simultaneously, the necessary labour of performance entailed in the construction of her image was effaced in preserving the image of her childishness – keeping her skirts short, curling her ringlets, postponing her adolescence – as long as possible. Thus Shirley Temple revealed within Hollywood the essential problem of incorporating the female child narrative as a structural feature within the semantic and syntactic framework of the musical: the child star's image was not a stable sign because it was guaranteed to suffer transformation.

For this reason, I would argue, popular discourses surrounding female performance in the 1930s musical shifted from a focus on the individual girl child to the fetishization of female adolescence. This paradigm shift functioned as a means of disavowing the essential problematics of female performative juvenation within the musical syntax. Replacing those articles that expressed wonder at the preponderance of "big pay babes" in movies from the middle of the decade,[422] in 1938 there was an explosion of literature in fan magazines and trade journals on Hollywood's so-called set of "young fry,"[423] adolescent stars like Mickey Rooney, Freddie Bartholomew, Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland. As Studlar has noted, this was a direct reflection of the extent to which the "teenager" had suddenly become an object of "cultural fascination" in America.[424] The fetishization of adolescent stars in popular discourse sanctioned and sanitized the erotic appeal that had been denied or disavowed in the filmic representation of Shirley Temple. Their romantic entanglements were a frequent

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[421] Jennifer Fleeger, "Deanna Durbin and the Mismatched Voice," *Camera Obscura*, 27:3 (2012), 78.
[422] "A Quartet of Big Pay Babes," Op. Cit..
[423] Sally Reid, "Young Fry Society," *Photoplay* (July 1939), 24.
[424] Studlar, *Precocious Charms*, Op. Cit., 95.

object of speculation in the press, functioning as an outlet for the expression of erotic interest in their image, while their characters' narratives in films tended to confirm their pre-sexuality (if not their sexual interest) – a paradigm of representation determined and closely guarded by Joseph Breen and the PCA. In such a way, teenage stars of the late 1930s were fetishized for their liminality, their poisedness-between-stages of life both physical and emotional, between innocence and (sexual) precocity. This would be manifested in the rise to prominence of Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland as leading female musical stars at the end of the decade.

Neither star to date has been afforded extensive scholarly analysis, excepting Jennifer Fleeger and Gaylyn Studlar's readings of the "mismatched" voice of Deanna Durbin,[425] Richard Dyer's ascription of performative "camp" to Judy Garland in analysis of her popularity amongst gay men, and Salman Rushdie's self-reflective discussion of her performance in *The Wizard of Oz*.[426] In that Durbin's mature and "womanly"-sounding voice bore connotations of sensuality/sexuality at odds with its referent image, her juvenile and ostensibly pre-sexual body, Jennifer Fleeger has referred to the performer as a fundamentally "mismatched woman."[427] As extrapolated by Studlar, this theory posits that Durbin's "vocal masquerade of womanliness [...] complicate[d] her representation of juvenated femininity promoted in the nonmusical elements of her films."[428] Such an observation might further be extended or compared to Judy Garland. Each star possessed a voice remarkable in its own right: Durbin was classically trained, with a soprano voice whose maturity belied the fact of her juvenility; Garland had taken lessons, but her rich contralto was practiced in contemporary swing and thus exercised more towards an affectation of "naturalness" and expressivity. Where Durbin's voice signified control, Garland's registered just-barely-contained emotion and spontaneity. As has been noted by Fleeger and Studlar, the specificity of Durbin's singing style threatened to pose problems for the narrative-formal integration of her films – how to integrate operatic musical sequences, with their connotations of archaism and high culture, into a storyline fitting for a teenage protagonist? – though her traditionally feminine good looks were iconic of those of the conventional female musical film star (more so, perhaps, than were Judy Garland's). Shorter, carrying some puppy fat, and with overall idiosyncratic features – her "lumpy *unsexiness*," by Rushdie's description – Garland fit less with the stereotypically attractive image of the female musical performer. Durbin's voice made her an incongruous image, but Garland was

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[425] Fleeger, Op. Cit..
[426] Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Op. Cit.; Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: BFI, 1992).
[427] Fleeger, Op. Cit., 70.
[428] Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 130.

a problematic visual sign as well, though her voice-as-sign was perhaps better suited to the signification of excessive feeling that was beginning to be associated particularly with the "awkward age" of adolescence in popular discourse.[429]

By the late 1930s, musicals were increasingly looking to represent the post-pubescent female adolescent as an idealized form of juvenated femininity over the more unknowable and problematic pre-pubescent child represented by Shirley Temple. The pre-pubescent child always already threatened to bear the inevitable signs of a physical change and maturation, the passage from one state of being (child) into another (adolescent/woman). Though consistently disavowed in its musical representation, the body of the female child speaks to the essential physicality, bodily-ness, and ultimate sexuality of the female star, outside of a purely objective and imaginary context. Though the individual adolescent might be performed as changeable or emotionally volatile/unformed, her body would speak to her already predetermined sexual function, the stable referent of her object/sign. I would therefore argue that the female adolescent stars Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland managed to retain the representational benefits of performative juvenation within the phallogocentric syntax of the classical Hollywood musical (by which their individuated talent, or "extraordinary giftedness" as termed by Ruth Waterbury,[430] was mitigated by their seeming "humanness"/"naturalness") precisely because they had already reached physical (and perceptible) sexual maturity as musical stars. While contemporaneous star/promotional and fan discourses appear to have insisted on their "growing up" in front of the public as a process, their actual film appearances attest to the fact that from their earliest features, the sexual *potential* of both young stars was consistently invoked rather than disavowed. In such a way, Durbin and Garland performed their juvenation, but it was a juvenation crucially displaced onto physically mature bodies.

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[429] "That awkward age" was the favoured euphemism for puberty/adolescence in contemporaneous literature. Ruth Waterbury, in her column "Close Ups and Long Shots" for *Photoplay*, frequently referred to the "awkward age" as a stage of maturity which Durbin et al. were successfully "hurdling": "these kids are being carried past the awkward age without losing employment" (September 1938), 10; she also contrasted their performative success with Temple's seeming failure: "Shirley Temple today isn't an easy problem of casting ... she is getting into that awkward age" (March 1939), 13. In a letter extolling the virtues of Deanna Durbin, a young fan used the term in relation to herself: "It used to make me mad when people said I was at the 'awkward age' (I'm fourteen)" (December 1937), 90. Also: "Deanna avoids the comic performances that ordinarily go with the awkward age – on either the young or the old side," Jennifer Wright, "How Deanna Durbin Hurdles the 'Awkward Age'," *Photoplay* (November 1938), 14. In review of *It's a Date*, *Motion Picture Daily* commented on Durbin's "graceful transition from an adolescent youngster first famed for her singing, through the 'awkward stage' into the full bloom of the adult, with a seemingly inherent richness of maturity, both in voice and acting," (25 March 1940, *It's a Date*, PCA file).

[430] Ruth Waterbury, "Close Ups and Long Shots," *Photoplay*, April 1937.

In 1936, both fourteen year-old singing stars were under contract with MGM, with the studio evidently unsure as to how to proceed with their handling. Deanna Durbin, née Edna Mae, had been a popular radio star, featuring weekly on Eddie Cantor's radio show; Judy Garland, originally Frances Gumm, had previously appeared with her sisters as part of the musical trio of "Gumm Sisters" in a number of revues and shorts. MGM already retained one operatic diva, Jeanette MacDonald, amongst its stable of stars and was looking to fill only a single singing slot with a teenage musical performer; thus it was always unlikely that the studio would have kept Durbin over Garland, in that there was a more clear-cut, stylistic (as well as age) distinction between the latter and the already-established diva MacDonald. Nevertheless, Durbin and Garland made one film together at MGM, *Every Sunday* (Felix E. Feist, 1936), which has since been mythologized as a glorified screen test/audition to determine who would become MGM's next female musical star. Viewed today, the short film exposes both the differences in the two young performers' individual singing styles and demonstrates how they would continue to be represented in musicals for the remainder of the decade, with Garland at MGM and Durbin at Universal (where she was signed shortly after appearing in *Every Sunday*).

The film's narrative premise is slight: the girls, playing characters by their own names (Deanna is "Edna," her real given name), put on a show in support of Edna's grandfather's weekly free concert in the park. Durbin first sings an aria, then Garland performs a swing number, before the two collaborate on "Americana" in counterpoint – Durbin in an operatic soprano, Garland in her rich contralto voice. They are thus associated with, and individuated by, the respective musical styles that would come to define their film careers; while thus distinguished from each other, both performance styles demanded a considerable vocal range and capacity for modulation from each star, such as was to be expected from accomplished and mature singers. In such a way, their musical performance styles were immediately distinguishable from Shirley Temple's "cute" aesthetic: they have the voices of women, as opposed to children. At the same time, their strong aural affect is mitigated by their visual representation: their sexual characteristics as females are emphasized in their curled hair and cinched waists, while their feminine sexuality is at the same time fetishized/disavowed by the worn symbols of their virginity (high collars and flower pins).

Durbin is, however subtly, more self-consciously juvenated or feminized in appearance than Garland as a function of her association with a more vocally unique form of singing (opera) than practiced by her peer. Garland's style (swing) was popular and

contemporary to the second half of the 1930s, and though it did not necessarily require any less vocal skill to practice, it was more readily accessible and familiar to audiences. Durbin, meanwhile, was marked out as over-determinedly "Other" via the certain connotations of maturity, foreignness and class elitism commonly associated with opera (this is even before taking into account the problematic juxtaposition of her adolescent body and wholesome image). Both Fleeger and Studlar have commented on this seeming "mismatch" between Durbin's star persona and her womanly/mature voice and singing style, with Fleeger identifying the particularly "European" connotations of opera alongside Durbin's characters' propensity to be associated with a foreign culture or theatrical tradition as a means of explicating her singing style, as well as eliding the affectation, labour and training behind her performance. At the same time, promotional discourses tended to posit Deanna Durbin as "all-American" and traditional, just a regular girl: "the more Hollywood insisted on Durbin's American sensibility," Fleeger has noted, "the more it belied the fact that she was something else altogether. A relic from the start, an anachronistic sound to be pitted against Judy Garland's 'natural' sway."[431] In a similar way, Studlar has noted that opera's association with theatricality, refinement, and overall Otherness, functioned to signify Durbin's professional maturity in/by her performances, the "womanliness" of her voice through learned vocal embellishment and tonal expression.[432] Thus, Durbin's "sonic womanliness" had to be "contained and controlled in order to keep it from undermining the star's juvenated qualities [...] signify[ing] not only physical and psychological immaturity but also sexual innocence and, therefore, moral goodness."[433] Both Fleeger and Studlar have therefore suggested that Durbin's vocal performance necessitated certain processes of fetishization – achieved through her narrative role-playing, promotional discourses, and the limitation of musical numbers in her films – as a means of containing the excesses of signification and affect within her performances.

