A DIFFERENT KIND OF DIVA:
REPRESENTATIONS OF AGING WOMEN IN THREE AMERICAN MUSICALS

Michael Evans Kinney

Department of Music Research
Schulich School of Music
McGill University, Montréal

December, 2016

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Musicology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

A Different Kind of Diva:
Representations of Aging Women in Three American Musicals

Despite increased interest in aspects of identity within musical theatre scholarship, few have turned a critical eye toward issues of aging. This thesis furnishes a new perspective in both musical theatre studies and musicology by engaging in an analysis of aging, gender, identity, and representation in the American musical. By providing close readings of both score and book of three canonic musicals – Jule Styne and Stephen Sondheim's *Gypsy* (1959), Sondheim and James Goldman's *Follies* (1971), and Scott Frankel, Michael Korie, and Doug Wright's *Grey Gardens* (2006) – this project outlines the emergence of a complex set of women in narratives that confront the aging process, both directly and indirectly. Furthermore, these shows act as cross sections of the past 60 years of musical theatre, and therefore exemplify a development of the representation of aging women within the genre.

In the first chapter, the thesis considers the representations of aging women in the Golden Age of musical theatre (1930-1966). This was a time when aging women were typically portrayed as one-dimensional characters, found at the margins of these narratives, and stereotypically characterized as sexless, passive, and merely supportive to the youth-oriented plots. However, the musicals *Gypsy*, *Follies*, and *Grey Gardens* boldly place aging women as the focal point of their respective narratives and bring attention to the perspective of aging women, addressing issues of visibility and agency in the aging process. The following three chapters explore the complex protagonists of these musicals. I examine the function of certain songs in the narratives, such as the "I want/I am song" and duets, that reveal age-based complexities of these newer leading ladies. Their motivations, ambitions, relationships, and ambivalences are considered in conjunction with themes outlined in age studies, such as decline, life course, and generational conflict.

RÉSUMÉ

Une diva différent:
Représentations du vieillissement des femmes dans trois musicaux américains

Malgré un intérêt grandissant de certains aspects de l'identité à l'intérieur de l'étude du théâtre musical, peu ont jeté un regard critique ou ont posé des questions sur le vieillissement. Cette thèse fournit une nouvelle perspective dans deux cadres d'études, celle du théâtre musical et celle de la musicologie, en entreprenant une analyse du vieillissement, genre, identité, et de représentation dans le musical américain. En fournissant des lectures attentives des partitions et du livre de trois oeuvres canoniques musicales – *Gypsy* (1959) de Jule Styne et Stephen Sondheim, *Follies* (1971) de Sondheim et James Goldman, et *Grey Gardens* (2006) par Scott Frankle, Michael Korie, et Doug Wright – ce projet donne un aperçu de l'émergence d'un complexe ensemble de femmes dans des narrations qui font face aux processus direct et indirect du vieillissement. De plus, ces spectacles agissent comme une section transversale des soixante dernières années du théâtre musical, et pour ces raisons, ils illustrent le développement de la représentation des femmes vieillissantes dans ce domaine.

Le premier chapitre de cette thèse considère la représentation des femmes vieillissantes dans la belle époque du théâtre musical (1930-1966). Ce fut un temps où les femmes matures étaient décrites comme des personnages unidimensionnels, reléguées aux périphéries du récit, dépeintes comme asexuées, passives, et soutenant presqu'uniquement les scénarios mettant en scène les jeunes. Par contre, les musicaux *Gypsy*, *Follies* et *Grey Gardens* placent audacieusement les femmes vieillissantes au centre de leurs récits respectifs et portent une attention particulière aux femmes vieillissantes en leur donnant plus de visibilité et d'accès aux agences dans une perspective d'un vieillissement actif. Les trois chapitres qui suivent analysent les protagonistes complexes de ces musicaux. J'analyse la fonction de certaines chansons dans ces récits, tels que la "I want/I am song" et les duos, qui dévoilent les complexités fondées sur l'âge de ces grandes dames. Leurs motivations, ambitions, liens, et ambivalences sont considérés conjointement avec les sujets de l'étude sur les effets du vieillissement, tels que le déclin, le parcours de vie, et le conflit de générations.

Translated by Sophie Kabbash

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank first and foremost my supervisor, Chip Whitesell, for his enthusiasm and support over the past two years. This project was ambitious, but Chip's intellect and helpful criticism guided this research. He has taught me to always be as analytically rigorous as possible while not losing sight of the bigger goals. I would also like to thank Erin Hurley for her encouragement, insight, and for pointing me toward some valuable resources. I am also grateful for the guidance and comradery of The Glam Squad – Nina Penner, Jess Holmes, Kristen Franseen, Alyssa Michaud, Rachel Avery, Russell Wustenberg, Margaret Cormier, and Kiersten Van Vliet – who have listened to, read, and positively commented on my ideas.

Elizabeth Wells first showed me that musical theatre is not only worthy of academic study, but that its exploration can be extremely rewarding and eye-opening. She continues to be a good friend and a source of inspiration and support. Tessa MacLean, Sophie Kabbash, and Erin Sheedy were constant sources of friendship during my time at McGill, and were always willing to engage in intellectual conversations over a good Friday brunch.

My parents, Brian and Paula, and rest of my family have provided unwavering support and love throughout my entire life. They have never questioned my goals and have always done their best in helping me achieve them, and for this I am forever appreciative. Lastly, I thank Ted Wilson for his unconditional love, understanding, and for wholeheartedly believing in me. I would not have wanted to do this with anyone else by my side.

This project has been funded by a Joseph-Amend Bombardier Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Michael Kinney

INTRODUCTION

In 1971, drama scholar Gerald Weales noted that there were a number of Broadway shows in recent years that had starred or featured aging actresses.[1] Former stars of stage and screen, such as Joan Blondell, Alexis Smith, Ruby Keeler, Yvonne De Carlo, Anne Baxter, Fifi D'Orsay, Patsy Kelly, and Jane Russell, were all in Broadway productions such as *No, No, Nanette*, *Applause*, *Follies*, and *70, Girls, 70* between 1969 and 1971. Weales noted that because of these now aging stars, the productions carried a theme of nostalgia. He added that a sense of nostalgia had recently made itself known in many different cultural factions, and that this was cause for hope; "Not that this is the wrong moment for nostalgia. God knows it is all around us. Mail order catalogues, once given away, are reprinted and sold at high prices to remind us that life was cheaper (and hence simpler?) in, say, 1897."[2]

John Bush Jones notes that in the mid 1960s, the "struggle between generations was especially apropos," given the youth-driven countercultural movements that dominated this decade.[3] Presumably, issues of age and aging were very much part of the American public consciousness and present in the American musical. Shows such as *West Side Story* (1957), *Hair* (1968), *Godspell* (1971), and *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973, West End; 1975, Broadway) have all been noted for their focus on themes of youth culture.[4] Yet, other than the mention of this obscure reference to aged women on the musical theatre stage by Weales, the discussion of aging has been neglected by musical theatre scholarship.

---

[1] Gerald Weales, "Nostalgia and Beyond." *The North American Review* 256/4 (Winter, 1971): 78-80.
[2] Ibid, 78.
[3] John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 212.
[4] Ibid, 191-194. Also, Raymond Knapp notes the themes of youth rebellion in both *Hair* and *the Rocky Horror Show*. See Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 244.

Discussions of aging and age studies remain largely disconnected from musicological discourses. Only a few studies in popular music deal directly with age. Sheila Whiteley (2003) has written about the evocation of a "youthful appeal" among teenage performers in pop music, noting the marketability of youth and the exploitation of age.[5] More recently, sociologist Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson (2012) have provided ethnographic insight into how aging people participate in subcultural and countercultural movements that find a certain genre of music at their centre. The pair note that many view aging fans who have not give up their identification with youth-oriented music scenes as slow to grow up into adulthood.[6] At the same time, Ros Jennings and Abigail Gardner (2012) have engaged with issues of "aging-beyond-youth," gender, and performance in pop and rock. Their collection of essays "is the first collection to critically unpack…the ways in which older women negotiate age in their musical performances and how this, in turn, is represented within media."[7] Finally, Richard Elliott (2015) has offered an innovative look into aging rock performers, analyzing issues of age in terms of temporality and experience, and considers how aging performers approach performance style, maintenance of professional image, and the creation of legacies.[8]

Beyond popular music, Linda and Michael Hutcheon have provided one of the first analyses of creativity and aging in their book *Four Last Songs: Aging and Creativity in Verdi, Strauss, Messiaen, and Britten* (2015). Through four case studies, the Hutcheons attempt to understand the intricate relationship between aging and creativity, and consider issues such as longevity, legacy, renewed creativity, illness, disability, and struggle. Additionally, Catherine

---

[5] Sheila Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age, and Gender* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003), 2.
[6] Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson (eds.), *Aging and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 2.
[7] Ros Jennings and Abigail Gardner (eds.), *Rock On: Women, Ageing and Popular Music* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 1.
[8] Richard Elliott, *The Late Voice: Time, Age, and Experience in Popular Music* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

Haworth and Lisa Colton's collection of essays on age, gender and creativity (2015) provides insight into the issues of age in both popular and classical art music, touching on the "complex personal, economic and cultural reasons [of why] women's creative careers, and the reception of their work, often bear little resemblance to those of men."[9]

On the other hand, age studies have been more readily integrated into the analysis of film, literature, and theatre. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the humanities turned to texts with artistic representations of aging. This was inspired by both humanities scholars with interests in aging, and by gerontologists striving to create a more socially-aware gerontology.[10] Gerontologist Mike Hepworth suggests, "because fiction is a creative mental activity requiring author and reader to extend her or himself imaginatively into the minds of other characters, novels are in the advantageous position of admitting readers to a variety of different perspectives on the situation of an aging individual."[11]

Kathleen Woodward's landmark psychoanalytic and literary study, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* was among the first to deconstruct popular representations of aging in works from Freud, Lacan, Proust, Woolf, Barthes, and Beckett, among others. She notes:

> I submit that the relative lack of ambiguity in our representations of aging, the relative paucity of their elaboration or differentiation, is a symptom that our culture as a whole has not succeeded in producing persuasive representations of aging – in particular of the aging body – which are characterized by *tolerance* in the Kleinian sense. Splitting is a defense against ambivalence. In our culture we are profoundly ambivalent, and primarily negative, about old age.[12]

---

[9] Catherine Haworth and Lisa Colton (eds.), *Gender, Age, and Musical Creativity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 2.
[10] Thomas R. Cole, "Preface," in *Voices and Visions of Aging: Toward a Critical Gerontology*, edited by Thomas R. Cole, W. Andrew Achenbaum, Patricia L. Jakobi, and Robert Kastenbaum, (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1992), vii-viii.
[11] Mike Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2000), 5.
[12] Kathleen Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 8.

Woodward's focus on psychoanalytic theory turns an analytical eye to the aging body and its ambivalences. She rethinks the experience of the voyeuristic gaze, applying it to the aging body. She notes that, unlike the two-participant model of the gaze (i.e. the viewer and the viewed), the aging body often experiences an additional participant, the self-gaze.[13] This sometimes results in a feeling of the unrecognizability of one's own aged body. In picking apart notions of the gaze, narcissism, and the body among aging subjects, Woodward introduced, into studies of age and representation, a complex image of the aging body and mind. A search for the complexities of age and identity has since been undertaken by many age scholars both in the humanities and social sciences.

Finding great value and insight in a discourse of aging and the body, Woodward soon turned her attention to the connection between feminist thought and aging. The invisibility of aging women (and ageism more generally) has persisted in many social institutions, including within the "Second Wave" feminist movement itself. Barbara MacDonald became the first woman to critique the ageism in the Women's Liberation Movement and insisted that aging was a feminist issue. MacDonald, who was in her 60s through the 1970s, found that prominent feminist rhetoric about bodies, sexuality, and economic equality largely excluded women who were old, and as a result, she feared that feminism, while supporting equality for women, was in fact further dividing women. For those who were more sensitive to the issues of aging and feminism, the connection between the two has been described as a "double standard;" while men, who are seen to become more distinguished with age advance their privilege as they get older, women face a double marginality of reduced agency based on gender *and* age.[14] Woodward

[13] Woodward here heavily pulls from Lacan's mirror stages of infancy, and insists that, in old age, the mirror stage become "inherently triangular." Ibid, 69.
[14] Susan Sontag, "The Double Standard of Aging," *Saturday Review* (September 23, 1972): 29-38.

brought together feminist scholars, artists and critics for a conference entitled "Women and Aging: Bodies, Cultures, Generations" (1996), to discuss issues of gender and aging in the humanities. She and others at the conference sought to promote visibility of aging women in academic circles other than gerontology and to question cultural conceptions of aging and womanhood.[15] As a result, more scholars have begun to rethink social gerontological research on income and labor, bodies, temporality, vulnerability, sexualities, families, and technology.[16]

Age-focused work done in the humanities, in addition to the work being done in social gerontology, inspired more comprehensive theories of age. The work of Margaret Morganroth Gullette, who is widely considered to have coined the term "age studies," began to theorize how people age and how people identify with their age. Famously, Gullette posited that "we are aged by culture," meaning that almost all media – from advertising to cartoons to birthday greeting cards – shape how we understand the aging process. She described the typically pejorative images in Western culture that highlight aging as a process of decline. As a result, a fear of aging is internalized from an early age.[17]

Gullette importantly brought awareness to the "master narrative of decline," issues of generational conflict, and the social construction of age by deconstructing various cultural media phenomena, from literature and film to birthday celebrations and the American Dream. Decline

---

[15] Kathleen Woodward, "Introduction," in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, edited by Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), xvi.

[16] See Colette Browne, *Women, Feminism, and Aging* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1998), as well as the collected essays in Toni M. Calasanti and Kathleen F. Slevin (eds.), *Age Matters*: *Realigning Feminist Thinking* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Sally Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narrative* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2003); and Margaret Cruikshank, "A Feminist's View of Gerontology and Women's Aging," in *Learning To Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*, second edition, by Margaret Cruikshank (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

[17] Gullette (1997) develops the idea of an "age anxiety" noting that this anxiety manifests itself more often than not as an internal dialogue (she uses the term, "soliloquy" [pg. 1]). The result of this internalization is a willingness or acceptance to see oneself as old during mid-life. See, Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Declinging to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 166-169. Gullette comes back to this idea in *Aged By Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

narratives promote the belief in regression and decay as one ages, both physically and socio-culturally. Gullette defined the "master narrative of decline" as "[a]n invisible producer of economic differences, an omnipresent regulator of age-inflected discourses, a constant pressure on our sense of life time."[18] She continues, "The master narrative starts….as a story of progress and becomes a peak-and-(early)-decline story. The peak now occurs long before death or old age, heading backward toward an idealized early midlife or young adulthood."[19] Decline narratives are introduced at young ages in the guise of popular cultural tropes and therefore negatively affect outlook on both the process of aging and the elderly. When narratives of decline are taught and culturally reinforced, the elderly are looked upon as decrepit, weak, and feeble. Furthermore, these narratives of decline are internalized from a young age and create an "age anxiety;" we often grow up fearing the aging process and the prospects of "aging past youth."