Interestingly, and perhaps indicative of how Durbin's star image could not have been sustained at MGM, her visual representation in *Every Sunday* echoes that of Jeanette MacDonald in such romantic musicals as *The Merry Widow* (1934), *Naughty Marietta* (1935) and *Maytime* (1937). As I have shown already, the potentially excessive affects of MacDonald highly individuated talent/voice were contained, compartmentalized, and literally bound up first in her frivolous association with lingerie and feminine underthings during her pre-Code career with Maurice Chevalier, then by her tendency to appear in

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[431] Fleeger, Op. Cit., 78.
[432] Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 100.
[433] Ibid., 99.

fetishized period costuming and ornamentation in her films with Nelson Eddy after 1934. In a similar way, in *Every Sunday* Durbin (who was also taller and therefore effectively more physically present/dominant than Garland when posed in the same frame) wears a romanticized version of Garland's simple and functional dress; while the latter is decorated with buttons, an angular collar and a simple daisy pin, the former (Durbin's gown) is composed of layers of tulle, ruffled collar and a contrastively ostentatious rose. The dress is stylistically complementary to Durbin's operatic mode of performance, which is romantic and nostalgic; her visual representation also functions more insidiously to spectacularize her physical form, to draw attention away from her aural performance and back to her visual attractiveness vis-à-vis the traditionally gendered – and moreover traditionally optically-focused – politics of audio-visual representation. By virtue of her relative youth, though, Durbin's sexual function as a woman under the fetishistic gaze is arguably more successfully disavowed than was Jeanette MacDonald's. MacDonald was confirmedly sexually mature: in her early films, she was openly sexually desirous of Maurice Chevalier, and in her later films with Nelson Eddy, she was always already narratively wed or to-be-wed to her male partner. In this sense, the fact of Durbin's physical maturity-cum-pre-sexuality allowed/made possible her solo individuation as a female musical performer within the phallogocentric structures and strictures of the genre.

In a way, and also evidenced as early on as *Every Sunday*, young Judy Garland appears to have been deemed less excessively feminine in her own right than the young Deanna Durbin; this was manifested in her relatively non-fetishistic visual representation. Garland was no less extraordinarily talented as a singer, but as Fleeger has noted, her singing style was from the very beginning predicated on a seeming naturalness and emotional spontaneity that stood in stark contrast to Durbin's more practiced and affected style.[434] In a sense, Garland's musical performance-qua-performance may be read as relatively self-effacing – seeming to emanate more directly from her/character's heart, soul and psychological motivation than from a learned propensity to sing. In such a way, the performative mechanism behind her musical numbers does not immediately demand disavowal and fetishization to be made integrative with narrative. Further, Garland's rather anachronistic beauty at this stage in her life (prior to intensified studio management and the consequent overhaul of her image in the 1940s) – her slight pudginess, her lack of height, and her extraordinarily expressive face – seems to have mitigated her potential to be read as a sex symbol (at least in the eyes of her producers and directors). Thus Garland is dressed

[434] Fleeger, Op. Cit., 78, has also observed that Durbin's voice is more self-evidently trained, while Garland's seems more "natural" and/or unaffected.

relatively plainly in *Every Sunday*, as she would continue to be in most of her films throughout the 1930s, in keeping with her star persona as an "ordinary" girl-next-door. Nevertheless, in that her musical performance and representation precluded the need for visual fetishization, while her aural affect exceeded the paradigmatic limitations of female performance and representation in the classically integrated musical,[435] she presented – to borrow from Studlar's reading of Deanna Durbin's performance – an even more sustained "resistance to the limitations and vulnerability [...] attributed to women's acoustic" – and visual – "representation in cinema."[436]

I would like now to discuss each young star individually in the context of her performance and representation in Hollywood musicals of the second half of the 1930s. In ways subtly distinct from each other, both Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland may be seen to have performed juvenility as a means of distraction from the obvious fact of their physical maturity (relative to "true" child stars like Shirley Temple). Durbin was initially the more successful star – a result, I would argue, of her adherence to/containment within an already established paradigm of female performance and representation in musicals, which was predicated on the dual processes of individuation and fetishization. This entailed her textual subscription to the "Miss Fix-It" child narrative trajectory (established via Temple) and a fetishistic mode of visual representation (particularly during musical sequences) in her films before 1940. For Garland, on the other hand, whose "look" appears not to have been able (or was deemed unable) to withstand a traditional "Hollywood-glamorous" – that is, fetishistic/scopophilic – visual representation during her adolescence, narrative incorporation (using her for narrative purpose) and integration (using her to contribute to the overall ideological/meaning-bearing structures of her films) proved more difficult to negotiate at the level of text (though late 1930s promotional discourses consistently tried to align her with Deanna Durbin). In such a way, Garland may be seen as a sort of outlier to the semantic and syntactic structures of her 1930s musicals, despite her seeming-innocuousness as a female physical presence on film; her image resisted traditional forms of voyeuristic objectification, and with it narrative and formal integration, within the musical syntax; she remained excessively, performatively affective as a female performer.

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[435] In *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, Op. Cit., Richard Dyer has argued that Judy Garland's star image – particularly in the case of gay male viewership – has been associated with/appreciated for her seeming ordinariness, androgyny and overall camp affect. Though I do not wish to enter into a prolonged discussion of the queer significations of her performance here, I would posit in agreement with Dyer that the perception of Garland's transgression of such limitations on behalf of sensitized audiences would have led to an association of Garland with androgyny and gender ambiguity.

[436] Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 14.

Fixing Up 'Miss Fix-It': Deanna Durbin and the integration of sexual initiation within the child narrative musical:

Following closely the child narrative pattern of the classic Shirley Temple musicals by which she would "solve adult problems through childish machinations,"[437] Durbin's first three films at Universal represent a distinct narrative cycle. *Three Smart Girls* (Henry Koster, 1936), *One Hundred Men and a Girl* (Henry Koster, 1937) and *Mad About Music* (Norman Taurog, 1938) all posit Durbin in the archetypal role of the angelic daughter around whom the driving narrative conflict unfolds. But whereas Temple's very presence alone appears to have effected harmony and conciliation between other characters (most crucially, an initially diametrically opposed father (figure)-mother (figure) pair) without often her willful or guided intention, Durbin's singing appears to have a direct causational effect on her parents'/parental figures' conciliation. In such a way, like Temple at her "cutest" stage of middle features, the overwhelming emotional expressiveness of Durbin's musical performance is self-consciously employed to elicit that utopian sensibility of togetherness which proves seductive enough to re-attract the protection of an errant father figure. At this early stage of her career, however, Durbin's numbers are carefully contained within scenes of self-conscious performance, whereby her singing is directed specifically towards a diegetic audience, with whom the extra-diegetic audience is thereby encouraged to identify from a subjective and scopophilic-fetishistic perspective. As a means of constraining her syntactic function, then, Durbin's individuated talent is demonstrated and moreover fetishized and contained within her musical performance.

In *Three Smart Girls*, Durbin's first feature-length film made soon after signing with Universal (MGM waited too long to secure a contract after *Every Sunday*), Durbin plays the youngest of three daughters to wealthy divorced parents. Having learned their father plans to remarry, the girls decide to run away from their home in Switzerland back to New York, break up his new relationship, and reunite their parents. The film thus moves from spaces associated with a female homosocial milieu (interestingly, echoing the semantic tendencies of the earliest backstage musicals) back into the more sexually (and thus ideologically) integrative space of the patriarch's home. The film opens with Penny (Durbin) and her sisters sailing on a lake in Switzerland as she sings about the joys of nature in springtime ("My Heart is Singing"). The camera cuts between Durbin (alternately in close up and – less confrontationally – in medium- or long-shot) and her sisters, which establishes Durbin's

[437] Ibid., 93.

vocal expressiveness as representative of the female collective's emotional state. In such a way, the number in its sequential context effects a temporary feeling of utopia overwhelmingly gendered feminine. According to the film's narrative logic, however, the female homosocial group cannot be sustained as utopian, in and of itself, in that it lacks an essential phallic authority. Therefore, to end "happily," female homosociality is returned to the control of the patriarch, which is enacted via the closing shot on Durbin looking down over the joined hands of her parents.

Crucially, Durbin machinates their re-union by means of musical performance; as a musical performer, she is thus integrated into – or rather, made to serve – the romantic-reconciliation narrative in satisfaction of a phallogocentric narrative and syntax predicated on heterosexual matrimony. Specifically, Durbin's musical performance serves narrative in acting as a "lure" or attraction to her father. She captivates him via aural seduction, through the employ of an "incantatory" authority (borrowing the phrase from Turk) that recalls for her father the pleasures and the appropriately binding ties associated with the domestic and the feminine sphere. In such a way she reminds him of his "proper" role, as a man, to be linked back to the feminine through traditional familial bonds, to effectively resume his role as patriarch. This is illustrated most clearly during Durbin's performance of "Someone to Care for Me."

Penny's father calls in to say goodnight to his daughters, who are gathered in her room. As he sits gingerly on the edge of her bed, Penny begins to croon a song that expresses her (and her sisters') desire to be looked after once more by their father. Durbin's vocal performance is nuanced: while she hits the notes in an exacting fashion, she employs none of the vocal or gestural embellishments typical of Jeanette MacDonald's operatic performances (and which I have associated with camp affect). She is rather more subtly seductive, singing with a wistful smile and half-lidded eyes, communicating a sort of gentle longing or quiet passion. Indeed, the overt eroticism of the scene is deniable only by virtue of the fact of her youth and of Penny's blood relation to the (diegetic) male audience.[438] Durbin's performance thus offers experiential pleasures confounding of a (phal)logocentric logic, in that she so disturbs her father's intentions to leave the domestic sphere. At the same time, her extraordinary performance is effectively brought back into line with narrative, in that it provides a logical reason for the skill and spectacularity of her performance: as one of her sisters explains to their dumfounded father, Penny takes voice lessons, which accounts for her propensity to break into song. However, at the same time,

[438] In *Precocious Charms*, Studlar (Op. Cit., 100) has similarly argued that Durbin's impromptu bedtime performance is presented much like a sexual-seduction scene.

the labour behind these lessons is denied in her depiction as singing for sheer joy (established in the film's opening scene); this signals that her performance may be taken as both spontaneous/natural expression and accepting of its objectification. Furthermore, her incantatory powers are narratively employed towards the ultimate reinforcement of the very same phallic authority it temporarily disturbs. (Besides acting obviously to showcase Universal's new star attraction,) Durbin's few operatic performances in *Three Smart Girls* thus represent in tangible form the complete, embodied image of pure emotion and utopian sensibility, serving, ultimately, of heterosexual (re)conciliation and the preservation of a family unit. It is in seeing his daughter(s) projected thusly that Penny's father finally realizes the rightness – in fact the necessity – of his marriage to their mother. In such a way, according to the narrative logic of the film, the mere fact of Durbin's existence effects utopia. She is presented, via the dual-focus narrative pertaining to her parents' reconciliation, as having been only ever thus.

Durbin's function as accessory to, rather than agent of, narrative would be similarly repeated in her next feature. While *One Hundred Men and a Girl* dispenses with the parental love story narrative trope, it follows an alternative child narrative trajectory, as established by Shirley Temple in such films as *Stand Up and Cheer* and *Little Miss Marker*, by which the female child (Durbin) inspires her father/father figure to professional and personal success. The narrative focus in this film is therefore not so much on Durbin's character's psychological and/or emotional development, but on her father, and specifically whether his failing orchestra will find employment under the famous conductor Leopold Stokowski. Durbin-as-Patricia's narrative function is to draw other characters' attention to her father, and in such a way she is affirmedly the focus of spectacle in *One Hundred Men and a Girl*. Her father's orchestra finally having attracted Stokowski's solicitation (after he has heard Patricia singing), the film ends with Patricia refusing to make a speech regarding her father's musical engagement; instead, she prefers to celebrate by singing an aria from *La Traviata*. Patricia significantly waives her right to speech here, and with it, an ostensible claim to narrative commentary/subjectivity. In positing that Durbin's films belong to a cycle of musicals depicting women with "mismatched voices" (voices whose performative affect is perceptibly different from their visual affect: in Durbin's case, she has a mature voice in an adolescent body), Fleeger has noted a tendency of such musicals to treat their protagonists as "singing women first and speaking women second;"[439] I would go so far as to say that, as manifested in *One Hundred Men and a Girl*, this tendency functions to re-contain the

[439] Fleeger, Op. Cit., 72.

potential affective excesses of subjective female musical performance within a phallogocentric representational paradigm predicated on the primacy of the visual. In other words, Durbin's aural subjectivity is constrained within the mechanism of self-conscious/objective performance. It is no coincidence that in such moments as Durbin's performance of "Brindisi" here, her singing face is framed in tight close-up, conforming to a traditionally fetishistic-scopophilic mode of visual representation, so as "to expose the mysterious workings of a throat that could produce such a voice."[440] In such a way, her musical talent, her "voice" in both literal and metaphoric senses, is simultaneously indulged as an object of attraction for audiences within and without the filmic text, and disavowed as having subjective, narrativizing capabilities.

Interestingly, contemporary reviews and discursive material appear to have attempted to re-ascribe a degree of narrative agency to Durbin's characters within her early cycle of star vehicles. This speaks perhaps to the degree to which Durbin's performance and lingering affect exceeded the narrative and syntactic bounds of the integrated Hollywood musical at the level of audience reception. Just as *Photoplay* declared Durbin "walk[ed] away with the honours" of *Three Smart Girls*,[441] so did *Variety* gush over her second feature, *One Hundred Men and a Girl*: "her achievement as a performer is [..] remarkable. She motivates the entire action, keeps the situation alive with her spontaneity, and tops off with superlative vocal contributions."[442] While it is true that all the scenes within *One Hundred Men* are grounded in some relevance to the character of Patricia, and in this sense Durbin motivates what action is presented, I would argue she functions more as an objective correlative – echoing again Shirley Temple's roles – by which separate narrative events are given cohesion and continuity, than as a narrative subject. Durbin is a narrative touchstone, and the source of lingering affect, in experiencing of the film, but she is nevertheless superfluous to the narrative on a syntactic level: it is concerned more with re-integrating her father and his orchestra into the artistic/social hierarchy of professional musicianship, resolving the ideological conflict between populism and male individualism.[443] I would argue, then, that it was in response to this perceptible excess of performative affect within her films, notwithstanding the fetishistic mode of representation imposed upon her by

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[440] Ibid., 76.

[441] *Photoplay* (February 1937), 50.

[442] *Variety* (8 September1937, *One Hundred Men and a Girl*, PCA file).

[443] There is no love story in this film, which distinguishes it semantically and partially syntactically from the classical cycle of Hollywood musicals. In its review of the film, *Film Daily* (3 September, 1937, *One Hundred Men and a Girl*, PCA file), perceived this deviation from standard narrative, but noted the film seemed to "work" nevertheless. I would argue it is in its conformance to an integrative ideal of reconciliation that the film adheres, however tenuously, to the established musical syntax, even if the semantic structure of the heterosexual couple is displaced onto a father-daughter relationship.

direction (most frequently by Henry Koster), that a correlative fetishization of her adolescence arose in discourses surrounding the star as a means to re-situate her performance in a phallogocentric context and qualify her lingering affect as a performer. This was concomitant with an abrogation of her training and experience, her professional maturity, further fetishizing her individuated talent.

As Ruth Waterbury wondered following *One Hundred Men and a Girl,* "the Durbin youngster has no dramatic training ... just a voice and youth ... yet she's standing the cash customers up all over the country ... does so-called acting experience mean nothing and is it all personality, after all ... ".[444] Such fetishization of Durbin's precocity was further developed and propagated by June Proctor's article "It's Lonely Being a Child Prodigy" several issues later: it focused on Durbin the star's seeming normality (in all except voice), trying to draw parallels between the "real" Durbin and her character in *Three Smart Girls*. Proctor notes, "In the school glee club, Deanna sang as a member of the chorus" (like Penny), but, "Not once did she admit, or even hint, that her voice qualified her for solo work."[445] In such a way, Proctor disavows Durbin's agency over her own career and image, or that she in any way "worked" for it; she thus locates responsibility for her inevitable individuation firmly in the hands of society as an outside party, casting Durbin as a sort of communal child protected and raised by a paternalistic fandom.

Such a discursive invocation of Durbin's need for a father (implied as well in her first two films, though they are more concerned with the affirmation of her biological father's paternal authority) would be enacted even more explicitly in her third film, *Mad About Music*. Here, Durbin plays Gloria, the secret daughter of a famous movie star (Gail Patrick) who has been shipped off to boarding school in Switzerland[446] on the advice of her mother's management; there, for lack of a paternal figure in her life, she forges letters from her made-up father, which she then reads out to her fellow classmates. She winds up convincing an English composer (Herbert Marshall) to pose as her father in front of her friends before her mother's identity is made public, when the mother and the composer meet and fall in love. Alongside this primary narrative, which is driven by/predicated on conciliation between Gloria's mother and surrogate father, Durbin is also for the first time represented as having

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[444] Ruth Waterbury, "Close Ups and Long Shots," *Photoplay* (April 1937), 12.
[445] June Proctor, "It's Lonely Being a Child Prodigy," *Photoplay* (June 1937), 122.
[446] Notably, most of Durbin's films from the 1930s are set in a foreign location or in some way associate Durbin's character with "Europeanness." In this film, as in *Three Smart Girls*, Durbin's character grows up in Switzerland; in *Spring Parade,* she is an Hungarian peasant girl. In *That Certain Age*, *First Love*, and *It's a Date*, she is located within an urban/cosmopolitan milieu, with references to her/her family having travelled widely. Fleeger has suggested that these seeming European associations may function to explain away her distinct individuation (Op. Cit., 82).

a love interest herself, in the form of a local schoolboy played by Jackie Moran. It is implied that Durbin cannot take him seriously as a love interest, however, until she is able to solve the problem of her missing father. The film ends with Gloria singing a triumphant aria as her mother and new father look on holding hands; Tommy, her would-be boyfriend, is also in attendance, and the camera cuts away to his blushing reaction shots individually, thus confirming the parallel to be drawn between her now-complete family and her future husband: her narrative and signifying function is attendant on the presence of a balancing/containing male force. Thus it is established that Durbin's re-assimilation into a patriarchal system as a pre-sexual adolescent makes possible her continued performance within the phallogocentric syntax of the musical as a future romantic lead.

The concretization of Durbin's narrative and spectacular function in this cycle is further emphasized by the staging of her solo piece "Chapel Bells" in *Mad About Music*. Here, Durbin-as-Gloria performs for an audience of her school friends, accompanied by her visiting "father" on piano. While the erotic potential of the number is underplayed (reminiscent of her performance of "Someone to Care for Me" in *Three Smart Girls*), the musical scene nevertheless serves to establish a deep personal connection between Gloria and her surrogate father, evidenced by their acoustic compatibility. Durbin is framed largely in medium-shot, with Marshall behind and visible at the piano. In such a way they are visually confirmed as an idealized male-female unit. Marshall's playing of lower chords complements Durbin's high notes in soprano, thus mitigating, or establishing an acoustic boundary around, her super-feminine register and range. Thus Durbin's sonic ethereality – her incantatory power – is effectively grounded and tempered by Marshall's masculine presence. As Durbin glances back at Marshall, ever smilingly, she communicates an understanding of the "rightness" of his patriarchal authority, of their mutual completion in each other's presence. Thus the overwhelmingly feminine aspects of Durbin's mature singing voice fit into the framework of dual-focus narrative, a Platonic ideal of integration, and conservative/phallogocentric ideology.