Despite work in musicology, cultural studies, and age studies described above, considerations of age have not yet made their way into the multifaceted and interdisciplinary field of musical theatre studies. Recent trends in musical theatre studies have focused on issues of identity and representation. Raymond Knapp notes that the American musical, from its early stages, placed an emphasis on "the personal and away from the larger political issues." He continues, "Often closely coordinated with this shift toward the personal is the developing focus in musicals on exploring different kinds of identities and relationships, already a growing trend by the time of its first maturity."[20] Representations of personal identities in musical theatre "have

[18] Gullette, *Aged by Culture*, 130.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Knapp, *American Musical and Personal Identity*, 3.

given people, in a visceral way, a sense of what it *feels* like to embody whatever alternatives that musicals might offer to their own life circumstances and choices."[21]

Analyses within the study of musicals range from general considerations of identity issues, to more finely directed considerations of specific facets of identity. For example, general studies include Knapp's two-part series (2005, 2006) on the American musical, quoted above, and John Bush Jones's social history of the Broadway musical of the 20th century (2002), which tracks musical theatre's response to events like the Great Depression, World War II, civil rights, and capitalism. More focused studies include D. A. Miller's 1998 *Place for Us [Essay on the Broadway Musical]* (1998), which is a personal exploration of gay experience and the musical theatre, and Stacy Wolf's feminist readings and reorientation of the Broadway canon in both *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (2003) and *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (2010). Nationality, race, ethnicity, and class have also all been explored within the field of musical theatre studies and all provide a nuanced look and more depth to the ever-popular genre of entertainment.[22]

Even with the recent increased awareness of personal identity in musical theatre scholarship, considerations of age and aging have been sparse. The rare examples come from theatre scholars interested in musical theatre, including Anne Davis Basting, who primarily

---

[21] Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 283.

[22] For more on different aspects of identity, such as race, religion, or nationality, see, for example, Allen L. Woll, *Black Musical Theatre: From* Coontown *to* Dreamgirls (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), and Andrea Most, *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). See also analyses of specific shows that deal with multiple issues of identity and culture: Elizabeth A. Wells, *West Side Story: Cultural Perspectives on an American Musical* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), or Todd R. Decker, *Showboat: Performing Race in an American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), among others.

writes about the benefits of theatre therapy among the aging.[23] She provides an excellent analysis of age and stardom on the Broadway stage through a look at the 1994 revival of *Hello, Dolly!*, which stared a 73-year-old Carol Channing. Additionally, theatre scholar Michael Mangan has written about the use of existing pop songs in musical plays put on by groups of older people, and noted the new meanings derived from classic rock and roll songs, like The Rolling Stones's "My Generation," when sung in the context of an age narrative.[24] To date, however, there remains no comprehensive consideration of how age is represented on the musical theatre stage.

Coming back to Weales's observations about the increased number of aging woman on stage, several questions arise when we think about representations of these aging subjects: what roles did aging women play before this time? How are these women portrayed in these musicals? How are certain representations of aging women different from others, in both positive and negative ways? Does the aging woman continue to be found in the American musical theatre, and, if so, how? How does music enhance understandings of the experiences of aging women? These questions about aging, while covered in other media, are still largely excluded from critical discourse on identity and representation in musical theatre.

This thesis will explore representations of aging in relation to female protagonists in three musicals: *Gypsy* (Styne and Sondheim, 1959), about a middle-aged stage mother and her efforts to offer her children a chance at stardom; *Follies* (Sondheim and Goldman, 1971), which follows

---

[23] There are many other theatre scholars who have addressed issues of aging in both straight theatre and musical theatre, albeit fewer have discussed the latter. See Anne Davis Basting, *The Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998),163-179.
[24] Michael Mangan, *Staging Ageing: Theatre, Performance, and the Narrative of Decline* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 219-234.

a group of aged stage performers during a reunion at the now decrepit theatre where they met many years before; and *Grey Gardens* (Frankel, Korie, and Wright 2006, based on the Maysles brothers' cult documentary of the same name) which chronicles the lives of Edith Bouvier Beale (aunt of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis) and her daughter "Little Edie," who live in the squalor of their East Hampton summer home. Though the image of the aging woman has been found throughout the history of the American musical, these three shows boldly place her in the middle of the dramatic action. Furthermore, these shows chronicle the past 60 years of the genre, representing some of the major developments and trends in stylistic development, both theatrically and musically. This will allow me to assess the progress in age representation within American musical theatre.

The major goal of this thesis is to bridge the gap between age studies and musical theatre studies by identifying and analyzing representations of the aging woman in what are considered three canonical American musicals. In effect, I hope both to enrich the attention to personal identity within musical theatre scholarship, and to provoke a more rigorous discourse on issues of age representation within musicology. Additionally, this thesis will contribute to the existing analyses of *Gypsy* and *Follies* by offering more nuanced readings of age and identity. It will also include the first rigorous considerations of the music and book of Frankel, Korie, and Wright's *Grey Gardens*. My interdisciplinary approach, which draws on material from age studies, musicology, theatre history and studies, feminist gerontology, literary gerontology, sociology, and psychology, will recontextualize historical, structural, and aesthetic understandings of the American musical with a focus on the aged female subject. I have chosen to focus on the female subject as opposed to the aged subject in general because of the differences that gender imposes

on experiences of aging, including body politics, familial relationships, and expectations of behaviour based on gender roles.

Following synopses, Chapter 1 begins by examining previous representations of the aging woman in musical theatre, from the early revue and burlesque styles, until the end of the Golden Age of musical theatre (approximately 1930-1966). Through this exploration I will outline the progression of the aging woman in musical theatre from a marginal position to a more central position. Drawing on the abundance of chronological histories of the American musical, from Ethan Mordden, Geoffrey Block, and Larry Stempel, I will shed light on the function of the aging woman as a character type in the American musical, as well as on issues of aging such as expectations of life course narratives, and gendered expectations of aging. I argue that over time, there was a gradual emergence of the aging women in musical theatre; she gained musical voice, agency, and a more central position by the time *Gypsy* was premiered in 1959. The second part of Chapter 1 will focus on the centrality of the the aging women examined in this thesis.

The following three chapters explore character complexity in each of the three musicals in question. Each chapter will consider desires and ambitions, relationships, and ambivalence as markers of complexity through close readings of both book and musical numbers. Both desire/ambition and relationships can be represented in conventional musical theatre song types: the "I want/I am" song, and the duet.[25] The "I want/I am" song is typically found near the beginning of the musical and develops a character's motivation for taking action in the plot. I use this song type as a way to gauge ambition and desire among the characters to be discussed. The function of the second song type, the duet, has been explained by musical theatre scholars to represent the connection or bond between two people. As Raymond Knapp notes, this

[25] This does not mean that these are the only ways in which musical theatre can represent desires and relationships. As we will see, these categories are not rigid or strongly defined.

convention is pervasive in musical theatre, but it typically is based on the heterosexual coupling between man and woman.[26]

Both desire and relationships factor into how the aging women of these musicals display psychological complexity. These women are motivated to achieve goals and pursue desires. They are also shown to be deeply involved in some sort of relationship, romantic and/or familial. My analyses will show how their experience of aging greatly impacts how these desires and relationships play out. These three chapters will also address the ambivalences within each character. All three musicals end with ambivalent finales, where conflicting emotions are confronted. The musical complexity of these songs reflect the difficulties that are encountered in the aging process. An intricate representation of the aging woman shows us that aging beyond midlife is accompanied by many fears and uncertainties.

[26] Knapp, *The American Musical and Personal Identity*, 264-5. Knapp goes on to suggest that one can see the relationships in musical theatre as not being constitutively bound to meanings of normative heterosexuality, but rather that the relationships in musical theatre can stand in for any variety of relationships, either straight or queer. Furthermore, Stacy Wolf points to homosocial female-female duets that became became prominent in the Golden Age of musical theatre, suggesting the queerness of these duets. This will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4 when I consider another type of female-female duets, the mother-daughter duet. Stacy Ellen Wolf, "'We'll Always Be Bosom Buddies': Female Duets and the Queering of Broadway Musical Theatre," *GLQ* 12/3 (2006): 351-376.

SYNOPSES

The synopses provided here are intended to introduce, with some detail, the plots of the three musicals that are discussed in this thesis. Some readers may wish to skim these in order to familiarize themselves with these shows before the analyses. Other readers may wish to begin with Chapter 1 if they are familiar with the three following narratives.

Gypsy

We first meet Rose at an audition for Uncle Jocko's Kiddie Show, where June and Louise perform "May We Entertain You," a song that will serve the family's performances throughout the show. Immediately, June is pegged as the talented one of the pair, while the timid Louise appears uncomfortable on stage. It is here that Rose makes her first appearance as she interrupts the audition and the flow of the show; Rose (originally played by singular Ethel Merman) barrels down the left audience aisle, shouting for Louise to "sing out!" Rose, being very forward with Jocko, tries to charm him, claiming to be part of several lodges and societies, such as the Knights of Pythias and the Elks. But, when Uncle Jocko sees through her facade and dismisses the act, Rose becomes vicious, threatening to expose him for fixing the audition. He accedes and their act is booked.

Following this, Rose returns home to Seattle, landing on her father's doorstep, begging him for money. Her father, disapproving of her nomadic way of life, refuses to support her. Rose takes matters into her own hands and steals a gold plaque from her father's wall to pawn for cash ("Some People"). She and her daughters leave to begin a new show with June as an effervescent, high-kicking child dancer/singer. Rose and her girls hit the road, driving from Seattle to Los Angeles, kidnapping several boys along to way to appear in the act.

In Los Angeles, Rose has difficulty booking her children. A salesman enters while Rose is arguing with a theatre manager. The salesman, known to the manager, suggests that he book the act, revealing that he has seen it before. He turns out to be Uncle Jocko, whose real name is Herbie. He agrees to become Rose's booking agent ("Small World") and shortly after we see the first performance of "Baby June and Her News Boys," a terribly contrived act in which June appears as a Shirley Temple-like performer. They tour this act for approximately 6 years and, as Baby June gets older, the act becomes "Dainty June and Her News Boys." As teenagers, the children's performance seems awkwardly out of place.

Rose is still seeking to make it big, and on Louise's birthday, Herbie books them an audition on the Orpheum Circuit ("Mr. Goldstone"). Ecstatic, Rose dismisses Louise's birthday and they develop a new act, Dainty June and her Farm Boys. The act features June as a rising Broadway star whose only friend is a cow named Caroline (played by an unenthusiastic Louise). The audition is cut short and the theatre owner, Mr. Grantzinger, is willing to take on June as a solo act. Rose refuses and continues to book the act in smaller venues. Meanwhile, Louise and June imaging a life where their mother was more traditional ("If Momma Were Married"). Louise also begins to develop a crush on one of the boys from the act, Tulsa ("All I Need Is the Girl").

Seeing that vaudeville is quickly dying out, the boys in the act leave the show in hopes of salvaging their careers. June runs away with Tulsa to be married and it seems that Rose's dreams of a life on the road are reaching journey's end. Herbie and Louise are the only two left to console Rose. Both take this potential turning point as an opportunity to convince her to settle down, marry Herbie, and to start a normal family. Rose is terrified by this prospect, and instead decides that she will make Louise into the new star of the show. Herbie and Louise are both

disappointed that she will not give into their wishes of living a more traditional life. They look on in horror as Rose assures them that "Everything's Coming Up Roses."

The new act, "Mme. Rose and her Toreadorables" stars Louise as "Señorita Louise" adorned in a blond wig. Louise is clearly uncomfortable performing this act and hates that she is made to appropriate June's appearance and performance. Rose reassures her that they will need to stick together if they want to be successful ("Together Wherever We Go"). Herbie is soon able to book them into a theatre in Wichita, but shortly after they arrive, they find that the theatre is actually a burlesque house, and their act is supposed to "keep the cops out."[27] Rose is at first completely opposed to working in burlesque, but Louise reminds her that they need the money. Rose has no option but to accept the gig and perform their act there for two weeks.

We soon discover that one of the girls who is supposed to play scenes during the show has dropped out and the manager of the theatre is looking for a replacement. Offering ten dollars a show, Louise volunteers to fill in for the actress. Louise becomes a regular in the show and becomes friends with three strippers, Tessie Tura, Miss Mazeppa, and Elektra, who impart their burlesque wisdom to Louise ("You Gotta Get a Gimmick"). Meanwhile, Rose has made a deal with Herbie that they will become married once their contract is over. The last day of their contract arrives and Rose is getting ready to finally settle down, quit show business and marry Herbie. As they prepare for the ceremony, the manager of the theatre enters their dressing room to announce the star striptease has dropped out of the show at the last minute. Rose is terrified of marrying Herbie and, upon hearing the news from the manager, volunteers Louise to fill the starring role. Herbie, frustrated by Rose's inability to be fully committed to him, leaves her. Rose

---

[27] Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim, and Jule Styne, *Gypsy, A Musical Suggested by the Memoirs of Gypsy Rose Lee* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1959 [1989]), 73.

prepares Louise to make her debut and dresses her in a gown. Louise sees herself for the first time as a beautiful woman and gains confidence ("Let Me Entertain You").

Louise continues to strip and quickly becomes the most famous burlesque performer in the United States, known for her youth and sultry strip-teases. Rose, still at her side, believes that they will eventually return to vaudeville, but Louise is now famous, rich, and loved by everyone; vaudeville is dead in Louise's eyes. Louise becomes upset with her mother and accuses her of using her children to achieve stardom; she didn't do it for her children, Louise chides, but rather she did it for herself. Rose believes Louise is not grateful for the sacrifices she has made for her two daughters and has a mental breakdown ("Rose's Turn"). After Louise witnesses her mother's breakdown, she begins to forgive her mother for neglecting her as a child. She sees that maybe, after all, she learned her strength from Rose. The two exit the theatre with a newfound respect for each other.

Follies

Stephen Sondheim and James Goldman's *Follies* is as difficult a piece to describe today as it was for its audiences in 1971 to fully understand. Tackling issues of memory, regret, and disappointment, the two creators first conceptualized the show as a murder mystery. Taking place at a reunion of a former theatre company, our four protagonists meet for the first time in 30 years and subsequently re-open old emotional wounds and rekindle past romances. As the story was intended to go, each had a motive to kill someone, a story Sondheim describes in early drafts as a "Who-will-do-it" instead of a "whodunit."[28] But the plot was contrived, so Sondheim and Goldman brought in Hal Prince to help smooth out the narrative. Prince suggested that the show

[28] Meryle Secrest, *Stephen Sondheim: A Life* (New York: Random House, 1998), 185.

focus less on a plot, and more on the events that led these characters to their current emotional states.[29]

Running with this idea, *Follies* was restructured as a concept musical where the idea was simply a reunion. Sondheim remembers, "The notion of a reunion, where emotions and relationships buried in the past gradually resurface with the help of nostalgia and alcohol, seemed like a dramatic and, in this particular example, theatrical idea."[30] Prince aided in transforming the show from a realist drama into a surrealist one, which allowed Sondheim and Goldman to work more with the expression of sentiments rather than with the logistics of a mystery. But this approach, while coming into fashion at the time of its premiere, was still a bit too avant-garde for musical theatre audiences who grew up with the integrated book musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein. This seems to have impacted the show's reception; Sondheim believes that "*Follies* is a show that's a bit crippled by its size, ambition, and mysteriousness."[31]

The story opens on the dark, collapsing empty stage of the once grand Weismann Theatre. As the mysterious overture plays, ghostly figures of former follies girls emerge from the wings and rafters, performing short excerpts from old routines. Sally Durrant Plumber, a former Weismann girl, enters the theatre as the ghost of her 19-year-old self watches. The present-day Sally is unaware of the ghosts around her. She is the first to arrive for the reunion and she looks around with nostalgia and melancholy. Soon the other guests start entering one by one and reuniting with old friends.

---

[29] Foster Hirsch, *Harold Prince and the American Musial Theatre: Expanded Edition with an Updated Forward by Harold Prince* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 93.
[30] Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics (1954-1981) with Attendant Comments, Principles, Heresies, Grudges, Whines and Anecdotes* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 199.
[31] Ibid, 249.