It is telling that throughout this early cycle of Deanna Durbin musicals, as in her successive pre-war features, all scripts and final prints passed virtually without comment from the PCA. There were only two instances in which Joseph Breen expressed any degree of reserve regarding Durbin's filmic representation: during production of *Three Smart Girls*, Breen – anticipating the potential for Universal to exploit Durbin via a similar babysex aesthetic to that which was practiced on Shirley Temple, but which would have been more problematic and destabilizing by virtue of Durbin's relative physical maturity – cautioned

that the three girls' costuming must remain at all times modest and un-revealing.[447] Evident in Breen's subsequent silence on the matter, Universal proceeded in full compliance. Indeed, it is unlikely they would have ever attempted to test the limits of representation with Durbin under the Code: as borne out in her films, Universal perceived the wisdom in conserving Durbin's sexual potential, so as to capitalize on the perceptible positive affects of her performative juvenation and defer audience gratification in seeing her inevitable (if implicit) sexual initiation depicted onscreen. Thus, Universal plotted from the very beginning of Durbin's career the gradual maturation of her image, though not beyond the cusp of womanhood: she would be forever poised at the brink of sexual initiation.

Whereas Durbin's first three films had confirmed her containment within patriarchy, her fourth film, *That Certain Age* (Edward Ludwig, 1938), would posit her interest in heterosexual (as opposed to father-directed) love; *First Love* (Henry Koster, 1939), *It's a Date* (William A. Seiter, 1940) and *Spring Parade* (Henry Koster, 1940) then enacted this pursuit. Durbin's performance and representation within a child narrative syntax in her first three films had established her image as perpetually to-be-juvenated and sexually innocent (if interested); her segue into romantic roles was thus de-problematized due to the confluence of her performative image and the physical fact of her mature female body. It was not until *It's a Date*, which called for the image of "youngsters stretched out on the ground," that Breen deemed it necessary to remind producers to "handle with [their] usual good care" any depiction, no matter how implicit, of adolescent sexuality either in direct reference to or in association with Deanna Durbin.[448] The producers at Universal did not have to be told, as her films following this initial child narrative cycle would attest.

Durbin made five more films between 1938 and 1940: *That Certain Age* (Edward Ludwig, 1938), *Three Smart Girls Grow Up* (Henry Koster, 1939), *First Love* (Henry Koster, 1939), *It's a Date* (William A. Seiter, 1940), and *Spring Parade* (Henry Koster, 1940). With the exception of *Three Smart Girls Grow Up*, in which Durbin reprised her first role as Penny, this time playing matchmaker to her sisters instead of her parents, Durbin was consistently represented as having some degree not only of sexual desire but agency as well – an aspect of her performed persona for which audiences had been prepared both at the textual level (positing strong personal relationships between Durbin's characters and her onscreen fathers) and extra-textually in fan magazines where audience preparedness to see Durbin in romantic situations was constantly reiterated. As a fan expressed in a letter to *Photoplay* in 1938,

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[447] Joseph Breen to Harry Sehner, memorandum (18 August, 1936, *Three Smart Girls*, PCA file).
[448] Joseph Breen to Maurice Pivar, memorandum (4 December 1939, *It's a Date*, PCA file).

> Maybe Deanna Durbin is growing up. We're told that she wore her very first pair of long silk stockings the other day and felt quite the young lady. Well, we can take it. Growing up is something that simply can't be avoided. [...] So go right on growing up, Deanna! We're not afraid!"[449]

Key to preserving the juvenated – and thus overtly sex-disavowing – aspects of Durbin's image-persona, and thus ostensibly her broadest star appeal, was Universal's decision to slowly segue her character-image into that of the individuated romantic female lead. In *That Certain Age* and *It's a Date*, Durbin develops a strong attraction to an older male who is obviously better suited romantically either to her mother (as in *It's a Date*) or another older woman (*That Certain Age*). In both cases, Durbin's character gradually comes to understand she is better matched to a male admirer of her own age, and she ends both films with a triumphant operatic performance whereby she is watched by both her reconciled parental unit, intercut with reaction shots from her prospective boyfriend. In addition to preserving a classically integrative syntax, by which Durbin's musical performance literally and figuratively brings together the disparate factions of a society around her – young and old, father and mother, family and future husband – thus effecting utopia, the films also enacts a Freudian drama by which Durbin learns to re-channel an erotic desire for her father (figure) in the direction of an appropriate romantic partner. It is important that in either film, Durbin is not actually seen to be joined with her love match; rather it is promised that one day they will be. Her pre-sexuality is thus strongly affirmed.

It was not until *First Love* in 1939 that Durbin was fully initiated into romantic lead status. "'First Love' is the great experiment," *Photoplay* declared. "Does the public want Deanna with or without sex?"[450] The film is a basic Cinderella story which sees Durbin as an orphan, Connie, in the care of upper-class New York relatives; she falls in love with her cousin's beau, but is prevented from attending the ball at which she intends to see him; kindly servants allow her to go, but the night ends in disaster when her jealous cousin fires the staff, and Connie departs to teach music back at her old boarding school; her beau follows, and they are finally reunited. On the surface level of text, of course, Durbin is never implicated in any sort of sexual situation; however the film makes a pointed statement about her sexual function in contrasting Connie's choice to marry with her spinster teaching mentor's decision to remain unwed. Durbin's character is thus individuated as distinct from

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[449] E. A. Loucks to *Photoplay* (September 1938), 4-5.
[450] "We Cover the Studios." *Photoplay* (October 1939), 91.

an asexual older woman, as opposed to a mother figure standing in as the appropriate half of the heterosexual couple at the center of the musical narrative; in such a way, Durbin's female function according to the classically integrative syntax of the musical is confirmed, at the same time as her performative juvenation – displaced onto a sexually objectifiable body – constrains her erotic affect and her spectacularity within her few musicals numbers sparsed throughout her narratives. Rather than betraying a problematic representational split, as Studlar has claimed, whereby her numbers declare her to be sensual and womanly while her narratives proclaim her to be innocent and immature,[451] I would argue that Durbin's early musicals may be traced on a trajectory of maturation, by which her image-persona is increasingly, purposely imbued with an erotic appeal to match her syntactic function within the traditional "dual-focus narrative" of the musical.

Every single one of Durbin's films between 1936 and 1940 passed by without comment (excepting the two instances detailed above) from Joseph Breen and/or the PCA. Though Durbin's next musical, *It's a Date*, would return to the mother-daughter love triangle trope first implied in *Mad About Music* and made explicit in *That Certain Age*, its narrative – involving Durbin's mother's relinquishing a stage role to her daughter so that she might marry the man they both love – firmly, and self-reflexively, establishes Durbin as the primary meaning-bearing female role, both within the play-within-the-film and at the narrative level of the film overall. As *Variety* would extoll, "Deanna Durbin steps securely into the rank of top flight actress,"[452] and *Motion Picture Herald*: "She has become one of the rare specimens of cinematic history – a youngster retaining a box-office personality through the tender years and the grownup stage, while still giving full promise of years and years in which to entertain the American and the world populace."[453] Thus Durbin was able to capitalize on the juvenated ideal of femininity established by Shirley Temple, but avoid the pitfalls of puberty by merely invoking the "awkwardness" or in-between-ness of adolescence at the narrative level, while her voice and body belied her true sexual and syntactic function.

Resisting the Image: Judy Garland and the spectacle of the juvenated "great female singer"

Judy Garland, on the other hand, remained a more problematic figure in musicals throughout the 1930s. Her rich and tremulous voice spoke like Durbin's to maturity beyond her years; however, in that this maturity was performed towards an affect of naturalness

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[451] Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit., 100.
[452] *Variety* (20 March 1940, *It's a Date*, PCA file).
[453] *Motion Picture Daily* (25 March 1940, *It's a Date*, PCA file).

and spontaneity as opposed to technical brilliance, her maturity registered more as an emotional rather than a physical one. As Studlar has shown, Durbin's classically trained soprano may be seen to have signified, however implicitly, a secret bodily maturity that explained away her extraordinary capacity for vocal control: indeed, it was a matter of publicity that Durbin's larynx had been checked by a doctor who proclaimed that in that physiological respect, she was extraordinarily well-developed.[454] Garland's voice, on the other hand, without such conventionally good looks to act as a tangible referent, and with a voice less tightly regulated by stylistic dictates, was seemingly bodiless: signifying pure emotion, pure affect. At the same time, the narrative and formal strategies of containment by which Durbin's musical performances were both visually fetishized and narratively compartmentalized into distinct sequences – when she sang, it was done so publicly for a diegetic audience or a single viewer (always a man), thus reinforcing her conceptualization as an object of spectacle – would not hold for Garland. I would argue that, beyond the paradigm of the "mismatched voice/woman" theorized by Fleeger and Studlar, Garland's voice signified meanings undefined by the syntax constructed in/through the traditionally gendered politics of viewing – and hearing – such that, comparable to Jeanette MacDonald in Susan Smith's analysis of the "great female singer," the "individual, one-off nature of [Garland's] voice" came to be "invested with [...] sustained and complex subversive charge."[455] This is in keeping with Richard Dyer's semiotic analysis of Garland's star image, whereby she has come to be associated variously with qualities of "ordinariness" (a-spectacularity), "androgyny" and ultimate "camp" (founded in the perceptible over-affectation of emotion, i.e. excessive affect). From the very beginning of her career as a musical film star, Garland may be seen to have resisted objective fetishization, despite her confirmed individuation, both as a star and in character, and her overall affective power.

MGM, having retained Garland over Durbin in 1936, evidently did not know how to use her once they had her. As noted in *The Hollywood* Reporter, following the release of *Broadway Melody of 1938*, it seemed incongruous that they would not have sprung to star her in feature film immediately after *Every Sunday*.[456] It was not until 1939, after appearing as a supporting player in six films – *Broadway Melody of 1938* (Roy Del Ruth, 1938), *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* (Alfred Green, 1937), *Everybody Sing* (Edward Marin, 1938), *Love Finds Andy Hardy* (George B. Seitz, 1938), and *Listen, Darling* (Edward Marin, 1938) – that

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[454] Studlar, *Precocious Charms: Stars Performing Girlhood in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Op. Cit.
[455] Smith, Op. Cit., 77.
[456] "The sensational work of young Judy Garland causes wonder as to why she has been kept under wraps these many months. [...] Hers is a distinctive personality well worth careful promotion." *The Hollywood Reporter* (14 August 1937, *Broadway Melody of 1938*, PCA file).

Garland would feature in a leading role in a musical, as Dorothy Gale in *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939). While *Thoroughbreds Don't Cry* cast Garland in a leading role, opposite Mickey Rooney for the first time (their films together would become the bedrock of MGM's musical output around the turn of the decade and into the war era), the film was not, strictly speaking, a musical: it included only one song, sung by Garland, and did not conform to a romantically integrative syntax. In *Broadway Melody of 1938* and *Everybody Sing,* Garland played hopeful starlets, little girls with big voices, whose hidden talents had yet to be revealed. *Love Finds Andy Hardy* saw Garland's first appearance as Betsy Booth, the girl next door to Mickey Rooney's eponymous cad, loving him from afar with a more-than-Platonic passion. *Listen, Darling* posited Garland in the Temple-esque/Durbin-esque role of "Little Miss Fix-It," matchmaking on behalf of her widowed mother. The variety of narrative functions which Garland played prior to 1939 thus speaks to the degree to which her syntactic function had yet to be established; semantically speaking, her powerful, soon-to-be-iconic voice came to signify un-repressed emotion, the expression of private longing in a public forum.

Garland's performance of "You Made Me Love You" in *Broadway Melody* represents the first significant instance of her non-conformance to conventional representational paradigms. Unlike star Eleanor Powell's performance, which as I have argued in Chapter 1, was at least partially re-contained within a phallogocentric paradigm of representation through fetishistic representational means, Garland's musical performance escapes these constraints to the point of subversion. In this number, Garland, as the precocious Betty Clayton, expresses her desire for Clark Gable by singing to his photograph. While the lyrics frame Betty's desire as passive ("I didn't want to do it, I didn't want to do it/You made me love you/And all the time you knew it"), Garland sings with such a sense of urgency and longing that she exerts certain agency both within the song's internal narrative (as Betty) and over the breadth of the performance (as a musical star). Garland's expression of erotic desire here is at odds with her juvenated, ostensibly sexually innocent image, yet the number escapes falling into parody by virtue of Garland's sincerity. Garland balances wide-eyed ingenuity with a rueful smile, reflecting a mature awareness of the meaning of the song's lyrics and meaning. At the beginning of the song, she sings directly to the photograph, in profile, before the camera shifts to a three-quarter view of her face. It is not until the very end of the song that Garland is framed in a traditional close-up, taking in the full picture of her singing face, as if to demystify the source of the sounds emitting from her body. Unlike the traditional visual representation of Deanna Durbin in song, however, there is no cut

away to an audience reaction shot (as Betty is singing alone in her bedroom); the camera lingers on Garland, taking in her unmediated expression of an excessive – transgressive, even – desire. At the same time, any potential scopophilic pleasure in viewing to be had from indulging in Garland's visage is undercut by her evident juvenility and the objective plainness of her features: the source of her affect remains aural, and thus uncontained by the phallogocentric paradigm of representation predicated on the visual. In such a way, the number serves the film's purposes, as an MGM musical, in showing off the spectacular talents of its youngest singing star, but in that Garland's exceptional qualities as both a singer and emotive actor resist reduction to (and/or mitigation via) visual fetishization, she subverts the traditional gendered politics of viewing both within and without the diegetic framing of her solo performance. Not coincidentally, this number (much like her participation in the climactic show-within-the-show at the end of the film) exists more as an insert to the narrative, without bearing on its broader development.

Elsewhere, between *Broadway Melody* and *The Wizard of Oz*, there appears to be at work within Garland's films a more concerted effort to re-integrate her spectacular vocal performances into the narrative logic of each film and, as a corollary, within the traditionally gendered paradigm of visual representation typical of Classical Hollywood Cinema. When Garland sings similarly melancholy ballads solo in *Love Finds Andy Hardy* ("It Never Rains But It Pours") and *Listen, Darling* ("Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart"), she is represented very much as the object of a gaze within the narrative diegesis. In the case of *Love Finds Andy Hardy* – in which final scene she is dressed in a romantic gown evocative of MacDonald's ostentatious costumes, thus further cementing her pointed "to-be-looked-at-ness" – there are several cuts away to Andy's reaction in seeing/hearing Betsy for the first time from an admiring perspective. In such a way, Betsy's solo performance's ostensible narrative function is to establish her as the proper object of Andy's desirous gaze. Nevertheless, Garland yet again escapes confinement to this strictly phallogocentric narrative function through performative means, exerting a perceptible agency as an active participant in her own musical representation. As is her tendency when performing for diegetic audiences, Garland looks constantly about herself, seeming (if not actually) to make eye contact with individual spectators and smiling in recognition at each moment. She appears to be in all ways *present* to her own performance – knowing and fully participant in the communication of its message – and taking pleasure in its moment more than (or in addition to) its effect on the male love interest. This comes through particularly in her vocal manipulations to comic effect ("It never rai-hai-hains/But it pour-hour-hours"), thus confirming how essential

charisma is to her appeal as a musical star, perhaps even more so than her technical skill, and certainly more than her superficial attractiveness.

Similarly in Garland's climactic musical performance in *Listen, Darling*, her singing functions to reveal an essential "truth" to her character that serves the ideological coherence of narrative. In this case, the crucial audience to Garland's performance is her mother (Mary Astor), who realizes – through the experiential effect of her daughter's performance, directed at her – the weight of her daughter's love (she has just saved her mother from making an unsuitable match, pairing her with a more promising suitor). Here, as with "It Never Rains But It Pours," the apparatus of the scene guides the extra-diegetic audience towards identification with a particular diegetic "look" or perspective upon Garland. The meaning of her performance is thus telegraphed in terms of her effect on another character, and the objective spectacularity of her performance is emphasized. On the other hand, in that the focus of narrative rests on the relationship between two female family members, *Listen, Darling*'s ideological structuring is shifted (however slightly) away from predication on heterosexual union and towards the preservation of familial love, particularly amongst women (admittedly, with the aid of a patriarchal influence). This is communicated via an exchange of performances during Garland's rendition of "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart" – Garland's being an outward expression of emotion through music, and Astor's a matter of acting through listening – which subtly subverts the centrality of traditional, heterosexual romance.

In this context, Garland's role and performance within *The Wizard of Oz* appears to be continuous with her tendency towards the escape of the more oppressive limitations to female performance in musicals up to 1940. Here, Garland's famous performance of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" recalls the representational paradigm employed in *Broadway Melody of 1938*, by which the spectacular affect of her solo vocal performance remains largely unmitigated by the distractive resort to a diegetic audience or an otherwise optically-focused mode of representation. Indeed, it communicates a meaning that cannot (nor does it attempt to) be yoked back to the larger narrative structures and sensibilities of the film/story. In the first place, of course, the film dispenses with a dual-focus love story altogether, in syntactic predication on affirming ties between the individual and community/"home" (alongside its semantic alien-ness, as a musical-fantasy, to the familiar milieus of the musical). Even more unusually (in that the traditional child-narrative musical similarly does not foreground/literalize a romantic relationship for its female protagonist), *The Wizard of Oz* entirely eschews the device of a diegetic audience for its adolescent

singing star: her musical performances is thus fully integrated into narrative (in that it is not self-consciously, literally "staged") without removing narrativizing agency from its female star in foregrounding her to-be-looked-at-ness.

As Rushdie has observed, Garland is both "object of the film" – to-be-looked-at in performance – as well as its crucial "subject." As an individuated female protagonist whose narrative agency is otherwise unmitigated by equal focus on a male love interest, she alone carries the film's "emotional weight" throughout the narrative and/into numbers.[457] Garland's solo performance of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" towards the beginning of the film (prior to its transition into the fantasy land of Oz) is exemplary of her phenomenal effect. Without a diegetic audience (beyond Toto the dog) to watch her, Garland sings the number completely un-self-consciously (echoing her performance of "You Made Me Love You"); she communicates introspectiveness and a sincerity of expression that are largely denied to the comparable solo performances of, say, Jeanette MacDonald and Deanna Durbin: while they might perform similarly in gesture, their "subjectivity" is representationally limited in recourse to a diegetic audience's gaze. Framed largely in mid-shot from below the waist, Victor Fleming's direction further eschews fetishization of Garland's face in song; instead he tracks her performance as she moves through space, taking in the physical and temporal integrity of her performance, and minimally cutting between views of Garland in frame.[458] In such a way, the number's staging is reminiscent of the full-body framing granted to Fred Astaire in his dance numbers: the camera follows her lead without obtruding upon her performance; it does not impose a meaning or otherwise comment upon it in the same way that, for instance, the cut to close-up on Ginger Rogers's face during "They Can't Take That Away From Me" could be seen to detract from the performative agency she demonstrates elsewhere in the same scene.

Furthermore, the way in which Garland moves through and interacts with her surroundings throughout the course of the number establishes her as firmly in command of the space. As she moves from a leaning position against a hay bale to swinging around a wagon wheel and petting Toto, Garland expresses a familiarity and comfort within her environment that facilitates (presentationally) her fluid movement through space and (representationally) Dorothy's mental introspectiveness. Garland thus indulges (or is let to indulge) in a sort of *bricolage* – a strategy of interaction with her environment more commonly ascriptive to male performers – (seen by her touching the wheel, petting Toto),

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[457] Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: BFI, 1992), 27.

[458] There are only two cuts away from Garland, both to views from her perspective: once to Toto, once to light coming through the clouds, thus confirming Dorothy/Garland's subjective position to the sequence.

which emphasizes her performative agency and spontaneity.[459] In such a way, Garland subverts the traditional representational paradigm regarding female performance in musical numbers in affecting a naturalness of style and gesture that could, as Dyer has suggested, be read as androgynous, by virtue of the fact that it is not conventionally "feminine." Thus as a female musical star, she transcends the typical narrative and formal limitations of the gendered politics of viewing and representation conventional within Classical Hollywood Cinema.

Furthermore, Garland's extraordinary musical performance in *The Wizard of Oz* exceeds a narratively "necessary" function within the film, despite its logically integrative purpose within the story. The song "explains," on the one hand, Garland's desire to explore (both literally and figuratively to travel to Oz), which is foundational to the film's central ideological conflict, that between "Here" (the familiar) and "There" (the fantastical). On the other hand, the emotions that Garland conveys, ranging from bemusement to melancholy, express an ambiguous meaning – a preponderance of *wonder* – that is profoundly disturbing to the film's narrative conclusion, "There's no place like home." In these few minutes, alone (but for Toto) onscreen, Garland (re)presents unanswered longing on behalf of the female star, which is seldom given voice to in the Classical Hollywood Musical. And in that Dorothy Gale winds up, at narrative's end, right back where she started but crucially *without* a triumphant musical number in celebration of her return, Garland's musical performance in the film lingers as unbalanced, unresolved, and thus emotionally, ideologically, and narratively excessive.