Phyllis, another former Weismann girl and Sally's old roommate, comes through the doors with her husband, Ben, a lawyer and former politician. Phyllis and Ben are arguably the wealthiest people at the party, but they are also perhaps the unhappiest; they are on the verge of divorce and both are constantly chiding each other. Next enters Buddy, Sally's husband and former friend of Ben. He looks for Sally, asking if anyone has seen his wife who is "cute as hell." He is interrupted by Dmitri Weismann, who welcomes everyone to the first, and last, reunion before the theatre is demolished. He invites everyone to "stumble through a song or two and lie about ourselves a little" at which point, the former emcee, Roscoe, sings "Beautiful Girls," inviting the women to descend the theatre's staircase one last time.

The party begins and several different conversations are happening at once. No conversation lasts longer than a few lines of dialogue, but each establishes the cast of characters as they catch up and reintroduce themselves after 30 years. Phyllis spots Sally from across the party. The two, happy to see each other, exchange niceties and reminisce about their shared youth. The subject quickly turns to their husbands and how the four of them used to be good friends. Meanwhile, Buddy and Ben similarly reacquaint themselves. Throughout these two scenes, concurrent flashbacks occur, in which younger versions of the four main characters are depicted.

Sally finds Ben and becomes nervous that he won't remember her ("Don't Look at Me"). She is in love with Ben and there is a romantic history between the two of them. They joke about how much they've changed and are clearly excited to be reunited. Phyllis and Buddy join them and the four remember how they use to go out dancing together and the lengths they went to to impress their now disdainful spouses ("Waiting for the Girls Upstairs"). This reminiscence makes them a bit more bitter about their current dissatisfaction with life. This is followed by

three diegetic performances of old follies numbers from other guests at the party: “The Rain on the Roof,” “Ah, Paris!,” and “Broadway Baby.”

Ben and Sally continue to catch up. Ben tries to explain that his life is good and has been successful, although there is an air of regret in his voice (“The Road You Didn’t Take”). Meanwhile, Buddy explains to Phyllis that he did not want Sally to come to the reunion because he feared she would fall in love with Ben again. This confirms Phyllis’s 30-year long suspicion about Ben and Sally. A flashback shows a naïve and young Phyllis in love with Ben. We start to see that each of the four main characters have settled into their unhappy lives. Sally summarizes these sentiments while she unconvincingly tells Ben about how Buddy makes her feel special, even though her dreams never were realized (“In Buddy’s Eyes”).

Buddy and Sally, and Ben and Phyllis, are separated into their respective pairs and privately confront each other for the first time since they arrived. Phyllis asks Ben why he hates her so much; she admits that she did love him once, but she remembers that after their marriage, she couldn’t wait to be old “so that nothing mattered anymore.” Ben tells her bluntly that he feels the same way and that one more day with her seems intolerable. Phyllis then propositions a young waiter. Buddy also tells Sally that he has a relationship with another younger woman while he is working on the road. She treats him better than Sally does and Buddy appreciates her company. But he says that the worst part about his affair is that he still loves Sally, even though she makes him feel like a bad husband. Carlotta Campion, a follies girl turned movie actress and TV star, interrupts the concurrent scenes to sing “I’m Still Here”, commenting on the survivorship that each of the couples have achieved through their marriages.

Both looking for comfort, Sally and Ben find themselves together. Ben regrets marrying Phyllis, saying that it was the only impulsive thing he’s ever done. He wishes he were young

again, and Sally takes this to mean that he wants to leave Phyllis for her. Memories of the past begin to infiltrate the present moment and the two profess their love to each other. The problem is that it is the memory of their younger selves that they love. The present Sally and Young Sally switch places so that Ben confesses his love to the memory of Sally, and Sally, likewise, declares her care and devotion to the memory of Ben ("Too Many Mornings"). The present versions of the two kiss as Buddy walks in.

After Buddy witnesses Sally and Ben kissing, he questions all of his thoughts about Sally being the "right girl" and compares her to how he feels when he's with Margie, his lover ("The Right Girl"). He realizes that he does not love Sally and, as she walks in, he tells her that he does not want to be with her anymore. Apparently not fazed by this news, she tells him that she'll be fine because she and Ben are getting married, although this has not been confirmed by Ben. Buddy thinks that Sally must be crazy for thinking Ben would actually marry her. He leaves because he does not see the use of worrying himself about Sally any longer. Sally's confidence is shaken as she tells herself that Ben really does love her: "He held me in his arms. And the band was playing. I'm getting married and I'm going to live forever with Ben, my love!" Ben never actually proposed to her and she has jumped to conclusions. As Sally runs off in a state of delusion, we see Ben propositioning Carlotta, who kindly declines his offer.

Phyllis is found fooling around with a waiter as she questions ideas of sex and love. She leaves abruptly, apparently unable to find satisfaction in either. Another aged follies performer, Heidi Schiller, comes out to perform "One More Kiss," and she is joined by the ghost of her younger self. The two sing about how love is a fleeting emotion and how it is harder to find love

as one ages.[32] Afterwards, Phyllis pleads with Ben to try to revitalize their marriage, but he asks her for a divorce. She mocks him and what she assumes to be his rekindled love for Sally. But he tells her that he has never been in love with Sally and the reason he is upset is because he has no one in his life who he really loves. Phyllis refuses to grant him his wish and, out of contempt, stays with him ("Could I Leave You?").

At this moment the past and present become intertwined and the four main characters find themselves confronting both their former selves, and each other. This culminates in a breakdown of temporality with all eight characters yelling at each other. The stage then transforms into a lavish follies set and we are transported to Loveland, a Busby Berkeley-esque stage world with elaborate costumes and sweet song and dance. While young follies performers sing, the four older characters find themselves watching with shock as they are transported into this dream world. They soon retreat into the stage and disappear to the wings ("Loveland").

Young Phyllis and Young Ben appear and sing a diegetic follies number "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow," which depicts a youthful and optimistic outlook on love and marriage. This transforms into a scene with Young Sally and Young Buddy, who lovingly sing about their quirks that might prove annoying in "Love Will See Us Through." This transitions into Buddy's follies number "The God-Why-Don't-You-Love-Me Blues", which makes a folly out of Buddy's real life inability to commit to Margie even though she loves him, while simultaneously chasing Sally, who doesn't love him; he only seems to want what he can't have.

Immediately following, Sally sings her follies number, "Losing My Mind." This torch song allows Sally to express how she loves Ben, though she knows she can never have him. This

[32] Mark Eden Horowtiz suggests that this pastiche is reminiscent of Sigmund Romberg's "One Kiss" or "When I Grow Too Old to Dream." Mark Eden Horowitz, "Way Up There: A Close Examination of *Follies*' 'Haunting' Score" *The Sondheim Review* 18/1 (2011), 19.

results in her immobility and internal emotional struggle. Phyllis's follies number contrasts the sadness of Sally's number with an upbeat sophisticated song "The Story of Lucy and Jessie."[33] Phyllis contemplates the two sides of her personality: Lucy, who is impassioned, yet young and naïve, and Jessie, who is "cold as a slab," but with life experience. These two sides of Phyllis are constantly pulling her in different directions, and the song becomes a pop-psychoanalysis of Phyllis's personalities.

Lastly, Ben sings "Live, Laugh, Love," where he tries to project his confidence and happiness in life, but this façade quickly crumbles into a chaotic culmination of music and sound as all of the songs from the evening are heard simultaneously. Ben begins to stumble on the lyrics and as the music rages on, he cries out to Phyllis. At this moment, the Loveland set disappears and Ben is found collapsed on the stage at the Weismann Theatre. Phyllis rushes to his side and embraces him. Ben confesses his adoration of her in this tender moment of care, and they leave. Buddy, likewise, comforts an emotionally distraught Sally with the promise to work things out. As they too leave, the ghosts of their past remain in the dark theatre as the curtains fall.

Grey Gardens

Act I of the musical is set entirely as a reminiscence of Edie's engagement party.[34] The opening sequence begins with a voice over and newspaper clippings projected on the front

[33] Sondheim has drawn a connection between this song and Harburg/Porter lyrics (Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat*, 236). However, Geoffrey Block has noted the similarity this song has with Ira Gershwin and Kurt Weill's "The Story of Jenny." Geoffrey Block, *Enchanted Evening: The Broadway Musical From 'Show Boat' to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber Second Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 375-6.

[34] While it is thought that maybe Little Edie and Joseph Patrick Kennedy Jr. had a romantic relationship, the events portrayed in the first act are purely fictional. Some of the lines are quotes from the 1975 documentary.

façade of the house. The voice over introduces the two women, their current situation of squalor, and their familial relation with Jaqueline Kennedy Onassis. It ends posing a question, "how could American royalty fall so far, so fast?" inviting the audience to cast their minds back to 1973, which is where the dramatic action of the musical is played out. As an old vinyl record starts to play, Edie announces that she has found her mother's old recording of "The Girl Who Has Everything," which Edith recorded in 1941. Suddenly, the recording transforms into a live performance of the song. We find Edith in 1941 in the parlor of the house singing to Edie on the day of her engagement party.

Edith intends to perform the song for the guests at the party, but Edie, embarrassed by her mother's theatrics, covertly tries to dissuade her from singing. But Edith is too busy to listen; the house is bustling with people preparing the final touches of the party and everything is down to the wire. Edith delegates the party's "to do" list among the house staff as she awaits the arrival of her husband via train ("The Five-Fifteen"). Joseph Patrick Kennedy (Joe) comes in with Edith and he extends his thanks to Edith for hosting the party. As they are all gathered in the living room, Edie finds the program for the performance and becomes upset with her mother. She pleads with Edith to let her have her day ("Mother Darling"). They reach a reluctant compromise: Edith will shorten her program. Joe comforts Edie by telling her he's going to whisk her away from her mother. He divulges to Edie his plans to become president. Both have big dreams for their future, neither of which involve Edith ("Goin' Places").

Following Edie and Edith's confrontation, Edie's maternal grandfather, John Vernou ("Major") Bouvier II, is introduced as a doting grandfather to his three granddaughters, Edie, Jaqueline, and Lee. It becomes clear that he disapproves of Edith's bohemian lifestyle and seeks a better life for the youngest generation in his lineage. As the three granddaughters gather around

their grandfather on the back lawn, he imparts to them his wisdom and values, encouraging them to "Marry Well" in order to carry on the respectability of the Bouvier name.

After interrupting Edith's rehearsal ("Hominy Grits"), Major confronts his daughter upon learning that Edith has planned a concert. He and Edie gang up on Edith, accusing her of driving Edie's suitors away. Edith, meanwhile, suggests that her daughter's promiscuity has been Edie's downfall. This places yet another wedge between the two women. Major tells Edith that she has disappointed him and the family, telling her that she has become "the most pitiable of creatures, an actress without a stage." Edie feels badly for how quickly the argument escalated and cheers up her mother by singing a duet with her, one that Edith had taught her when she was young ("Two Peas in a Pod"). Afterwards, Edith has a change of heart. She admits that she has been "monstrously selfish" and offers to refrain from performing at the party.

As Edith begins to let go of her daughter, she starts to come to terms with the consequences of growing older. She says to Gould, her pianist, after Edie leaves to prepare for the party, "When Edie's gone, this place is going to seem *enormous*." Gould feels badly for Edith's loneliness, but nonetheless, he takes the opportunity to tell her that he will be leaving Grey Gardens as well; Gould feels that it is time he become independent ("Drift Away"). Edith pleads with him, stating that he's her Gibraltar, but Gould has made up his mind.

Alone on stage for the first time, Edith imagines a life in which she, Gould and Edie would stay together forever {Reprise: "The Five-Fifteen"). Soon after this, she receives a mysterious telegram that makes her gasp with shock. Joe enters the parlour to thank Edith again for her gracious hospitality. Looking at the telegram, she proceeds to tell Joe about Edie's rather scandalous past with men. This surprises Joe, a presidential hopeful, who wants to avoid any possible gossip at all costs. His first instinct is to break off the engagement, but when Edie finds

out what her mother has told him, she convinces Joe to talk to her father for a clearer sense of the truth ("Daddy's Girl"). We learn that Edith and her husband virtually despise each other while Edie's own relationship with her father is rocky at best. When Edith descends into the parlour, Edie confronts her, but then Edith hands her the telegram which is from her father. It informs her that he will not be present for the engagement party and that he is divorcing Edith to marry another woman ("The Telegram"). When Joe hears this, he immediately calls off the engagement just as the party guests are arriving. In the final moments of Act I Edith invites the guests in and begins entertaining with a song, "Will You?". Meanwhile, Edie packs her bags and runs away. As the song ends, the scene fades back to Edith in 1973 sitting on the porch of the rundown mansion.

Act II is set entirely in 1973 and the two women have now aged: Edie is 56 and Edith is 79 years old.[35] Their riches and status have been stripped away and they are left living in a collapsing version of their once magnificent home. Edie comes out to the front porch and addresses the audience explaining how she fights the media's perception of her and her mother's way of life by coming up with new revolutionary, *objet trouvé* costumes; she refuses to let anyone interfere with their personal matters ("The Revolutionary Costume for Today").

After being beckoned by her mother, Edie enters the house. We find Edith on the balcony waiting for Edie to bring her her lunch. As soon as Edie appears on the sun deck, she complains about how she left New York to take care of her mother and, once back, could not leave because Edith "kept right on living." Edith does not appreciate that she is blamed for Edie's life and reminds her that she had everything easy in life. The only difference between their two lives, as

[35] Edie is portrayed by the same actress who played Edith in Act II. Similarly, some of the other characters are double cast, such as Jerry, who is played by the same actor who portrayed Joe in Act I, and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, who is played by the same actor who portrayed Major in Act I.

far as Edith is concerned, is that Edie did not jump at the opportunities that came her way when she had the chance ("The Cake I Had"). Edie still believes that she would be a great actress and dancer if she could get out of Grey Gardens.

Next, Edie is found on the front porch reading her horoscope, hoping to learn more about her future husband. Jerry, a teenage boy whom Edie and Edith call "The Marble Faun," enters. Jerry helps out around the house and is friends mostly with Edith. Edie doesn't mind him but it is Edith who is most excited to hear Jerry's voice. For a moment, Edie considers if Jerry is the right man for her, but he is not the "Libra man" she is looking for.

Edie tells Jerry that she just needs to move back to New York and get back into show business. He asks if she can dance and Edie is taken aback because, as she assures him, "there isn't anything I can't do!" She goes inside to change into a costume, returning in a patriotically-coloured bathing suit. Jerry comments that she's "dressed for battle" to which Edie replies, "I only hope my costume stays up…" while she adjusts her bust. She starts a recording of a WWII home front victory march as she takes out a miniature American flag and beings to dance and sing for Jerry, who seems less than interested ("The House We Live In"). She tries to get his attention by continuing to mention her slipping costume ("Whoops! *[She glances down at her costume.]* My God, do you think it's going to stay up? *[Coyly, she adjusts her chest.]* I feel something slipping… I feel something…").

After the dance, Edith calls down again asking for Jerry. Edie lets Jerry in and they both go upstairs. Edith is in bed when they come in; she has barely any clothes on and Edie is appalled by her mother's appearance, but Edith doesn't care. She offers Jerry some corn that she's cooking on a hot plate that rests on the nightstand next to her bed ("Jerry Likes My Corn"). Jerry tells the two women that he has a washing machine that he can bring over and install for

them so that the women can keep their clothes and bedding clean. Edith thanks him and asks him to find one of her old records. Edie tries to tell her mother that she knows where it is, but Edith insists that Jerry do it. This causes Edie to become upset with Jerry because she fears that he will replace her. She accuses Jerry of stealing out of attic, but Edith will not hear the accusation. Edie retreats to a separate room where she keeps collected mementos. Edie dreams of traveling "Around The World," imagining her life beyond the walls of Grey Gardens.