Garland's representation in *The Wizard of Oz* establishes an early precedent for the mode of representation, predicated on the prioritization of Garland's aural affect, that would become standardized for Garland in her ascent to superstardom in the 1940s. During that decade, in such films as *For Me and My Gal* (Busby Berkeley, 1942), *Presenting Lily Mars* (Norman Taurog 1943), and *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944), Garland would increasingly be framed on her own when singing, without recourse to cut-aways to show reactions from diegetic audiences, as a means of indulging in a non-scopophilic manner in the pure, emotional affect of Garland's voice. On the immediate other side of *The Wizard of Oz*, however, Garland's musicals co-starring Mickey Rooney (with the exception of *Andy Hardy Meets Debutante* [George B. Seitz, 1940] part of the Andy Hardy franchise) would briefly attempt more pointed strategies of containment, by which Garland was to be promoted as a traditional romantic interest according to the classical structuring of the

[459] Feuer associates *bricolage* thusly in "The Self-reflexive Musical and the Myth of Integration," Op Cit., 444.

Hollywood musical narrative (favoured by MGM). *Babes in Arms* (Busby Berkeley, 1939) and *Strike Up the Band* (Busby Berkeley, 1940) thus present Garland in the same frame or shared space as Rooney when singing as a way both of visualizing Rooney's gaze upon Garland and of displacing a portion of the aural affect of her performance on Rooney, based on his physical presence in the scene. Such films thus stage an attempt to contain Garland's excessive performative affects as an exceptionally talented and thus highly individuated female star within the representational paradigms traditionally ascribed to the juvenated female performer.

It is not coincidental, I would further argue, that these films, like Garland's final musical of the pre-war era, *Little Nellie Kelly* (Norman Taurog, 1940), redress the classical musical's syntactic structure by which Garland's films evince the gradual reincorporation of melodramatic semantics (flushed out of the backstage musical early on) into her starring vehicles. This supports Smith's theory that in instances where the great female singer's performative affect may be seen to "spill out beyond the parameters of the numbers themselves and into the narrative world as a whole," her musicals often display a degree of generic hybridity.[460] In *Little Nellie Kelly*, Garland's first "mature" role, she plays two characters: Nellie Noonan Kelly, the beloved of Jerry Kelly (George Murphy), who dies in childbirth with her daughter, also played by Garland, the eponymous Nellie. The film is predicated narratively on reconciliation between Jerry Kelly and his father-in-law who, in a repeat of his treatment of daughter Nellie Noonan, exerts an overbearing and prohibitive influence on his beloved granddaughter; in order that she might eventually marry her sweetheart (Douglas McPhail), her grandfather's blessing must be gotten and familial reconciliation effected. In such a way, the narrative ostensibly harkens back to the "Little Miss Fix-It" child narratives of Shirley Temple and early Deanna Durbin; however, in that Garland is featured playing her own mother, narrative centrality and syntactic coherence are re-ascribed to Judy Garland as a sign within the text, thus exceeding – by virtue of the very doubleness of her presence – the principles of gender balance and integrativeness on which the classical Hollywood musical may be said to rest. Garland is excessively present in the text, and problematically so in terms of its conformity (or lack thereof) to the traditional musical narrative and form.

Interestingly, up until 1940 when Garland appeared on the cover of *Photoplay* for the first time,[461] she kept a relatively low profile as a juvenile female musical star, certainly as compared to Deanna Durbin. It was not until the release of *Little Nellie Kelly* that Garland

[460] Smith, Op. Cit., 78.
[461] *Photoplay* (December 1940).

began to generate considerable coverage in press and fan magazines. I would argue this speaks to the inability, up until that point, to reconcile the problematic audiovisual sign of Judy Garland both with her intended imagistic function as MGM's answer to the juvenile female star and her narrative function at the level of text to be the bearer of specifically gendered meanings according to the syntactic dictates of the classical Hollywood musical. Thus in order to accommodate Garland's idiosyncratic image and affect as a performer, a shift in representational paradigm was effected in her later musicals, by which the generic structure of these films was necessarily fundamentally altered.

Conclusion

Both Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin, heirs to the throne of Shirley Temple in the post-Code and ideologically conservatized era of the 1930s, performed versions of juvenated femininity iterated through adolescence that allowed for a simultaneous disavowal and objectification of their erotic/sexual function at the levels of textual narrative and reception. As Ruth Waterbury noted in 1938, their popularity gave "rise [to] the adolescent generation in pictures"[462] in the latter half of the 1930s, which in the case of the musical manifested itself in a preponderance of themes surrounding emotional/social maturity and integration on behalf of the adolescent female protagonist. But whereas Deanna Durbin's performative affect as a highly individuated performer, by virtue of her extraordinary voice, may be seen to have been successfully contained within the integrative syntax of the classical Hollywood musical, based on the fetishization of her image, Garland resisted attempts to contain her idiosyncratic vocal performance and "mismatched" image within a traditionally gendered politics of viewing and representation. In such a way, Garland's performance in musicals – exemplified via her rendition of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" within *The Wizard of Oz* – established a precedent or paradigm of representation subversive of the hegemony of the visual sign and the imagistic representation of female performers, which we have seen was fundamental to the phallogocentric syntactic structuring of the classical Hollywood musical.

[462] Waterbury, Ruth. "Close Ups and Long Shots." *Photoplay*, Vol. 52 (September 1938), 10.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have shown female performance and the representation of femininity to be key structuring features in the development of the Hollywood musical genre throughout its nascent period from 1929 to 1940. Integrating performance analysis into a structuralist methodology of genre study, I have considered how certain changes in the paradigmatic representation of women in musicals over time both affected and were effected by a range of factors: the concretization of the musical's syntactic structure according to a "dual-focus narrative" and the "Platonic ideal of integration;" the conservatization of ideology and systems of signification under the Production Code Administration; and the phallogocentric politics of viewing and gender representation implicated in the development of Hollywood cinema's classical mode of production. In each chapter, I have focused on either a single female star-performer or category of female star-performers as a means of illustrating the evolution of gendered performance paradigms in the musical over time. In so doing, I have also shown how the individual female musical star functioned both semantically as an iconographic sign of generic meaning and syntactically as integral to/constitutive of ideological meaning in the musical more broadly. Through close textual analysis, and with recourse to extra-textual sources such as censorship files, contemporaneous reviews, and fan magazines, I have shown how the overall ideological project of the classical Hollywood musical entailed – and was indeed predicated on – the containment of femininity and its referent, the excess of performative affect, within a phallogocentric paradigm of representation.

In so doing, I have attempted to integrate methodologies which have often been presented as conflictive in studies of the musical, but which, applied in complement to each other, provide a holistic view of how gendered paradigms of performance and representation – particularly as regards the female star – informed the development of the genre in its nascent period. This has illuminated where and to what effect certain performances have deviated from paradigmatic systems of representation. Towards the diachronic historicization of performance and representational modes throughout the musical, I have embraced Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to genre analysis, facilitating a reading of the development of ideological patterns across the genre over time. However, in that Altman's structural model of the musical as adherent (in its classical form, at least) to "dual-focus narrative" and the "Platonic ideal of integration" cannot account for an understanding of female performance and representation in such musicals as the early,

homosocially-oriented backstage musicals or the later musical-fantasy *The Wizard of Oz*, individual instances of performance and representation – and their consequent ideological significances – have been shown to be able to transcend, transgress or subvert the conservative ideological project of the musical (which is often communicated through narrative) and go beyond a strictly structuralist conception. This is seen in attendance to individual performances and sequences involving female stars that escape or exceed a narrative logic or function.

Towards this end, I have employed feminist semiology in the synchronic reading of the limitations of performative agency on behalf of the female. As such, I have been indebted to a Mulveyan theoretical framework, which accepts that a phallogocentric politics of viewing and representation is the dominant paradigm of Classical Hollywood Cinema, contributing to the concretization of conservative ideology as inherent to the largely meaning-bearing structures of the musical (though with crucial exceptions, as borne out in analysis of the early Warner Bros. backstage musicals, for instance). However, I have sought to go beyond a strictly Mulveyan approach to feminist theorization in positioning female performers as "subjects" of study: while often functioning as spectacular objects, reduced to a passive, imagistic function, female musical stars throughout the 1930s exhibited considerable and active authorship over their own audio-visual representation. Through performance analysis, I have thus attempted to isolate moments of perceptible agency or subversion on behalf of the female performer, or as ascribed to her through various representational strategies, as proof that female performance often pushed against – or inherently threatened – the constraints of representational tendency and phallogocentric narrative logic in pre- and early-classical Hollywood musicals. Whereas I have found that in general female performance was repressively contained – especially in light of the delimitations of censorship – I have shown that in many cases unique and subversive pleasures in listening as well as viewing may be offered by female musical stars.

Further to reading individual instances of female performance in historical context, I have taken recourse throughout to the archival investigation of contemporaneous star discourses and censorship files. Such have provided extra-textual evidence that certain female performances and representation in films were perceived as variously contained within and/or subversive of patriarchal ideology and phallogocentric narrativization. Throughout my analysis of censorship files pertaining to the musicals considered here, I have noted an increasing preoccupation on behalf of the PCA with the delimitation of female narrative agency (particularly as regards deployment of sexuality) throughout the 1930s.