Edith and Jerry are listening to her recording of "Will You?", the same song that closed Act I. She reminisces about Gould as Jerry gets up to leave. She is so caught up in her memories that she does not notice that he is leaving. Edie enters and comments that the recording is sublime. She beings to sing along, but in an obnoxious style, mocking Edith's diction. Edith glares at her disapprovingly. Edie continues singing, poking fun at her mother by dancing seductively to the song; she continues to sing even more horribly than before. Edith becomes increasingly upset. She yells at her daughter as she continues, then finally Edie purposely drags the needle across the record and scratches it. She confronts her mother, blaming her again for her reclusiveness and becoming angry about her mother's lack of appreciation for what Edie has sacrificed for her benefit. The fighting escalates as they jab at each other's failed romances. It culminates with the admission that Mr. Beale had come to think very little of his daughter. The scene becomes somber and Edith puts on the radio. She tunes into "The Positive Prayer Hour with Dr. Norman Vincent Peale." His lesson of the week is to "Choose to Be Happy."

Edie begins to pack her bags and prepares to leave Grey Gardens. She gets to the front lawn and stands on the porch, contemplating her decision to abandon her mother. She knows that she doesn't want to spend "Another Winter in a Summer Town," but Edith desperately yells out for help, struck by the fear of being alone, and Edie re-enters the house; she knows that she can't

leave her mother. Edie puts on the recording of “The Girl Who Has Everything” as she slips off her coat. The house walls close in around them as the lights fade.

CHAPTER 1: Centrality and the Aging Woman in Musical Theatre

Introduction

While it is important to address feminist issues in themselves, we should also recognize intersections of identity that inform narratives about women; gender is never experienced in a vacuum, but is rather felt and projected as a result of constituent social, cultural, political, racial, and economic factors. For example, issues of age and aging in musical theatre are not often considered integral to identity by creative teams, producers, marketing departments, reviewers, and scholars. This might be because of a tendency to perceive performance as a young person's business, with dancing and singing being central to the genre. More likely, it is because old age and aging are not considered marketable to the general public. Whatever the reason, it remains the case that discussions of aging, and especially aging women, do not figure prominently in any type of discourse, resulting in a lack of representation of these characters. However, this does not mean that images of aging women are entirely absent from musical theatre. In fact, some of the most beloved and canonic musical theatre pieces situate their narrative around the aging process either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, aging is mentioned by these shows' creators as a part of their characters' identities.[36]

In this chapter, I will reveal how *Gypsy*, *Follies*, and *Grey Gardens* centralize themes of aging. The centralization of themes and characters that are otherwise marginal or secondary, will often reveal some political power. Judith Roof asserts that,

> This apparent reversal of typical-eccentric, major-minor, normal-deviant draws attention to the righteous pomposity of convention. Fixing on material that normally

[36] Certainly, it is no surprise that *Follies* has been described by Hal Prince as having to do with him coping with his own aging. Sondheim similarly discusses how he views *Gypsy* as a coming of age in his professional career. He also discusses frankly the generational division between himself and Jule Styne's musical styles that appear in the show. See Carl Ilson, *Harold Prince: From* Pajama Game *to* Phantom of the Opera, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 177; and Sondheim, *Finishing The Hat*, 55-61.

> occupies the middle situates polymorphous pleasure as convention's antidote and appears to make multiplicity and deviance triumph over traditional narrative ends. The apparent reversal plays out as an allegorical struggle between minor and major, illuminating from the vantage point of the minor what is indeed valuable in the minor and showing the value of people and ideas that do not seem to serve a normative imperative.[37]

When these shows are viewed through a lens of age, the eccentricities of these women become validated, revealing a new kind of character that has traditionally been relegated to supporting roles.

For comparison, this chapter begins with an overview of some of the more prominent women from musical theatre's Golden Age. I will survey a few examples of where in the narrative aging women were most often found and what their function or impact was within their plots. I will then move on to discuss how each musical, *Gypsy*, *Follies*, and *Grey Gardens*, foregrounds themes of aging. Bringing awareness to these issues provides nuanced readings of these now canonical musicals and shows how aging women have gained more agency over their narratives throughout the second half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century.

Representation of Aging Women in the Golden Age Musical (1930-1966)

Before discussing the central position of the leading women in the narratives of *Gypsy*, *Follies*, and *Grey Gardens*, it is important to establish a history of this subject throughout the Broadway musical. Since *Gypsy* can be viewed as the beginning of the end of Broadway's Golden Age, I will outline what I argue to be the most pervasive representations of the aging female subject in musical theatre from approximately 1930-1966. Broadly speaking, characters of the Golden Age musical are typically one-dimensional and archetypal. The genre of musical comedy was, for all

[37] Judith Roof, *All About Themla and Eve: Sidekicks and Third Wheels* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 24.

intents and purposes, a vehicle for musical numbers and, as a result, had weak narrative structures and underdeveloped characters; plot tropes were often recycled and centred almost exclusively around heterosexual romance. Larry Stempel notes that the musical comedy at the turn of the century was more often than not a variety show, "a two-act diversion in which a fairly clear storytelling trajectory in the first act was blown off course in the second by a barrage of specialty turns that made the entertainment seem more like a revue."[38] As a result of this structure, character development was not a priority of the early musical theatre in America, emphasizing instead the stars and their particular talents. As a result, the music from these shows, as well as their stars, were considerably more memorable than the plots, as evidenced by the international fame garnered by songwriters and singers in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Cole Porter, the Gershwins, and Fred and Adele Astaire, and not by the book writers.[39] Furthermore, the musical was typically marketed to a youth-oriented vision of modernity, and focused on "people with character types who were recognizably of the day in what they said, what they did, and what they wore."[40] Consequently, shows were built around archetypal characters and focused on mismatched love; older characters were not typically present in these stories, and when they were, it was often as a comic senex character, someone who has become foolish or dimwitted in old age. The musical was a place for young chorus girls, for example, with "a sleeker ideal of feminine beauty on stage than the beefy ladies of burlesque."[41] This was not like

[38] Larry Stempel, *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theatre* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 133-4.
[39] Ethan Mordden, *Sing for Your Supper: The Broadway Musical in the 1930s*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 5-6.
[40] Ibid, 133.
[41] Ibid. Andrea Friedman comments on the low brow entertainment of burlesque in America and its transgressive acts and bodies; Andrea Friedman, "'The Habits of Sex-Crazed Perverts': Campaign Against Burlesque in Depression-Era New York City" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7/2 (1996): 203-238. There is little written about aging bodies on the burlesque stage, although Robert Allen cites a review of a Michael Leavitt production that comments on the "age" of the female minstrels, referring to the act as "old and badly played." This is even an ambiguous reference, either referring to the age of the performers themselves or the outdatedness of the act. But the

operetta, whose characters, while engaged in ignoble behaviour, were of Old World nobility and sensibilities. On the other hand, operetta's aesthetic evoked a European sophistication and nostalgia; in a sense operetta was a genre for the older audience as it looked fondly back to the past.[42] Furthermore, this was the era of the Ziegfeld Follies, known for their showgirls who exemplified beauty, glamour, grace, and poise; these traits were not often associated with the aging or aged woman.

By and large, the early 20th century American musical followed such revue-like formats. the 1930s saw some exceptions, but by no means did this signal a general trend of the period.[43] For example, *Show Boat* (1927), *Porgy and Bess* (1935) and *The Cradle Will Rock* (1938) introduced a politically and socially conscious type of musical that was also entertaining and profitable. These shows saw deeper character development, and catalysed the presence of a more diverse range of character types. While these musicals focus predominantly on young love and social issues,[44] they give space for older, secondary female characters. Parthy Ann Hawkes, the wife of Captain Andy from *Show Boat*, for example, acts as "mother" to the actors on the boat, but her overbearing and authoritarian hold on those around her casts her in the stern or "disapproving mother" category. She is given virtually no solo singing and is used mostly as an antagonist to the young lovers Magnolia and Gaylord.[45]

---

image of the old burlesque dancer has perhaps entered public consciousness, as a trio of older dancers famously appears in *Gypsy*'s "You Gotta Get a Gimmick," drawing on the trope of burlesque's second-rate entertainment and desperate and "past-their-prime" performers. See note 11 from Chapter 6 of Robert Clyde Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 311.

[42] Stempel, *Showtime*, 99-105. See also Dominic Symonds, "Orchestration and Arrangement: Creating the Broadway Sound" in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 267-8.

[43] Mordden, *Sing For Your Supper*, 1.

[44] Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 45-6.

[45] Geoffrey Block notes that just before the song "Make Believe," the scene is interrupted by what he labels "Parthy's Theme." This music is what influences Magnolia to leave, Gaylord, like she's being summoned away from him by her mother. He also notes the importance of the 1994 production which has Party sing "Why Do I Love You" to her granddaughter. This gives Parthy a softer side not seen in any other production. See Block, *Enchanted Evenings,* 29-38, 27.

Similarly, the comical and sinister Mrs. Mister in *The Cradle Will Rock* has traditionally been portrayed by middle-aged actresses.[46] Yet the relatively few shows and revues that featured middle-aged or older actresses did not focus on issues of age or aging. For example, Noel Coward's 1932 revue, *Words and Music*, starred a 46-year-old Ivy St. Helier. Her age, however, was seemingly not a factor in plots of the short sketches that comprised the show. stories of aging or older women were rarely, if at all, presented as key factors of Broadway narratives of the early Golden Age.

The 1940s saw an improvement in the dramatic integrity of the musical comedy. This is attributed to the use of stronger and more narratively sound source material for the books of shows. The best example is perhaps *Oklahoma!* (Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1943) which is an adaptation of Lynn Riggs's play *Green Grow the Lilacs*. The play deals with Native American Territory in the early 20th century and land usage arguments between farmers and cowboys. Rodgers and Hammerstein's plot addresses these issues, focused mainly on the romantic development of a young couple, the cowboy Curly and the farmer Laurey. Important to their development as a couple is Laurey's older Aunt Eller, who acts as a moral educator within their small town. Aunt Eller's actions are rooted in servitude and care for Laurey and the other young characters in the narrative. She is also seen as a respected elder in the town. This allows her to speak her mind and give honest criticism that is always rooted in care.

Aunt Eller is a significant force in *Oklahoma!*, strongly affecting the outcome of the main heterosexual romance. It is also meaningful that this older woman has a voice of influence in the musical. However, her position within the narrative as the caring mother figure is stereotypical of the image of the older woman, and her gender and age prescribe her social roles, limiting her

[46] Peggy Coudray played Mrs. Mister in the original 1938 production, and Vivian Vance would later also play this role in 1947.

agency. This is demonstrable in her limited musical significance, especially in a musical that is lauded for the integration of music, drama, and dance. While Aunt Eller may have an important dramatic role, albeit secondary, her musical voice within the show is reduced by her exclusion from the same musical world as the other younger characters.[47] This suggests that Aunt Eller's motivations and outlooks are fundamentally different from those of Laurey or Curly, who are both clearly motivated by love. Eller does not, and, I would suggest, cannot, engage in romantic desires or more complex emotional states due to her gender and age. Stacy Wolf notes that "any identity written on the body…operate[s] semiotically; actors and audiences rely on culturally and historically specific images…to interpret characters, their actions, behaviours, and desires."[48] As an older woman, she is a secondary character and does not develop beyond her maternal role as moral educator and caregiver because this is how she is coded at the outset of the musical; the ageist tendency is to believe that Aunt Eller would not have ambition or desire. As a result, she has no permission to sing an "I am/I want" song, designed to communicate desires and motivations, because we have already determined who she is and what she wants based on our understandings of her gender and age.

Aunt Eller does sing twice in the show, other than a few one-line quips in Act I ("Surrey With A Fringe On Top" and "Kansas City"). Act II begins with the didactic and highly spirited dance number, "The Farmer and the Cowman," in which the elders of the community attempt to mediate a peaceful encounter at the box social between the two rival factions in their town, the

---

[47] Scott McMillin finds use in Carolyn Abbate's term "voice of the opera," and appropriates it to "the voice of the musical." He notes that "It is not so much that the characters learn from one another's musical motifs as that they sing their way into 'the voice of the musical' – a voice that is not exactly their own but in which their voices can join." See Scott McMillin, *The Musical as Drama: A Study of the Principles and Conventions Behind Musical Shows from Kern to Sondheim*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 68.

[48] Stacy Wolf, "Gender and Sexuality" in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, eds. Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 210.

cowmen and the farmers. Aunt Eller acts as the only effective referee in this song, ending a fight and forcing an agreement between the farmers and cowmen. In the last verse she sings:

> I'd like to teach you all a little sayin',
> And learn the words by heart the way you should,
> I don't say I'm no better than anybody else,
> But I'll be damned if I ain't jist as good!

As Andrea Most notes of this moment, "Aunt Eller voices the liberal sentiments that will allow all kinds of people to be assimilated into the community."[49] This song defines her function within the musical as keeper of peace and order, and unifier of difference. Similarly, when Curly and Laurey are married, the titular song "Oklahoma!" opens with well wishes from all of the older townspeople. Here, Aunt Eller gets the last line before the song proper begins and she sings of the newlyweds (and the land they live on), "Plen'y of heart and plen'y of hope!" Her musical voice is limited to songs of communion, peace, and optimism, and is the only voice suitable to describe the idyllic home, which was vital for *Oklahoma!*'s success during its WWII run. The aging or older woman here represents stability in the otherwise unstable narrative.

Older women in the musicals of the 1950s continued to find themselves in maternal roles that were one-dimensional, portraying either the caring figure, like Aunt Eller, or the stern and crabby crone, like Parthy. The mother figure is especially present in the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein who dominated the musical theatre stage during the 1940s and 1950s. These characters include Mrs. Mullin from *Carousel* (1945; jealous of Julie), Marjorie Taylor and Grandma from *Allegro* (1947; Marjorie dies after trying to dissuade her son from marrying, and Joe's grandma dies soon after she has fulfilled her role as comforter early in Act I), and Bloody Mary from *South Pacific* (1949; comic, mocked as sexually unattractive in the song "Bloody

[49] Most, *Making* Americans, 106.

Mary").[50] Both Marjorie and Bloody Mary are given musical voices, but they are minor to say the least; Marjorie shares a duet with her husband ("A Fellow Needs a Girl") on their joint dreams for their son to marry, and Bloody Mary is featured in the ensemble number "Bali Ha'i" but is not given a singing voice in the eponymous chorus number "Bloody Mary."[51]

While Marjorie and Bloody Mary both have musical voices, albeit minor, I would argue that they are exceptions to the rule.[52] There is a tendency to revoke the musical voice of any older character in the musical. For example, in *My Fair Lady* (1956), perhaps one of the most successful and well-known musicals from this period, Henry's mother, Mrs. Higgins, is present in three scenes; in her first two scenes, she establishes her fondness for Eliza, and, in the third, she consoles and defends Eliza's choice to abandon Henry. Mrs. Higgins affects Eliza's character in reaffirming her self-confidence, but she is not given the opportunity to sing. Elizabeth Wells notes that, similarly in *West Side Story* (1957),

> All that is left [of older characters] in the final version is one offstage line, when Maria's father calls to her during the balcony scene (using a Spanish nickname). The only other adults, Doc (the candy story owner) and the police, never sing or dance, only speak, creating a greater sense of isolation for the teenagers. Much like the white characters in *Porgy and Bess*, they stand outside, almost extra-theatrically, from the teenage protagonists.[53]

While Mrs. Higgins has more presence and agency than the adult figures in *West Side Story*, her lack of musical voice does isolate her from the narrative of the lovers. Notably, the other older character in *My Fair Lady*, Eliza's father, Mr. Doolittle, has a romantic

---

[50] There are also many difficult racial issues in *South Pacific* that are considered in more depth by John Bush Jones. See Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, 149-53.
[51] The character Bloody Mary originally had a solo number, "Happy Talk," but it is often cut from modern productions because of its racist portrayal of Polynesian speech.
[52] A larger exception to this rule is the character of Anna in the *King and I*. She is often described as middle-aged, and is given a substantial role in developing a relationship with the King of Siam. But her age is often not a driving factor behind the narrative, at least not on the same level as the racial and cultural differences met by the two lovers. These differences are thought out in Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves,* 153-56.
[53] Wells, *West Side Story*, 201.

storyline where he reluctantly marries. This culminates in the 11 o'clock number "Get Me to the Church on Time." Despite his age, his gender gives him access to a romantic relationship and, thus, a musical voice.[54]

Musical voice, gender, and age are intricately interconnected. The reduced agency of aged women in the 1950s musical may be connected to the social expectation that women of a certain age would be married, and, if widowed, would continue to care for the institution of the family.[55] This is what is expected of Mrs. Higgins; to act as the mediator of Henry and Eliza's ambiguous relationship,[56] much as Aunt Eller functions as the facilitator of Curly and Laurey's relationship. Furthermore, the age division among youth and the middle-aged started to stretch during the 1950s. With youth consumerism taking hold in the late 40s, the teenager and young adult developed a distinct culture from that of their parents.