This is in accordance with Lea Jacobs's argument that, while censorship under Joseph Breen and the Production Code Administration was not fundamentally more restrictive than censorship under the Studio Relations Committee (as Maltby has also argued), practices of censorship under Breen, post-1934, were subtly more repressive of female agency; thusly censorship became "coextensive" with, or inherent to, classical narrative and style, limiting the extent to which the female subject could be seen to be in control of narrative and/or her own representation. Similar to the development of the Fallen Woman Film from 1929 to 1940, then, female representation in the musical over the course of the decade was, by design, increasingly constrained within the phallogocentric, meaning-bearing structures effected and enacted by narrative predication on male subjectivity, heterosexual romance, and Platonic integrationism. Thus, adherence to Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to genre analysis has been beneficial to this project, to the extent that its positing of narrative as foundational to the construction of ideological meaning across film genres and within individual genre films facilitates consideration of the ideological function of female star performance within and alongside "story-telling" (which is, theoretically, one of the Classical Hollywood Musical's functions, in addition to the presentation of "spectacle"). Altman's structuralism has not, however, and by virtue of its generalizing tendencies, proven to be as relevant a theoretical framework where female musical performance is seen to be excessive to – or even explosive of – narrative functionality (as is its prerogative, putatively, in the classically integrative musical according to Altman).[463]

As my analysis of star performance in various cycles and sub-genres of the musical has shown, certain conventions of representation were adopted as a means towards the end of containing femininity within the integrative syntax of the classical Hollywood musical. Overall, I have identified three interrelated strategies of containment regarding female representation and star performance, which developed over the course of the 1930s: individuation, fetishization, and juvenation. Individuation, which I have defined as the process by which female characters at the level of film text and female stars more extra-textually were represented as distinct or unique in terms of image and personality, functioned to redirect narrative focus towards a heterosexual couple at the center of a story and mitigate the subversive or socially and sexually transgressive connotations of female homosociality, which was a common (if implicit) theme within early iterations of the genre. Fetishization thereby developed as a representational trend within the musical towards the

[463] This confirms certain of the criticisms of structuralist genre theory put forward by Steve Neale, Bruce Babington, Peter Evans, and Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, Op. Cit., who have highlighted the problematics of Altman's generalizing approach.

containment of thus-individuated female stars' specialized musical talent(s), which threatened to tip the balance of perceived narrative agency and affective pleasure in favour of, or in identification with, a female "subject." Finally, juvenation, which I have borrowed from Studlar as a term for a designated paradigm of representation within the musical, arose as a specific manifestation or strategy of fetishization in response to the increasing conservatization and phallogocentricization of modes of film production and representation therein in the latter half of the 1930s. Juvenation, which has been here defined as the communication of femininity through codings of youthfulness and/or juvenility, with concomitant associations of innocence and vulnerability, thus worked towards the mitigation of sexual content and signification within the musical, which the traditionally gendered politics of viewing and representation – with all its attendant objectification and fetishization of the female form/image – may be seen to have encouraged. I have sought to address each of these strategies of representation and containment through analysis of the major female musical star-performers of the 1930s.

It is interesting to note, as I have discussed in my first chapter on "The Girls Backstage: women in the backstage musical," that compared to other, later-developing sub-genres or cycles of the musical, individual – or, rather, individuated – stars bearing specific iconicity to the backstage musical are hard to identify. Whereas Ginger Rogers may be said to be representative of the dance musical at RKO, and Jeanette MacDonald is synonymous with operetta at Paramount and later MGM, the backstage musical, which was concretized in form early on in the 1930s by Warner Bros., has no single representative star. Rather, a distinguishing semantic feature of the backstage musical is its (re)presentation of a homosocial community of women as a sort of collective star. So, while individual star-performers like Ruby Keeler, Joan Blondell and the young Ginger Rogers are identifiable as recurring players within backstage musicals during its heyday from 1933 to 1936, they may be seen as more symptomatic than they are iconic of that generic mode: they bear an indexical, metonymic, or part-for-whole relationship to the paradigm of femininity that they function to represent within the backstage musical text. However, as I have sought to prove, converging impulses towards the regulation of female sexuality and the re-phallogocentricization of ideological signification within the backstage musical in the post-Code era, as well as towards a more seamless (or at least spatially coherent) integration of musical numbers with/into linear narrative (a near total disregard for which had been a distinguishing semantic feature of the cycle early on) effected the gradual individuation of the singular female protagonist within the backstage musical narrative. By the end of the

1930s, the semantic and syntactic structures of the subgenre had changed to reflect an increased focus on individual/individuated character development and the confirmation of the female protagonist as the "object" both of narrative and spectacle.

In addition to theorizing the early backstage musical's syntactic distinction from later iterations as predicated on representations of femininity according to a paradigm of homosociality, I have thereby redefined the catalogue of films which may be said to fall within the parameters of backstage musical categorization. In positing *The Broadway Melody* as the first iteration of the homosocially-themed, female-oriented backstage musical, I have countered Richard Barrios's designation of the film an "uncommonly baroque hybrid."[464] I have argued, rather, that *The Broadway Melody* must be considered in the context of the earliest cycle of backstage musical films made between 1929 and 1933, which focus on the emotional bonds between women and derive most of their meaning, at the narrative/representational level, from the interplay of female characters. By the end of the 1930s, the primacy of inter-female relationships within the backstage musical had been effectively negated via the shift of narrative focus towards individuated male protagonist/subjects and individuated female object/stars. This is paradigmatic of a more general trend regarding female performance and representation within the Hollywood musical throughout the 1930s.

In two subsequent chapters therefore, I have illustrated the emergent machinations of individuation as the dominant paradigm of representation for female characters and stars in musicals of the 1930s via the case studies of Ginger Rogers and Jeanette MacDonald. In both cases, I have shown how individuation as a strategy of containment for femininity was always already fundamentally problematized by the subversive potential of its positing female subjectivity. In relation to Ginger Rogers, her elevation to star status by the end of the decade was a corollary of the progressive augmentation of her narrative centrality and agency in the cycle of nine dance musicals she made with Fred Astaire from 1933 to 1939. This was, originally, the function of a concerted attempt to redirect focus away from the feminizing effects/spectacular affect of Fred Astaire's self-conscious musical performance, as theorized by Steven Cohan, in the post-Code era. In Rogers' and Astaire's few films together prior to 1935, obviously effeminate and implicitly homosexual secondary male characters had been employed to mark Astaire as contrastively suitably masculine and thus believable within the text as half the central heterosexual couple, the symbol on which extrapolation of the overall meaning-bearing structure of the classically integrated musical was based. Code

[464] Barrios, Op. Cit., 98.

regulations prohibited the continued representation of homosexual stereotypes, and in their absence, Astaire, the always already problematically "feminized song and dance man,"[465] may be seen to have been divested of some of his syntactic function. Thus Ginger Rogers's characters were granted additional narrative significance and centrality in their later features as a means almost of distracting from the limitations of Fred Astaire as a male star/sign of masculinity. This resulted in a representational imbalance that threatened to undermine the integrity of the meaningful gender dichotomy on which the syntactic coherence of the RKO dance musicals was, by 1939, tenuously predicated. For this reason, I have suggested, the cycle of Astaire-Rogers musicals was discontinued: it had lost its meaning according to a system of signification predicated on the fact of sexual difference. Thus, the case of Ginger Rogers exposes certain of the problematics facing individuation as a means of containing female performance within a phallogocentric system of representation in the musical.

Therefore, I have argued that fetishization of individuated female talent emerged in the second half of the 1930s as a more specific and effective way of containing female musical performance according to the traditionally gendered politics of viewing and representation. Towards this end, I have looked to Jeanette MacDonald as iconic of a thusly-fetishized female musical talent. In doing so, I have also offered a detailed analysis of operetta as a sub-genre of the musical in order to explicate the context in which certain of MacDonald's representational tendencies must be considered. Through an extended semiotic analysis of MacDonald as an aural versus visual sign within the semantic constraints of the operetta, I have detailed how her spectacular, and stylistically highly specialized, aural affect was fetishistically indulged as a means of disavowing her narrative subjectivity within a phallogocentric narrative paradigm. Nevertheless, as Smith has noted, certain of MacDonald's individual musical performances – particularly those in which she sings popular or contemporary songs in an incongruously operatic style – may be seen as subversive of a male narrational authority, and challenging to their subjective potential as a point of audience identification within the filmic narrative.[466] Also, as I have argued, implementation of censorship under the Production Code Administration in 1934 functioned paradoxically to mitigate the phallogocentricizing function of the fetishization of MacDonald's musical performance. Prior to 1934, one of the primary attractions of MacDonald's operettas was her co-star Maurice Chevalier, whose attraction was predicated on his association with an unrestrained, almost excessively masculine sexuality. In that Chevalier's image could not be

[465] Cohan, "'Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man," Op. Cit., 2002.
[466] Smith, Op. Cit.

reconciled with post-Code morals, he was replaced by Nelson Eddy in operettas starring Jeanette MacDonald after 1934 (with the exception of *The Merry Widow*, Chevalier's last film with MacDonald). As I have shown, Eddy's performance of masculinity was less ostentatiously libidinous and authoritative, allowing MacDonald to take on increasing narrative agency in roles opposite him as a result. In such a way, MacDonald's fetishistic mode of representation during spectacular musical sequences may be seen as having an overall camp affect and parodic effect – speaking again to the functional limits of containment pertaining to female performance and representation in the post-Code, classical era.

In my fourth chapter addressing Shirley Temple, I have argued that in recognition of these paradigmatic limitations, Hollywood musicals turned towards the pre-adolescent female child/star as a means of effacing the subversive potentiality of female subjectivity presented by mature female musical stars such as Ginger Rogers and Jeanette MacDonald. Thus, Shirley Temple established juvenation as the paradigm of femininity and female representation that would dominate Hollywood musicals in the latter half of the 1930s. Drawing on the theories of Studlar, Lury, Merish and Wills, I have shown how Temple's erotic appeal as the object of the male gaze was simultaneously disavowed in/by the fact of her immature body – thus ostensibly sanitizing the image of the female musical star in accordance with post-Code strictures – while her *potential* sexual function was nevertheless consistently hinted at as a means of containing her spectacular affect within an objectifying (and now latently paedophilic), phallogocentric politics of viewing and representation. Tellingly, Temple functioned in the majority of her films as more of an objective correlative than narrative subject, positing Temple as a "Little Miss Fix-It" whose presence seemed naturally to effect romantic conciliation between an initially diametrically-opposed, (often surrogate) mother-father pair. In such a way, the classically integrative syntax of her films was embellished with a predication on the establishment of a complete family unit. Crucially, the erotic connotations of Temple's bond with older men (a recurring semantic feature of her films), were successfully displaced onto the stand-in mother/surrogate character, thus preserving the essential meaning-bearing structures of the classical Hollywood musical, predicated on inter-sex conciliation, but divested of any overtly sexual connotations.

However, Temple's inevitable physical change towards the end of the 1930s threatened to destabilize again the meaning-bearing structure on which the child narrative musical was constructed. Temple's physical maturation, her essential transformativeness,

was an explicit indicator of the transient and performative nature of her image-persona, which destroyed all correlating myths of spontaneity, "naturalness," and purity developed around her. As I have argued, this contributed firstly to the failure in the syntactic functioning of her later musicals, and secondly to the rise of the adolescent female musical star in the late 1930s as heir to the throne of feminine ideal. The post-pubescent adolescent female star of the late 1930s, of which Deanna Durbin and Judy Garland were the major representatives, was a more stable referent of juvenated femininity in that, already having suffered a physical transition from childhood (a stage of pre-sexuality) to adolescence (a stage of sexual potential), she was poised, after the fact of transformation and imagistic reconstruction, to in fact deny that that re-construction had ever occurred.

Thus I have concluded my analysis of female performance and representation in Hollywood musicals of the 1930s with two divergent examples of the juvenated female musical star: one is an example of the successful containment of femininity via performative juvenation, Deanna Durbin, and the other, Judy Garland, evinces its unsuccessful containment. As I have shown, from the beginning of their parallel careers, Durbin was consistently more overtly juvenated and feminized in her appearance than Garland as a function of her association with a style of singing (opera) that already bore connotations of maturity and specialization. While Garland's aural affect was arguably equally unique and thus individuated, her rather more plain outward appearance resisted fetishization via the optic processes to which Durbin's conventionally attractive image was readily receptive. For this reason, I have argued, Durbin made an easy transition from child narratives, by which she may be seen to have followed Temple-esque narrative trajectories, into playing individuated romantic leads who nevertheless bore fetishistic connotations of innocence and youth carried by the juvenated star persona. Garland, on the other hand, proved more difficult to represent imagistically – to fix-as-narrative-object – consistently onscreen, as proved by the variety of types (Little Miss Fix-It, girl-next-door, child in the wilderness) she was assigned to play between 1936 and 1939. As a result, I have argued, the cycle of musical star vehicles that MGM constructed for Garland resorted to incorporating certain of the semantics of melodrama (such as the thematic focus on familial ties and mother-daughter relationships) into her films as a means of "explaining," through generic structural means, the excesses of her performative affect when her voice, as-yet-uncontained by an iconic referent/object, let loose. In such a way, I have shown that Garland's performance in musicals, strongly individuated even at this early stage in her career, made necessary a redress of established musical paradigms of representation to suit her particular image and

style of singing. Nevertheless, as borne out in analysis of Garland's performance in *The Wizard of Oz*, I have suggested that Garland, as a representative female star within a generic system of representation bent on the effacement of female subjectivity, transcended the phallogocentric limitations of musical form and narrative in a subversive way (as received from a feminist perspective). Furthermore, in ending with a consideration of Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*, I have taken female performance and representation out of the context of semantic/syntactic functionality – thus making a departure from Altman and structuralism – to treat it as (potentially) lastingly *phenomenal*, or unique in its own place and time of utterance and reception. This enacts a "liberation" of female performance from representational paradigm, at the same time as its phenomenality is contingent on the existence and coherence of that same repressive system of representation.

Overall, I have shown in this thesis how the various syntactically integrative and ideologically conservative impulses towards the containment of femininity within a phallogocentric paradigm of representation in the classical Hollywood musical may be seen at almost every point to have been subverted or resisted in some way by specific modes of performance and/or representation by individual female musical star-performers. I have also shown how specific iterations of performance paradigms affected the overall structural development of the Hollywood musical in the first decade of its existence. Crucially, individuated female performance resisted, at the same time as it concretized, the classical Hollywood musical syntax.

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The Cat and the Fiddle (William K. Howard, MGM, 1934)

Curly Top (Irving Cummings, Twentieth Century Fox, 1935)

The Crowd Roars (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, 1932)

Dames (Ray Enright and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1934)

Dancing Lady (Robert Z. Leonard, MGM, 1933)

The Desert Song (Roy Del Ruth, Warner Bros., 1928)

Dimples (William A. Seiter, Twentieth Century Fox, 1936)

Don't Bet on Women (William K. Howard, Fox Film, 1931)

Dora's Dunking Doughnuts (Harry Edwards, Educational Pictures, 1933 for

Duck Soup (Leo McCarey, Paramount, 1933)

Every Sunday (Felix E. Feist, MGM, 1936)

Everybody Sing (Edward Marin, MGM, 1938)

The Firefly, (Robert Z. Leonard, MGM, 1937)

First Love (Henry Koster, Universal, 1939)

Flying Down to Rio (Thornton Freeland, RKO, 1933)

Follow the Boys (E. Edward Sutherland, Universal, 1944)

Follow the Fleet (Mark Sandrich, RKO, 1936)

Footlight Parade (Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1933)

For Me and My Gal (Busby Berkeley, MGM, 1942)

The Gay Divorcee (Mark Sandrich, RKO, 1934)

The Girl of the Golden West (Robert Z. Leonard, MGM, 1938)

Glad Rags to Riches (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1933)

Gold Diggers of 1933 (Mervyn LeRoy and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1933)

Gold Diggers of 1935 (Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1934)

Gold Diggers of 1937 (Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1936)

Gold Diggers of Paris (Ray Enright and Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1938)

Heidi (Allan Dwan, Twentieth Century Fox, 1937)

Hollywood Hotel (Busby Berkeley, Warner Bros., 1937)

I Married an Angel (W. S. Van Dyke and Roy Del Ruth, MGM, 1942)

It's a Date (William A. Seiter, Universal, 1940)

The Jazz Singer (Alan Crosland, Warner Bros., 1927)

Just Around the Corner (Irving Cummings, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938)

The Kid (Charles Chaplin, First National, 1931)

Kid 'in' Africa (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1933)

The Kid's Last Fight (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1933)

Kiddin' Hollywood (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1933)

Kitty Foyle (Sam Wood, RKO, 1940)

Knickerbocker Holiday (Harry Joe Brown, Producers Corporation of America, 1944)

Let's Go Native (Leo McCarey, Paramount, 1930)

Lights of New York (Brian Foy, Warner Bros., 1938)

Listen, Darling (Edward Marin, MGM, 1938)

The Little Colonel (David Butler, Twentieth Century Fox, 1935)

Little Miss Broadway (Irving Cummings, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938)

Little Miss Marker (Alexander Hall, Twentieth Century Fox, 1934)

Little Nellie Kelly (Norman Taurog, MGM, 1940)

The Little Princess (Walter Lang, Twentieth Century Fox, 1939)

The Littlest Rebel (David Butler, Twentieth Century Fox, 1935)

The Lottery Bride (Paul L. Stein, Paramount, 1930)

Love Finds Andy Hardy (George B. Seitz, MGM, 1938)

Love Me Tonight (Rouben Mamoulian, Paramount, 1932)

The Love Parade (Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount, 1929)

Mad About Music (Norman Taurog, Universal, 1938)

Managed Money (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1934)

Maytime (Robert Z. Leonard, MGM, 1937)

Meet Me in St. Louis (Vincente Minnelli, MGM, 1944)

Merrily Yours (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1933)

The Merry Widow (Ernst Lubitsch, MGM, 1934)

Monte Carlo (Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount, 1930)

Naughty Marietta (Robert Z. Leonard and W. S. Van Dyke, MGM, 1935)

New Moon (Robert Z. Leonard and W. S. Van Dyke, MGM, 1940)

Now and Forever (Henry Hathaway, Twentieth Century Fox, 1934)

Oh! For a Man (Hamilton MacFadden, Fox Film, 1930)

On The Town (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, MGM, 1949)

One Hour With You (Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount, 1932)

One Hundred Men and a Girl (Henry Koster, Universal, 1937)

Our Little Girl (John S. Robertson, Twentieth Century Fox, 1935)

Pardon My Pups (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1934)

Phantom of the Opera (Arthur Lubin, Universal, 1943)

The Pie-Covered Wagon (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1932)

Polly Tix in Washington (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1933)

The Poor Little Rich Girl (Irving Cummings, Twentieth Century Fox, 1936)

Presenting Lily Mars (Norman Taurog, MGM, 1943)

The Public Enemy (William Wellman, Warner Bros., 1931)

Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (Allan Dwan, Twentieth Century Fox, 1938)

Roberta (William A. Seiter, RKO, 1935)

Rose Marie (W. S. Van Dyke, MGM, 1936)

Royal Wedding (Stanley Donen, MGM, 1951)

Runt Page (Ray Nazarro, Educational Pictures, 1932)

San Francisco (W. S. Van Dyke and D. W. Griffith, MGM, 1936)

Shall We Dance (Mark Sandrich, RKO, 1937)

Show Boat (George Sidney, MGM, 1951)

Silk Stockings (Rouben Mamoulian, MGM, 1957)

Singin' in the Rain (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, MGM, 1952)

The Smiling Lieutenant (Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount, 1931)

The Sound of Music (Robert Wise, Twentieth Century Fox, 1965)

Spring Parade (Henry Koster, Universal, 1940)

Stage Door (Gregory La Cava, RKO, 1937)

Stand Up and Cheer! (Hamilton MacFadden, Twentieth Century Fox, 1934)

Stowaway (William A. Seiter, Twentieth Century Fox, 1936)

The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle (Mark Sandrich, RKO, 1939)

Strike Up the Band (Busby Berkeley, MGM, 1940)

The Sun Comes Up (Richard Thorpe, MGM, 1949)

Susannah of the Mounties (Walter Lang and William A. Seiter, Twentieth Century Fox, 1939)

Sweethearts (W. S. Van Dyke, MGM, 1938)

Swing Time (George Stevens, RKO, 1936)

Taxi! (Roy Del Ruth, Warner Bros., 1932)

That Certain Age (Edward Ludwig, Universal, 1938)

Thoroughbreds Don't Cry (Alfred Green, MGM, 1937)

Three Daring Daughters (Fred M. Wilcox, MGM, 1948)

Three Smart Girls (Henry Koster, Universal, 1936)

Top Hat (Mark Sandrich, RKO, 1935)

Torch Singer (Alexander Hall and George Somnes, Paramount, 1933)

The Vagabond King (Ludwig Berger, Paramount, 1930)

War Babies (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1932)

Wee Willie Winkie (John Ford, Twentieth Century Fox, 1937)

West Side Story (Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, 1961)

What's to Do? (Charles Lamont, Educational Pictures, 1933)

Willie the Operatic Whale (Clyde Geronimi and Hamilton Luske, Disney,1946)

The Wizard of Oz (Victor Fleming, MGM, 1939)