Older female characters gained a more significant stage presence throughout the 1960s. As I will explore in more depth later, Laurents, Styne, and Sondheim's *Gypsy* focuses on the subject of an aging woman perhaps for the first time in the history of American musical theatre.[57] In the following decades, several shows were released in which the principal female figure was an aging or aged woman, the two most notable being *Hello, Dolly!* (1964) and *Mame* (1966).[58]

---

[54] One could also think of Emile de Becque in *South Pacific* as another example of a male character described as older, but who has full access to a romantic plot line. He is, however, also a central character, unlike Mr. Doolittle.
[55] See Pat Chambers, *Older Widows and the Lifecourse: Multiple Narratives of Hidden Lives*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 15-17. Chambers describes that the older widow in post-war era America were certainly the subjects of change, but also sought continuity, striving to cope with loss by establishing the typical family after World War II.
[56] I say that the relationship is ambiguous because much has been written about whether or not Henry and Eliza's relationship is romantic. See McMillin, *Musical As Drama*, 47-9.
[57] Some may think of *The Merry Widow* (1905), *Call Me Madame* (1950), and *The King and I* (1951) as other examples of the aging women featured in musical theatre. However, I excluded these shows from the current project because they make no explicit reference to their ages or the fact that they are aging, other than their status as widows. This, in my opinion is not a sufficient marker of age.
[58] Other examples include, *I Do! I Do!* (1966), *Applause* (1970), *No, No Nanette* (1971) *70, Girls, 70* (1971), and *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking It On The Road* (1978).

Both Dolly and Mame are described as middle-aged widows, and both seem contented with their singular lives.[59] They have inherited money from their late husbands and they are surrounded by friends; this seems to be the perfect set-up for a progress narrative, in which the narrative follows the continuation of the woman's autonomy after this life-defining moment. These women, however, still fall into the roles of facilitators of happiness and their characters are still built up by stereotypical notions of gender and age. Dolly does this in her role as matchmaker. She facilitates Cornelius and Barnaby's relationships with Irene and Millie, going so far as to vouch for their actions in court, much like Aunt Eller does at the end of *Oklahoma!* Dolly, while given a love interest, is not necessarily primarily concerned with her own wants and desires. Stacy Wolf suggests that "Dolly and Mame do get married, but neither marriage changes the female lead, and marriage is ultimately insignificant in the musical as a whole."[60] Mame re-marries, yes, but her romantic plotline is not as significant as her relationship with her nephew, Patrick. She sings "If He Walked into My Life," questioning her relationship with Patrick, and asks

> Did he need a stronger hand?
> Did he need a lighter touch?
> Was I soft or was I tough?
> At the moment when he needed me,
> Did I ever turn away?

Before Patrick came into her life, Mame was a wild partier who lived her life to the fullest. One might argue that, by the end of the show, she feels guilty for not being the idyllic image of caretaker or motherly figure to Patrick.

Dolly and Mame both represent a transitional state for the aging woman in musical theatre. While their presence in the centre is an important move forward, risking the exposure

---

[59] Wolf argues that the 1960s saw an increase in the portrayal of "the single woman." For her discussion of *Hello, Dolly!* and *Mame*, see Stacy Wolf, *Changed For Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72-83.
[60] Ibid, 73.

and vulnerability of the aged subject, they are still bound by social expectations of age, especially in their sexual agency. Wolf notes how the two "single women"'s sexual freedom is limited by their age: "Because Mame and Dolly are middle-aged women, the musicals don't sexualize them; rather each woman's forceful personality reverses the age-old masculine-active/feminine-passive binary."[61] The aged female subject at this point has not fully developed into a multilayered and complex figure where gender and age are not inversely reciprocated. But soon, starting with Rose in *Gypsy*, aged women in the musical become aware of their bodies and sexuality in a way that is drastically different from their predecessors.

Overall, the position that aging and aged women hold in the Golden Age of musical theatre may be described as marginal, with a slow emergence over the course of several decades. Representation of that subject was limited to stereotypical, non-sexualized roles such as mother, caretaker, moral compass, and community elder, which, in turn, resulted in one-dimensional characterizations. Musically, their voices were diminished in importance while their actions still guided the youth narrative resolution often central to the show. These characters remained musically silent, for the most part. Sometimes, they were only referred to by younger characters or excluded from any onstage presence. Ultimately, older women were not given the opportunity to sing about themselves, because their characters were built on social expectations around gender and age. This one-dimensionality was useful in the more formulaic Golden Age musical because it allowed audiences to draw on age stereotypes that saw the aging woman as a steadfast symbol of constancy in the otherwise shifting lives of the young primary characters.

---

[61] Ibid. Wolf also notes Dolly's asexualized status in her eponymous song "Hello, Dolly!"; "Neither a heterosexual couple nor a community perform this rousing central song, but rather a group of men express their affectionate appreciation of a middle-aged, single, charming, sexually unavailable woman. Referencing the Ziegfeld Follies and Marilyn Monroe singing 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend," with the attending men respectfully admiring from a distance, Dolly's age excludes her as a viable sex object for them, and the men are positioned as mascots and seemingly gay." See Ibid, 75-6.

In the rest of this chapter, I will examine how *Gypsy*, *Follies*, and *Grey Gardens* all find aging women as central to their respective narratives, and how, as a result of their centrality, age and aging become central themes. I will consider the narrative structure of these musicals, looking at how their presence differs from earlier aging women in musical theatre. *Gypsy*'s and *Follies*'s classification as backstage musicals connect the theme of age with issues of visibility, invisibility and musical performance. *Grey Gardens* differs slightly due to its domestic setting and, in addition to the issues noted above, also highlights materiality and home.

Gypsy and Rose as a Leading Lady

As a leading lady, Rose is unique in the history of musical theatre. The role, created as a star turn for Ethel Merman who was fresh off a flop, was written specifically for a middle-aged woman. Merman brought a great deal of agency to the role; she herself was a powerful middle-aged woman at the time of *Gypsy*'s premiere. Consequently, the character of Rose developed into someone who is as big and brassy as Merman. To be clear, *Gypsy* is first and foremost a backstage musical; it focuses on the production of shows where Rose's daughters and other children are performers. As a result, the diegetic numbers are peripheral, or rather, secondary, to the non-diegetic numbers that are integrated with the book narrative. character development occurs by and large in non-diegetic book numbers such as "Some People" or "Little Lamb." Therefore, *Gypsy*, like the backstage musical more generally, has two separate "spaces," the public space of the musical, marked by diegetic numbers and performance aimed at a diegetic public that the characters acknowledge as being a part of their world, and the private space of the musical, which consists of the scenes, numbers, and dialogue that unfolds in private, and to which only the audience and the immediate characters in the scene have access. The private

space of the backstage musical is the more ubiquitous space of the narrative, and many of the shows in this genre focus on this element.

The backstage musical traditionally found "the 'chorus-girl-or-other-unknown-takes-over-for-the-prima-donna-and-becomes-a-star-overnight'" at the centre of its narrative, so much so that this became a trope of both stage and screen backstage musicals.[62] But Rose diverges from this conventional image and occupies the central position of the narrative as the manager figure. Typically, this character was perceived as older and relegated to the margins of the backstage musical in order to focus more on the younger talent and love interests. Furthermore, in instances where the manager figure was more involved, he was typically male.[63] To find a manager figure who was also a woman and mother at the centre of a backstage musical is an anomaly to say the least.

Rose's access to centre stage allows her to occupy a space in musical theatre that had not been inhabited by many women like her, in the process highlighting both her maternity and her desire for stardom. She is a single mother of two daughters who are quickly growing up. The typical life script of mothers often reads as one of decline where, as the child comes of age, the mother is excluded from the child's progressive life narrative. Motherhood is central to Rose's identity, but equally important are her ambitions and dreams of stardom. This is apparent in her recurring dream motif first introduced in "Some People," then heard again in "Everything's Coming Up Roses" and "Rose's Turn." Her dreams always incorporate her two children, and these two facets of her identity, star and mother, are complexly intertwined. In a sense, Rose sees her children, and therefore her maternity, as a fundamental component to her access to stardom.

---

[62] Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves*, 66.

[63] As an example, I think of Curtis Taylor Jr. from the musical *Dreamgirls* (1981) or Edmund O'Brien's character from the film *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956). These examples show as well how pervasive this male character type has been across time and genres.

As long as she is needed as a mother by her children, she has access to stardom. Rose is unique in her dreams and her usage of her daughters; she is not the benevolent mother figure previously seen on the Broadway stage, and is instead perceived as self-obsessed. The ambitious mother figure, perhaps best known as "the stage mother," has been used as a negative maternal trope whose main purpose was to act as an antagonist to the daughter.[64]

While Rose's central position to the plot is significant because she is a mother and, further, an anomalous mother by musical theatre standards, it is even more significant that an *aging* woman is placed at centre stage; until 1959, no age narratives appeared on Broadway, something that changed, I would argue, largely because *Gypsy* was created as a vehicle for the middle-aged Merman.[65] Having Rose as the central figure not only brings issues of gender and maternity to the forefront, as Stacy Wolf and Raymond Knapp have noted,[66] but it also, even if inadvertently, pulls issues of aging out of the margins and into the centre. It forces questions surrounding appropriate behaviours at certain ages and how those who are aging are typically treated in relation to those behavioural expectations. Throughout *Gypsy*, Rose subverts normative expectations of her age, as demonstrated in the song "Some People," where she refuses to settle down and establish a typical family unit bound by domesticity. Having Rose at the centre of the narrative gives the aged woman a visibility never previously seen. For example, Rose is sensitively aware of the aging process, as is demonstrated through her management of the Baby June and her Newsboys. As she sees it, the act is dependent on the exploitation of child

---

[64] Kristin Hanson, *Stage(d) Mothers: Mother-Daughter Tropes in Twentieth-Century American Drama*, (Ph.D. diss.: Louisiana State University, 2006), 1.
[65] Similarly, Gertrude Lawrence commissioned Rodgers and Hammerstein to write *The King and I* at the age of 52.
[66] See Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbour, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 108-128; and Knapp, *The American Musical and Personal Identity*, pp. 215-227.

youth. However, the children are shown as aging at the end of the "News Boys" number. A stage direction reads:

> *(the light on the performers begin to flicker faster and faster – and June and her Boys seem to dance faster and faster, they appear to be playing through space and growing. Actually, through the flickering dissolve they are replaced by another June, another Louise, and other Boys – all in the same costumes as the originals, but all older and bigger. Time has passed. The act is the same, but the cast is older).*

As the children around Rose get older, she is forced into a recognition that she too is aging along with them. But as her girls get older, Rose's identity as mother is at risk because they presumably will not need her once they have reached an age of maturity. This is dangerous for Rose because motherhood is such an integral part of her identity. The scene following the age shift mentioned above is Louise's birthday, and after one of the boys notices that Louise has been ten years old several times now, Rose quips, "STOP RIGHT THERE! As long as we have this act, nobody is over twelve and you all know it!"

But, despite her central position, Rose is still found at the margins in *Gypsy*. Part of the interest in backstage musicals lies in the genre's doubled space: the backstage, represented by non-diegetic numbers, and the stage performance, or diegetic numbers, that are part of the show within the show. Rose is central to the hidden backstage narrative that we, as audiences, have the privilege to gaze in on. Appearing in seven show numbers (of 16), Rose sings more than any other character, is given more solos (three; plus "Mr. Goldstone," which is an ensemble number dominated by Rose), and has the broadest emotional range. But importantly, these songs exist in the private space of the diegetic world; Rose, who some may say is obsessed with stardom, dominates only the backstage and private space of the diegesis, meaning that she remains unseen in the public space of the musical, the space that would ultimately gain her her desired stardom. She is absent from all diegetic numbers and appears as nothing more than a nuisance when she

does speak publicly, exposing a certain invisibility that Rose still experiences, despite her dominating presence in the private space of the musical.

The invisibility that she experiences is highlighted in the "Dainty June and her Farm Boys" audition; throughout the poorly rehearsed performance, we see Rose trying inconspicuously to pick up dropped props or fix sets. This is a moment of comedic value at the expense of her misplacement; we know that seeing Rose in the diegetic performance space is unfitting, despite the fact that as audience members, we have been seeing her perform powerfully all night. She later reflects more broadly on her exclusion from the stage in "Rose's Turn" when she sings, "Why did I do it? What did it get me? Scrapbooks full of me in the background." She knows that she has been kept away from the stage, and importantly she equates this exclusion with her age. Leading into "Rose's Turn," she states

> I thought you made a no-talent ox into a star because you like doin' things the hard way, Mama. And you have no talent. Not what I call talent, Miss Gypsy Rose Lee! I made you...I made you! And you wanna know why? You wanna know what I did it for? 'Cause I was born too soon and started too late, that's why.

Furthermore, the complex arrangement of previously heard musical numbers that makes up the bulk of "Rose's Turn" highlights her turn to finally become the centre of many of the diegetic numbers she maybe wishes she were part of. Curiously though, she never does sing any of those numbers. Perhaps she is too uncomfortable with the idea of performing younger persons' music, but she still manages to awkwardly imitate them ("Hello everybody! My name's Rose, what's yours!?"). While it is remarkable that this woman is central in *Gypsy*'s narrative, it does not reconcile the fact that, in the public space of the musical and in her psychology, she is quite decidedly still on the margins. *Gypsy* makes the point of drawing attention to the aging

woman and illustrates the true dilemmas of aging, highlighting the almost systemic marginalization of this figure, especially in public arenas such as performance and entertainment.

Gypsy's narrative outlines a decline, or the inevitable marginalization of the aging woman. Often this is shrouded in notions of showbiz; this narrative does not simply tell the story of a woman trying to make it in show business, nor is it about stardom, as some suggest. It is about the marginalization of a woman who resists traditional life course narratives. Raymond Knapp suggests that Rose and Louise gradually switch roles throughout the show; Rose, who is at first confident and powerful, becomes withdrawn and fragile, while Louise's trajectory is the opposite, moving from shy and delicate to poised and strong.[67] But because this story is told over the course of 8-10 years,[68] age impacts both Louise's and Rose's "quests." Louise ages into her strength, whereas Rose ages into a weak figure. This is a significant move forward in the history of aged characters in central narrative roles, regardless of Rose's overall decline.[69] Because of Rose's primary position, we are given access to her dilemmas, her hardships, her fears, and her journey, which ultimately gives her experience validity and dignity, allowing musical theatre audiences to take her seriously and gain sympathy for this aging figure.

Follies and the Chorus

Rose as an aging figure paved the way for more aged subjects in musical theatre: *Hello, Dolly*, *Mame*, and *I Do! I Do!*, all premiered in the 1960s and featured aging women at center stage. But

---

[67] Knapp, *American Musical and Personal Identity*, 217-18.
[68] Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat*, 55.
[69] In Mike Hepworth's comprehensive analysis of aging in fiction, he notes the increase in stories about older women since the release of Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn* in 1977. He says, "Older characters, it is argued in literary gerontology, are being moved by their authors from a marginal position in fiction to centre stage. When 'they appear n fiction old people are now much less likely to be afforded only the passing glance or minor role that was customary in the past…' (Rooke 1992: 241)." It is significant then that *Gypsy* appears so early in the boom of art that centre on aging protagonists, making it a leader in the representation of aging characters and their stories. For more information about the types of stories told about aging peoples, see Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*, 23-24.

none focused on the subject of age quite like Laurents, Styne, and Sondheim had in *Gypsy*. It was not until 1971 that Sondheim and James Goldman's *Follies* brought the aged female subject critically into the spotlight in new and unexpected ways. As we have seen, Rose was at the centre of the narrative of *Gypsy*, but her story still unfolds behind the diegetic scenery. In *Follies*, the aged and aging women are given the chance to be truly central to all aspects of the show, both diegetically and non-diegetically. As I will outline, the women in *Follies* hold an interesting position, in that they are responsible for shaping how issues of age and aging are addressed throughout the show, with many of the women acting almost like a classical Greek chorus within *Follies*'s loose narrative.

Like *Gypsy*, *Follies* is a backstage musical. It differs significantly, however, because it was written at a time when the backstage musical was no longer in fashion. As mentioned above, the concept musical was being ushered in by a new generation of writers including Galt MacDermot, James Rado, and Gerome Ragni with *Hair* (1968) and Stephen Sondheim with *Company* (1970). As a concept musical in the guise of a backstage musical, *Follies* has been aptly described by Foster Hirsch as "[t]he ultimate backstage musical." He continues:

> *Follies* comments on the old revue style in transforming its staples, and the interaction between past and present that forms the dramatic situation also describes the show's connection to the history of musical theatre. Possibly America's first revisionist musical, the show's full impact depends on a shared awareness among creators, performers, and audience of past musical-theatre styles.[70]

Follies, as a revisionist musical, has the ability to comment on the changes in theatre that were occurring in the 1970s, but this focus on temporal distance also grants the show the ability to comment on aging more generally in theatre and performance. The show uniquely examines the roles of aging performers by giving them their own voices.

---

[70] Hirsch, *Harold Prince*, 98.

The women in *Follies* are different from Rose in that they are given the opportunity to express openly and frankly their thoughts about aging and time. Dramatically, this is made explicit several times. For example, when Phyllis confronts Ben about their failed marriage after "Who's That Woman," she says: "I spent years wanting to be old. Imagine that! I could not wait until we were old enough so that nothing mattered anymore. I still have time for something in my life. I want another chance." Musically, many of the songs these women sing – both diegetic and non-diegetic – are about the aging process. Sally's first song, "Don't Look at Me," reflects her lack of confidence in approaching Ben for the first time in 30 years. Falling back on physical age tropes such as being fat and turning grey, she worries whether or not he will recognize her. Similarly, age is an important part of how Sally justifies her less than happy marriage. In "In Buddy's Eyes," Sally justifies to Ben, her true love, that she really is happy with her husband, Buddy, although, this is a thinly veiled lie. But, in Buddy, she finds comfort in his admiration of her; she sings in the first chorus,

> But in Buddy's eyes
> I'm young, I'm beautiful.
> In Buddy's eyes
> I don't get older.

Here, Sally's perception of her age is determined through how Buddy sees her. She finds comfort in Buddy's acceptance of her, because through her own eyes, she is old and undesirable. In the second verse she sings, "I can't get older," and, in the third iteration, she sings, "I won't get older." Each time she sings the chorus, it becomes clear that Sally uses her marriage with Ben as a shield against aging. She uses Buddy in order to feel young and to show Ben that she is happy. This youth she believes she harnesses from Buddy's gaze also imparts an air of naivety to Sally's character. Stephen Banfield echoes this by suggesting that Sally's voice, especially in this song,

is unique among the other women in *Follies*; her higher register evokes naivety and youth, which is only heard when she sings about Buddy's perception of her.[71] Otherwise, the vocal range of the older women remains in their lower and middle registers. This, according to Banfield, has "associations of suffering and experience, [that] is avoided in the music for Young Sally and Young Phyllis."[72] This song is important in that it shows Sally's vulnerability as an aging woman, normalizing fears and uncertainties of aging, love, and self-esteem normally associated with getting older.

Many of the other women of *Follies* also address issues of age and aging through song, with half of the numbers sung by older women. These songs feature age-related themes and address how age affects issues of love, memory, and regret. Of the 20 songs in *Follies*,[73] 9 are sung exclusively by older women, and 7 more songs prominently feature older women alongside older men. All 13 diegetic numbers, with the exception of "Beautiful Girls," and the two male Dreamland numbers, are sung by Sally, Phyllis, and the other ex-chorines. Sally and Phyllis only sing one diegetic number each (their Loveland numbers), meaning that the majority of the diegetic numbers are sung by secondary aged women.[74] Importantly, these aged women hold a unique position in the narrative. As Steve Swayne notes, "in *Follies*, the ex-chorines sing 'their' old songs that interrupt the linear stories of the leading characters but comment on those

---

[71] Stephen Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 183. He writes of Sally's vocal registers in *Follies*: "Sally's range descends equally far [as her female counterparts], but she also has to possess a soprano register for the chorus in "In Buddy's Eyes," particularly for the long held d″ at the end, and for "Too Many Morning," which she reaches as high as a g″."

[72] Ibid, 183-4.

[73] This number changes depending on the version of the show that is being considered. In 1987, Sondheim wrote 4 new songs for *Follies* for its UK premier. Sondheim however, has taken legal action to ensure that this version of *Follies* cannot be performed in America. He has said of the experience, "although I had been happy with the show the way it was, I saw no reason not to try new things, knowing we could always revert to the original (which eventually we did)…It would be easy to say that otherwise I wasted my time writing these songs, but that wouldn't be entirely true: there is always value in trying different things." See Stephen Sondheim, *Finishing The Hat*, 243.

[74] "Beautiful Girls" still focuses on the aging female subject even if it is sung by a man.

stories."[75] The fact that these figures are older *women* is not insignificant; in effect these women act as a pseudo-Greek chorus, offering their specific understanding of the dramatic action. They provide commentary on the narrative *as* aged women. Regardless of the message, the commentaries these diegetic songs provide are filtered through the voice and perspective of the aging female subject. Furthermore, it is these women who find the moral of the story in the loose narrative surrounding the four protagonists.[76]

Significantly, the mode in which this narrative is communicated empowers by altering the object of the viewer's gaze. As one ages, the rhetoric of invisibility becomes pervasive and seemingly inescapable. Jeanette King discusses how women over 50 often use clothes, hair, and cosmetics to disguise their bodies in a way that makes them more visible.[77] But *Follies* is unique because it makes the aging woman hyper-visible, literally placing a follow spot on her through an emphasis on the diegetic performance. This is a unique quality of the backstage musical, and Sondheim, Goldman, and director Hal Prince, who came up with the idea to establish a sort of "Proustian time," use this to their advantage.[78] The diegetic performances are interesting because they have dramatically remained constant over 30 (or more) years for many of the performers at the reunion, and the only aspect that has changed in their performance is their age and the different meanings that these songs now have. As a result, *Follies* places an emphasis on age by giving the aging performer an authorial voice, even if it is for a fleeting moment in one-off diegetic performance.

---

[75] Steve Swayne, *How Sondheim Found His Sound* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 153.
[76] It might also be useful to think of *Follies* as having and ensemble cast as opposed to strict primary and secondary characters. Stacy Wolf notes that the ensemble cast was an important feminist shift in the Broadway musical during the 1970s. See Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 91-97.
[77] Jeanette King, *Discourses of Aging in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), xi.
[78] Hirsch, *Hal Prince*, 93.

The focused gaze on the aging woman also awards an interesting musical agency; they are both heard and made visible. As a result, perspectives on issues of love and relationships are filtered through their point of view, bringing attention to the connection between aging and love, desire, and happiness. In other words, the diegetic commentaries that permeate the show lend agency and voice to aging women. This, to me, gives great importance to *Follies* as a revolutionary musical. By foregrounding the female aged subject, *Follies* rejects the common life course that Jeanette King addresses, turning the viewer's gaze into something empowering for the performer. Until 1971, no other musical had allowed women to express their concerns about aging openly and frankly. Often, they were painted as vessels of wisdom or, conversely, aloof comic relief.[79] These representations are neither accurate nor empathetic. In musicals where the aging woman does have agency, such as *Hello, Dolly!* and *Mame*, she is tirelessly optimistic and, therefore, one-dimensional.

Follies can be viewed as a progressive musical because it gives significant narrative voice to aging women through important diegetic songs, such as "Broadway Baby," "Who's That Woman," "I'm Still Here," and "One More Kiss." While it is progressive to give agency to these women, what are these women saying? Looking more closely at one of these songs reveals overarching and common concerns of aging.

"I'm Still Here" introduces Carlotta, a former Follies girl and the most famous of all those who are attending the reunion. She sings to a group of men about how she has worked and remained in show business since her days at the Follies. The song is a typical list song in which Carlotta sings about the interwar years, going decade by decade and describing her experiences

[79] Wise aging women in musical theatre are abundant and can be as important to the narrative as Aunt Eller (*Oklahoma!*, 1943) or as fleeting as Mrs. Higgins (*My Fair Lady*, 1956). The comedic aging woman appears with the likes of assistant principal Blanche from *Grease* (1972).

of getting older and staying in show business. Even though it is not in a traditional 12-bar blues form, Banfield suggests that this song is nonetheless a blues because it tells us about Carlotta's struggles and survivorship, although it is perhaps more closely related to a cabaret number, given the song's wit, intimacy, and histrionics.[80] Carlotta's life is depicted as being difficult, which paints her as a struggling woman. Further, she is seen to struggle more as she approaches the present in her song, reflecting the difficulties she has in remaining relevant as she ages.

> I've gotten through "Hey, lady, aren't you whoozis?
> Wow! What a looker you were."
> Or, better yet, "Sorry, I thought you were whoozis.
> Whatever happened to her?"

This bridge demonstrates the age related decline that Carlotta has experienced in her career. The emphasis lies in the past tense of these comments that she often receives from fans. This brings to the forefront the decline that is often read into the aging appearance. Despite her demonstrable talents at her current age, Carlotta's worth is gauged by who she once was.

But significantly, the music communicates Carlotta's frustration with this ageism. In the first verse, the orchestration is light and composed largely of woodwinds (clarinet, bass clarinet, celesta, muted trumpets and trombones), while the second verse is similar with added strings. Verse three introduces a more prominent trombone figure which carries through bridge 1, but it is still relatively subdued compared to the final two verses. In the second to last verse (verse 5), drum kit is added, giving a new and marked intensity to the song while Carlotta pines over her career's decline. Accompanying this build of intensity is a rise of power from Carlotta's voice. She becomes more impassioned with each verse, creating an affective narrative arc of decline *and* resilience throughout her life. The clarinet's style also shifts from soft, clean swing to a more

[80] Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musical*, 183.

vulgar, abrasive, and aggressive ornamented jazz style, which comes when she refers to herself as "camp" ("First you're another/Sloe-eyed vamp/Then someone's mother/Then you're camp"). This orchestration continues until the key changes from E-flat major to E major at which point open trumpets and a glitzy brass accompaniment take over for the last verse.

In addressing the orchestration, Jonathan Tunick said that "*Follies* is not a recreation of, but a glorification of, every Broadway pit band that ever played…it's what you *thought* the pit band sounded like."[81] The shifting orchestration described above reflects Carlotta's internalized conflict with the present; it juxtaposes her glamorized projection with fears of irrelevancy expressed in the lyrics, suggesting that surviving into old age is not necessarily a success, but rather, something more ambivalent.[82] She appears happy to have survived in showbiz longer than many of her friends, but at what cost? Kathleen Woodward astutely notes the ambivalence of survival in aging into later life:

> Simply to survive into what was seen as advanced or extreme old age in the decade of the 1970s…was cast…as an act of heroic proportions, one demanding courage, resourcefulness, and independence as well as a passion for narration, especially storytelling, which in turn gave strength and vividness to life. […] I am suggesting that historically, now, we are in the midst of a demographic revolution in longevity when living into our eighties and nineties and more is becoming a commonplace, not the result of special skills of survivorship.[83]

---

[81] Craig Zadan, *Sondheim & Company* (Carbondale, IL: Da Capo Press, 1994), 155.

[82] D. A. Miller addresses the ambivalence of show tunes as a space for the fragile to express a false enthusiasm. "Its appointed mission – to deliver whoever sings it from disaster and dejection, from resentment, self-pity, and various other unconsoled relations to want – ought to make the show tune thoroughly at home in a society where, by means of a doctrine of "personal responsibility," authority likes to entertain the impossible dream of a population with nothing to complain about. For however manifold the misfortune, or complete the catastrophe by which I am overtaken, my stout rendition of the show tune entails my not having to suffer any of its consequences, psychic or otherwise." D. A. Miller, *Place For Us: Essay On the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 6-7.

[83] Kathleen Woodward, "Inventing Generational Models: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Literature," in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, edited by Kathleen Woodward (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 159-60.

This song comes immediately after a significant fight between Ben and Phyllis, where he tells her that one more day with her would be unbearable. Phyllis likewise wonders how she and Ben have ended up in their present state of contempt and hatred, or how their marriage could have been different. In other words, she wonders how their relationship has survived all these years. Carlotta's song comments on this scene, imbuing it with her frustrated emotions surrounding survival. Phyllis is frustrated that her marriage has lasted so long in an unhappy state, but, at the same time, perhaps doesn't know what else she would or should have done to fix it. She now looks back on her marriage with the same amount of regret and fondness as Carlotta as she looks back on her career. This also acts as a commentary on marriage and age more broadly, suggesting that as one ages, often love declines, much as Carlotta's relevancy declined as she moved through her long career. This sentiment is elaborated on in the next diegetic number, "One More Kiss," whose waltz theme and Viennese operetta-like orchestration reveal the longing that Phyllis has toward love in her aging marriage. The song, almost matter-of-factly, addresses the idea that all things, including love, fade with time, validating Phyllis's melancholic outlook.

Follies significantly applies a pessimistic lens to the aging process, highlighting sentiments of regret, loss, and frustration. Clearly, these sentiments are not universal to all people, but they approach a version of aging that other musicals are quick to eschew in favor of optimism. The diegetic performances throughout *Follies* by and large give agency to the aging woman, providing her with a platform and audience with which to bring awareness and attention to issues of aging. Sondheim's pastiches are clever in that they hold a double temporality which also highlights the ambivalence of age. The diegetic numbers are simultaneously from the past, as they exist as previously performed follies numbers, and of the present, as their performances are

given new life at the reunion by the aged performer, who in performance creates new meaning from the song. This duality becomes an important theme in *Follies*; the four principal characters are each also represented by a ghost of their younger self. Further, this theatrical technique addresses the ambivalence between continuity and discontinuity of life. The songs, while unchanged musically, change in meaning, suggesting at once the continuous nature of memory, but the discontinuous nature of selfhood in aging. The voice of the performer in *Follies*, therefore, addresses multiple perspectives and concerns about the process of aging and the pursuit of happiness, love, and meaningful connection.

Grey Gardens and Continued Complexity

As a musical, *Grey Gardens* has not yet received much scholarly attention. Other than a few references to its importance as a musical featuring women in both central roles, most of the scholarship relates to its filmic counterparts.[84] *Grey Gardens*, originally a documentary film by Albert and David Maysles, follows Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter Edie as they live out their lives together as reclusive, has-been, American socialites. Edith Beale, aunt to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, at one time hosted American royalty such as the Rockefellers and Howard Hughes at their summer estate in East Hampton named Grey Gardens. But after a divorce from her husband Phelan, and a series of health problems, Edith had no choice but to live out her life in virtual poverty. Edie returned to Grey Gardens to care for her mother and likewise lived in derelict conditions until Edith's death in 1977.

The documentary from 1975 quickly became a cult classic due to its subjects' eccentricities and quotable lines. It also served as an early example of Direct Cinema, a style of

[84] Grace Barnes, *Her Turn on Stage: the role of Women in Musical Theatre* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2015), 59.

documentary film-making in which old methods of documentary such as voice overs and morality tales were abandoned in favour of a more unfiltered and candid capturing of the subject's identity.[85] Technological advances such as lightweight cameras and recording devices allowed creators to be "flies on the wall," catching actions and statements that planned documentaries could not.[86] The Maysles' films largely focus on celebrities, but they also highlighted societal underdogs, as exemplified in *Grey Gardens*.[87] This aspect of the film garnered a lot of criticism, some calling *Grey Gardens* exploitative, by taking advantage of the fragile state of two delusional women.[88]

Where in the earlier two shows, *Gypsy* and *Follies*, aging was often subtextually present, themes of aging in *Grey Gardens* are much more explicit and pervasive. In many of Edith's Act II songs, she refers to herself explicitly as old. For example, in "Jerry Likes My Corn," she refers to both herself and Edie as "relics of the stone age" when Edie implies that Jerry wants to sleep with her. Similarly, Edie recognizes that she is now a middle-aged woman in the song "Another Winter In a Summer Town," admitting that there is an elision between her psychological state, which she feels as being youthful, and her physical state, which she describes as declining. Throughout *Grey Gardens*, age emerges as a foregrounded aspect of character psychology. Chapter 4 will cover these examples in more detail.

As in *Gypsy* and *Follies*, Edith and Edie express ambivalent feelings toward the aging process. Both are caught between wanting to fulfill their dreams of becoming famous performers

---

[85] Jonathan B. Vogels, The *Direct Cinema of David and Albert Maysles* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 1.
[86] Ibid, 1-2.
[87] Ibid, 7.
[88] Agnieszka Graff, "Bitchy, Messy, Queer, Femininity and Camp in Maysles Brothers' *Grey Gardens*, its HBO Remake, and Krzysztof Warlikowski's *Tramway*," in *Narrating American Gender and Ethnic Identities*, edited by Aleksandra M. Różalska and Grażyna Zygadło (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 16.

and the fears of being rejected. Edith uses her old recordings of her singing to reimagine a career for herself in the present. She even resolutely declares after finding an old recording of her and Gould that she needs to get her singing voice back in shape. Similarly, Edie believes that she could have a career as a dancer if she could only escape Grey Gardens. She performs the diegetic song, "The House We Live In," to an old recording of a military march. As she dances, she imagines herself on a stage, crying out, "I need an agent!" Despite their ambitions, both women remain out of the public eye, not allowing their dreams to develop into anything other than a fantasy. The fear of how their aging bodies will be accepted in an incredibly critical world (as evidenced through the news coverage of their decline) keep them tied to the private sphere of the domestic. *Grey Gardens* centralizes the conflict between issues of visibility and fear of judgment, and shows how maintaining life-long goals as one grows older becomes a struggle when the aging body is devalued.

Furthermore, aging is made a central theme in *Grey Gardens* because of its focus on the passage of time. Like *Follies*, *Grey Gardens* has a polarized temporal structure, where Act I takes place 30 years before Act II. This allows for multiple perspectives on past and present events. This is saliently demonstrated in the continuous use of the song "The Girl Who Has Everything." When first heard, the song is played through a record player and marked as an old recording by its scratchy timbre. In this iteration and context during the prologue of the show, it is a song that represents the past. Soon we come to hear this song as it was first performed live, some 30 years before the prologue, at Edie's engagement party. Here, the song is a symbol of Edie's bright future as an aristocrat. In Act I, Edie is the girl who has everything: a wealthy family, a fiancé who is a presidential hopeful, beauty, talent, and intelligence. But when this song is heard for the final time at the end of Act II just before the final curtain, the somber tone of the

final scene transforms this song's outlook from optimistic and bright to something decidedly more ambivalent, and invites a comparison between past and present. On one hand, the song in Act II's setting takes on a more tragic meaning, in which the word "has" of the title begs to be changed to "had." But, on the other hand, it could be argued that they still have "everything," their house, agency to live out their lives as they see fit, relative health given their age and circumstance, and, above all, each other's companionship.

Perhaps the most significant difference that affects the representation of aging in *Grey Gardens* is its focus on the domestic. While the women in both *Gypsy* and *Follies* attempt to fight the onset of aging by taking a dominant position in a public sphere, Edith and Edie's story revolves around the eponymous house. Like the film, the musical gives its audience entry into the very private lives of these women. This access into the home is important for understanding how themes of age are centralized in this narrative. Mike Hepworth notes the importance of place in the formation of identity as one ages: "Because places provide the material and symbolic framework for the cultivation of personal selves, they make an essential contribution to the construction of the age identity of the residents.…The identification of someone as old is shaped by the location in which they are encountered."[89]

In *Grey Gardens,* the home holds a special status as the site where both Edith (in Act I) and Edie (in Act II) play out their performance fantasies. In Act I, musical performance, more generally, is something that Edith uses to create an identity of youth; in a sense she uses performance as a way to mask her aging. The vitality and enthusiasm that she demonstrates in her love of music and performance cloaks the physical and social signs of youth. Popular music,

[89] Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*, 77. Sally Chivers has also noted the associations with nursing homes and aging, and the theme of fear that institutionalization brings to literary narratives, noting that representations of nursing homes "localizes fears of age", but also "provides the elderly the tools with which to dismantle such fears." See Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women*, 57-8.

especially, has been dominated by youth and imbued with youth cultures; many performers try to avoid or delay the onset of aging, or at least camouflage the appearance of age.[90] Edith's diegetic performances, such as "Hominy Grits," exemplify this avoidance of age in their overtly performative style, showcasing her vigor and verve. It is for this reason that when Gould decides to leave Grey Gardens, Edith's reaction is so strong. Without Gould, her mask of youth is taken away, which reveals her aging.

Furthermore, the use of recorded music within the house in Act II brings attention to how the two women identify with the aging process. As previously stated, Edith uses her recording of "The Girl Who Has Everything" as a "biographical object." These are possessions that are inherently attached to the home and are "entangled in the events of a person's life and used as a vehicle for a sense of selfhood."[91] Music is used in this way several times throughout Act II, such as in "The Girl Who Has Everything" – as discussed above – but also in "Will You?" and "The House We Live In." In both instances, Edith and Edie respectively use these songs as a way to connect with the past. As a result, this identification with the past reveals their age.

In the first example, "Will You?" the recording reminds Edith of her relationship with Gould. The song and the act of reminiscence that the recording initiates "symbolically extend[s] to include individuals who are no longer physically present, yet continue to play a significant role in supporting conceptions of the self and form a type of insulation against the 'failed intersubjectivity' of the loneliness often associated with later life."[92] Edith's use of recordings in

---

[90] See Whiteley, *Too Much Too Young*, and Jennings and Gardner, "Introduction: Women, Ageing, and Popular Music," in "*Rock On": Women, Ageing, and Popular Music*, edited by Ros Jennings and Abigail Gardner (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 1-14.
[91] Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*, 73, quoting Janet Hoskins, *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of Peoples' Lives* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2.
[92] Hepworth, *Stories of Ageing*, 72.

Act II of *Grey Gardens*, much like her musical performances in Act I, give her access to the memory of youth and happiness.

Likewise, Edie's use of recorded music appears as a significant part of how she identifies in her late middle-age. In "The House We Live In" Edie notes that this song was played at Joe's funeral as planes flew overhead. The recording, and her accompanying performance, enact both a memory of the past that blurs the line between the past and present, and establishes a mask that awkwardly fails to hide her aging, exemplified through her less than perfect dance routine. Material possessions also allow Edie to identify with youth in "Around The World." The song's emphasis on material objects that remind Edie of the past create a space that is both calming and inspiring.

Conclusion

When we consider that aging women throughout the history of musical theatre were often silenced or marginalized to secondary positions within the plot, the centrality and driving-power that Rose, the various women of *Follies*, and Edith and Edie have within their respective narratives is significant. Rose disrupts the traditional notion of the aging mother by being everything that she is not supposed to be. Despite her convictions, she is still marginalized within the "public" sphere of the narrative. *Gypsy* can be seen to reflect the historical time of the plot (1920-30s) in that Rose, as an older woman, is still denied the agency to have a public voice. Overall, the musical highlights Rose's decline into late-middle age, and perhaps invites us to question why a woman with such ambition is inevitably inhibited by her gender and age.

Follies gives a new voice to the image of the aging woman. Several women share the spotlight, and have the space to publically air their grievances about experiences of time and

aging. These women frankly and directly address issues such as love, relevancy, and happiness. As a result, *Follies* filters these issues through the lens and voice of aged and aging subjects; in 1971, these topics were still almost exclusively the stuff of youngsters.

Grey Gardens directly addresses fears of aging as its central theme. It positions Edith and Edie in a domestic, less public, setting than the women in *Gypsy* and *Follies*. Still, the home highlights issues of aging such as continuity, memory, and identification through "biographical objects." Music is used as the primary symbol object of identification and age recognition, and allows for a musicalization of this unique story of perseverance and resistance to age expectation. Now that aging has been identified as a central theme in each of these shows, the next three chapters will further break down specific musical numbers and narrative points to show that not only are these women centrally located, in their plots, but they also have complex character development and psychology *as* aging women, which brings into musical theatre a different, more nuanced character.

CHAPTER 2: "Because I was born too soon and started too late": Complexity of Aging in *Gypsy*

Introduction:

When Laurents, Styne, and Sondheim first began working on *Gypsy*, there was no question that their star, Ethel Merman, would be able to sing the role. But realizing Rose's depth of character,[93] they began to quesiotn whether or not this brassy diva, who dominated the Broadway stage of the 1930s and 1940s with vigor and energy, would be able to find her stride in the complex character. But, throughout the 1950s, Merman was determined to become a more serious actor, abandoning the one-dimensional characters that she once played. In an anecdote told by co-producer Leland Hayward, Merman's decision to turn to more complex characters was partly inspired by her age: "I told her that if she played the part she couldn't go back to other types of roles, but she laughed and asked me who was kidding whom? She knows she is no longer a romantic leading lady."[94] Merman brought a great agency to the role; her typical charm and determination flowed through Rose, and coupled with the monstrosity that Laurents wrote into the part, the role has become iconic in Broadway history for its complexity and depth. Mordden notes that *Gypsy* looks to the future of musical theatre and demands its audiences to take it seriously.[95]

---

[93] Sondheim notes, "*Gypsy* was my first chance to write lyrics for characters of considerable complexity. Arthur Laurents's people were more dimensional that nay who had ever appeared in musicals before (if you discount *Porgy and Bess* as an opera) and as he started to shape them, I suggested that, given their substance, *Gypsy* might be more satisfying as a straight play; after all, no matter how subtly written, songs can't characterize with the same depth that extended dialogue can." *Finishing the Hat*, 55.

[94] Paine Knickerbocker, "How Leland Hayward Would Save the Theatre," *San Francisco Chronicle* 6 July, 1961, 27.

[95] Ethan Mordden, *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 253.

In this chapter, I will examine the psychological complexity of Rose as a unique, aging woman. Rose's ambitions, relationships, and ambivalent behaviours will be shown to be influenced by her age. Her aging acts in counterpoint to her identity as an ambitious manager and caring mother as outlined in Chapter 1, and ultimately leads to an ambivalent ending in which Rose is uncertain about her dreams and her future. Importantly, the complexity in character will be shown to be communicated through song type and close readings of the music.

First, Rose's ambition will be explored through her "I want/I am" songs. Few, if any, aging women have been given access to the level of self expression achievable in "I want/I am" songs. These songs allow for characters to define who they are and address their desires and ambitions. Rose is seen to be motivated and driven by a fear of stasis, but this allows her to subvert both age and gender expectations. Rose's access to relationships will also be considered by examining the duets she shares in the show. These duets, especially those between Rose and Herbie, reveal how Rose handles relationships. But Rose and Louise's relationship is the dominant pairing in the show. Aging and generational conflict become a common theme with this mother-daughter duo and will be shown to be the driving force behind this relationship. Lastly, Rose's unwillingness to alter her life plans will be shown to result in her eventual downfall. In the iconic "Rose's Turn," Rose is forced to come to terms with her aging and face the ambivalences of the aging process. *Gypsy* ends by highlighting Rose's triumphs in resisting pressures to yield to gender and age norms, but that resistance also proves to be what ultimately causes her pain.

Ambition: Desire and "I am/I want" songs

The opening moments of *Gypsy* are significant for understanding Rose as a traditionally secondary character-type who has gained significant musical and narrative importance. As she

interrupts and disrupts her daughters' performance at the beginning of the show, she moves from the audience, stage left, to centre stage, taking control of the scene. This movement from the background to the foreground frames Rose's character for the rest of the show; she literally moves from the margins to the centre stage. Now that our attention has been directed to her, we can begin to identify certain aspects of her personality. In threatening Uncle Jocko and trying her best to support her daughters, she is identified as a caring mother who fights her battles by any means necessary. Her outlook can be defined as jaded, especially in her quick-to-judge attitude toward Uncle Jocko, but, ultimately, her determination to see her children succeed drives her actions. One could also quite accurately see another side of Rose's character, one where she is a monstrous mother, demonizing the people around her while pushing her children into performance in order to appease her lost opportunity as a star of the stage. *Gypsy* thus quickly becomes a familiar story about a mother living out her fantasies and missed opportunities through her children. Neither description is inaccurate, but neither tells the whole story. The ambiguity of Rose's motivation and desire is what makes her a complex characterisation of an aging mother, and Rose's music throughout the show reflects this complexity and breadth of motivations, desires, and shifting outlooks.

The first song that Rose sings, "Some People," allows Rose to define who she is and what she seeks as an object of pleasure. In traditional musical theatre convention, this moment is defined as Rose's "I want/I am" song. These types of songs are used to communicate character motivation, motivations that will move the story forward, especially when sung by a principal character. "Some People" is sung when Rose's father refuses to support her latest showbiz scheme. He pleads with Rose to stay home and settle down to provide her daughters with a normal life, meaning accepting her position as domesticated mother. But she quickly retorts,

"Anybody that stays home is dead! If I die, it won't be from sittin'! It'll be from fightin' to get up and get out!" This book line catalyzes the song that introduces Rose's motivation. These powerful statements are accompanied by two sting chords with a solo horn holding a dissonant A♮, creating an uneasy feeling. Clearly these statements of endurance are controversial as the dissonant music pierces through the scene.

The song proper begins immediately from this statement, with Rose singing at the bottom of her range.[96] But Rose's melody begins on the raised fourth scale degree in D minor (G#, or enharmonically a lowered fifth of a i° chord [D, F, G#/A ♭]). While the song begins in her lowest register, resulting in a less powerful entrance, the dissonance of her voice against the sonority is noteworthy. This idea of dissonance complements how Stacy Wolf has described this as an "I am" song: "This early song allows the character to define herself, in the typical musical theatre convention of a 'I am' song, but Rose buoys herself up by insulting others. Her song is all about what she's not."[97] In a song that defines Rose as a person, she expresses discontent with normative expectations of her motherhood, and is musically marked as Other through her unwillingness to adhere to a typical tonal and natural beginning. Her inability to follow expectations of a tonal framework corresponds to her unwillingness to comply with conventional age expectations that reinforce a domestic image of the mother.

---

[96] Sondheim writes, "In the case of 'Some People,' Rose has just finished an impassioned speech to her father (interrupted with a sting chord from the orchestra, announcing 'SONG COMING!') which ends with her shouting at the top of her lungs, at which point she then begins to sing on the lowest not in her register….I wanted to begin in the middle of her passion, going instantaneously from speaking to singing…There was no way to do this at the top of the song without a traditional verse, which Jule and I duly wrote, and which I can no longer remember or find. In it rose told Poppa to go to hell, but Ethel refused to sing it because, she claimed, her fans would never forgive her for cursing her father. And there the cue to the song sits. Rose didn't care what people thought of her; Merman did." Sondheim, *Finishing the Hat,* 60.

[97] Wolf, *Problem Like Maria*, 111.

In the book dialogue preceding the number, Rose clearly expresses her discontent with the pressures to become domesticated and a resistance to gendered expectations, but I would also argue that part of her vehemence is rooted in a fear of stasis. Poppa tells her that "God put you down right here because He meant for you to stay right here!" Rose retorts that her dreams are for her children, and that it is too late for her, to which her father replies "It ain't too late for you to get a husband to support you." These remarks are perhaps overshadowed by Rose's insistence on her dreams and her begging for 88 bucks to support her latest plans, but these not so subtle reinforcements of what Rose *ought* to be doing given her age, gender, and social status provoke her angry outburst in "Some People." This fear of stasis is extended into the lyrics of her song in which she sings that staying at home is "perfect for some people of one hundred and five," associating old age with both stasis and something she sees as her antithesis. By refusing to settle down and establish a traditional family unit, she is communicating her fears of age through a fear of stagnancy.[98] "Some People," as an "I am" song positions Rose as a fighter, as someone who will not back down from a challenge and who is determined to achieve her goals.

But identifying her goals is hard to determine, mainly because we are unsure for whom or what she is fighting. On the surface, she wants her children to have the opportunity to be famous and to travel the world. However, this song's shifting motivic elements begin to reveal for whom she is working so hard. There are three musical ideas heard in "Some People" and each expresses

[98] I am using the word stagnancy in relation to Erik Erikson's conception of late middle-age and the binaristic decision that is met at this stage in the life cycle. As Michal Mangan explains, "The characteristic opposition…is Generativity versus Stagnation: late middle age is a time when the individual's own knowledge can be passed on; but if he or she feels that they have done nothing to help the next generation, then the experience may be one of stagnation." While this does not equate to Rose's situation, there are some parallels to be drawn, especially in relation to how Rose sees it as her duty to educate her children in performance and the pleasures of stardom. Rose, in a sense is refusing a feeling of stagnation, but is more concerned with being viewed as immobile, and less so with a feeling of having done nothing to inspired the next generation. See both Charles L. Slater, "Generativity Versus Stagnation: An Elaboration of Erik Erikson's Adult Stage of Human Development," *Journal of Adult Development* 10/1 (2003): 53-65; and Mangan, *Staging Ageing*, 68.

one of Rose's desires or wants. The first musical idea (mm. 1-32) depicts Rose's frustration with people who are not driven, or, in other words, static. Her melody in this section, being rhythmically and melodically active, establishes her "get-up-and-go" attitude; a rhythmically syncopated and rising melodic line that starts in her lowest register links to her quick-wittedness and optimism about moving forward and succeeding. The musical idea ends with a climbing melodic fragment that rises two major seconds, supported by a rising bass line from F to A (mm. 26-30).[99] The rhythmically active and syncopated melody marks Rose as an active agent in the narrative, something that is new for the aging woman in the musical.

The second musical idea, introduced at m. 33, is more rhythmically stable, and this is where Rose first refers to herself and the dreams she wants. It sits high in her register, becoming rhythmically less syncopated and more stable with long held notes. The rising motif from the first section carries over as the brass outline the quickly shifting harmonic rhythm by punching out scale degrees 1 and 5 in an ascending fashion, while the strings play through ascending chromatic scales; for Rose, everything is on the up and up. But in this moment, she frames her dreams, which she says is to give her children a shot at stardom, in more personal language. Rose's dreams for her children's success is framed by her own ambition more than her children's wants, and implies perhaps that Rose is using her children as a means to her own end. She sings "When I think of all the sights that I gotta see yet/ All the places I gotta play/ All the things that I gotta be yet," suggesting that her desires are based squarely in self-fulfilment.

The third musical motive arrives at the close of the first half of the song. Without losing its driving energy and forward momentum, the tempo slightly slows; winds play a staccato and animated accompaniment under Rose's rhythmically drawn-out triplet dream motive. The details

[99] This musical idea repeats at measure 17 with new lyrics.

of her dream about June and her success on the Orpheum circuit are set as a patter with no melodic activity, making it seem as though these details are unimportant. While, in the preceding book scene, Rose says that she wants to get out of her home so that her daughters won't "sit away their lives," this song almost entirely ignores her daughters as she frames her dreams and motivation solely with reference to herself. What is important is Rose's own dream, giving her a sense of purpose beyond that of motherhood.

Both Rose's identification away from the aging figure and the personal desire in her dream motif ignite images of selfishness and aging, which is a significant departure in relation to the selfless images of the aging woman that dominated musical theatre prior to *Gypsy*. Rose's desires are often characterized as selfish by critics and scholars such as Ethan Mordden, Raymond Knapp, and Thomas Adler.[100] This characterization is not entirely wrong; one only need look to the pressure she places on her children to succeed and her unwillingness to hear Herbie and Louise's pleas for stability in the Act I finale, "Everything's Coming Up Roses" (this song, discussed later, acts almost like a second "I want/I am" song). But in a sense, such rhetoric normalizes the idea that it is bizarre, or non-normative that the aging woman has wants, aspirations and ambitions. This highlights the age discrimination present in *Gypsy*, a discrimination that, as Barbara Macdonald noted in 1985 at the National Women's Studies Association, is a feminist issue.[101] The attempted repression of ambition and desire that Rose experiences is not in character with how she views herself; her father first tries to repress her desires to be away from the home, and then Herbie and Louise, at the end of Act I similarly try to

---

[100] Morrden describes Rose as "selfish, stupid, [and] destructive," (*Coming Up Roses*, 245), while Knapp and Adler both suggest her selfishness in depictions of Rose's drive toward "self-realization" (Knapp, *American Musical and Personal Identity*, 220) and "accomplish[ment] for herself" (Thomas Adler, "The Musical Dramas of Stephen Sondheim: Some Critical Approaches," *Journal of Popular Culture* 12/3 (1978): 515).

[101] An excerpt from Macdonald's keynote at the June 1985 annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association was later published as, Barbara Macdonald, "Outside the Sisterhood: Ageism in Women's Studies," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 25/1 (1997): 47-52.

reposition Rose in the home. These two instances differ, though, in the reasons Rose "ought" to give up her life on the road. In the first instance in "Some People," the patriarchal implications of the oppression of female ambition are clear, and are rooted in now outdated views of motherhood. But in the second example, she has lost one daughter and Louise is on the verge of adulthood. Herbie and Louise's insistence on returning to the domestic is rooted more in the oppression of the aged woman and the stereotypical image of the meek "little old lady." But this is not, and will perhaps never be Rose. As stated in Chapter 1 with respect to the vocal agency these musicals give to their aging protagonists, Rose's music subverts the book narrative, initiating what Scott McMillin terms "lyric time."[102]

The shifting of musical ideas in Rose's "I want/I am" songs, especially in "Some People," hints at the complexity of her dreams and ambition; she wants success for herself perhaps to validate her life, or perhaps to attain something she feels she missed out on in her youth. But one cannot exclude the possibility that she also wants success for her daughters, perhaps to provide a life she didn't have. This situation is not a matter of "either/or," but a more nuanced approach to her motivations, one that sees both occurring simultaneously. "Some People"'s excess of musical ideas that seem to shift every few measures, as well as its depictions of determination, demonstrate that Rose is a complex person who wants several things. What those things are is difficult to define, but this is what makes Rose different from many of her Golden Age predecessors. Additionally, the presence of this song type highlights the idea that the aging subject has access to continued ambition throughout her life. Rose's subversion of the stereotypical, unmotivated aging woman that persisted through the Golden Age of musical theatre highlights the importance of aging as a feminist issue.

---

[102] Scott McMillin discusses the musical's bifurcation of characters, distinguishing between book characters and their "alter ego" song characters. See McMillin, *Musical As Drama*, 59-63.

Relationships: Desire and the Love Duet

At the end of "Some People," Rose steals and pawns her father's solid gold plaque, which is ironically a symbol of his hard work and adherence to a traditional life course. This allows Rose to produce her new act for June and Louise. She is struggling to book her act when Herbie enters the scene. Herbie, formerly known as Uncle Jocko, has quit showbiz and has become a salesman who travels to theatres, selling orders of candy. When he stands up for Rose, they exchange "a sexual look." Significantly, this sets up what is expected to be the romantic partnership that will drive the narrative, as was the case with virtually all other Golden Age musicals from the 1950s. Stacy Wolf notes,

> Heterosexuality structures and ideologically underpins the the plot of musicals of the 1950s. Two principals, one male and one female, are introduced early in the show by solos that convey through music how they are opposites who will eventually unite. Their divergent personalities, overdetermined by their differences in gender, symbolize larger cultural and social divisions – between high and low class in *My Fair Lady*, between law and freedom in *Guys and Dolls*, between discipline and impulse in *The Music Man*…which are all resolved by the end of the show.[103]

Furthermore, Scott McMillin suggests that even though most couples are incompatible from the beginning, "no matter. They are intimate with one another's tune, one another's harmony."[104] Rose and Herbie's relationship does not fit this conventional mould.

Their Act I duet, "Small World," highlights their similarities instead of their differences, while stylistically adhering to the conventional sweetness of Act I duets. This duet is characterized by soaring strings often echoing the melody in octaves, portamentos that give the impression of emotional depth, harp embellishments that decorate the texture with wistful

[103] Wolf, *Changed for Good*, 31.
[104] McMillin, *The Musical as Drama*, 60.

arpeggios, and flutes and clarinets that offer countermelodies in thirds.[105] However, while it masquerades as a love duet, "Small World" establishes the unequal relationship that Rose and Herbie will have throughout the rest of the show. Musically, Rose is the dominant force in "Small World," and sings most of the song. Furthermore, Herbie is typically played by a non-singer with a weaker voice.[106] She tells Herbie what he likes and wants instead of allowing him to express himself. It is only in the last two phrases of the song that Herbie joins Rose, succumbing to her insistence to help her act and become her lover. In the original Broadway recording, Merman sings the entirety of the song, but in other recordings and different arrangements, Herbie is featured more prominently. But Herbie usually takes the subordinate position within these musical arrangements. For example, in the 1992 recording with Bette Midler as Rose and Peter Reigert as Herbie, Herbie only joins Rose in the second B section, which is set in the dominant key, and when they move together into the final A section, Rose takes the lead once again, while Herbie responds to her prompts about their compatibility. Additionally, in this version of the song, the final cadential moment is harmonized, with Rose taking the more firmly rooted upward bass resolution by third to the tonic, while Herbie resolves downward by step to the mediant.

---

[105] The specifics of this orchestration are based on two recordings: the original Broadway cast album from 1959, and the 2008 Broadway revival. The largest difference is that in the original Broadway cast album, the into is orchestrated with two violins and the B section countermelodies are played by flutes, whereas the 2008 revival uses two clarinets in the introduction and omits the flute countermelody. Regardless, the same sweet character is equally evoked in both.

[106] Raymond Knapp notes this imbalance as important to how Herbie is understood in the narrative: ""The conventional romantic story in *Gypsy* – between Mme Rose and Herbie – is enormously overbalanced in favor of the former, against whom Herbie has no chance, even though he does, in the end, act on a strong sense of morality and personal integrity (by refusing to accede to Rose's pressuring of Louise to perform a striptease). His failure is a noble one: he is utterly sincere in a world in which only show business matters; thus, he is given relatively little to sing an was originally (and is still often) cast with an actor of little or no singing experience." See Knapp, *The American Musical and Personal Identity*, 217.

It is hard to determine whether Rose has a genuine attraction to Herbie; has she seduced him into managing her her act? Is this part of her manipulation of those around her to get what she wants? Either way, Herbie is established as a pushover, a necessity, as D. A. Miller notes, when characters like Rose take centre stage: "[They are] paired with a less brightly lit male figure, ridiculous or pathetic, of whom is it variously demonstrated that he may not take her place there."[107] This partnership is odd because they are not equals, as the music suggests, even though textually, they try to convince themselves otherwise. Regardless, Rose's potential for romance makes her increasingly complex, especially when held against older women from the Golden Age, such as Aunt Eller, who is not presented with any romantic interest.[108]

Herbie and Rose, however, are not the primary relationship in *Gypsy*. Instead, the main relationship is between Rose and her daughters, especially Louise. Importantly, *Gypsy* focuses on the role of the mother and takes her beyond the trope of compassion and care. Instead, Rose is someone with fears and dreams beyond those related to motherhood. She is not altruistic or necessarily self-sacrificing. Motherhood, for Rose, does not mean a withdrawal from public life, or a loss of self identity.

Rose and Louise's relationship is typical of many mother-daughter stories that appear in literature and film. For Louise, *Gypsy* is a coming of age story in which she discovers and becomes empowered by her femininity and her body. But for Rose, Louise's realization of self is the catalyst for her final breakdown. Through a discovery of her body and a realization of her

---

[107] Miller, *Place For Us*, 73. The full quote reads "Every female who enters the star spot is paired with a less brightly lit male figure, ridiculous or pathetic, of whom is it variously demonstrated that he can not take her place there." It is important to note that Miller is referring to the women in *Gypsy*, *Funny Girl*, and *Mame*. These women are not just any women, but they are marked by some sort of difference. Rose by her age and determination, Fanny by her humour and, as Susan Smith notes, her Jewishness, and *Mame* also by her age. These are women who typically are not given space in the musical spotlight. See also Susan Smith, *The Musical: Race Gender, and Performance* (New York: Wallflower, 2005), 55-59.

[108] Here, I have omitted older characters who are married, such as Queenie from *Show Boat*. While these women do have romantic interests, they are not actively seeking to establish a romantic relationship.

beauty, Louise no longer needs her mother and becomes Rose's antithesis; by the end of *Gypsy*, Rose is broken, ignored, and virtually powerless, while Louise gains confidence and drive. This power shift is typical of generational conflicts that are often found to be central to mother-daughter narratives. While mothers hold authority over their daughters as parental figures, this authority is ephemeral and is lost when the daughter outgrows the mother, and even takes her position as a mother herself. The mother comes to fear the daughter's sexuality because in it is the power to displace her position of authority, relegating her to grandmother. As age studies scholar Sally Chivers notes, "a mother fights the possibility that her daughter could take on the role of mother, further supplanting her position within the family."[109]

In *Gypsy*, a similar conflict is played out between Rose and Louise, one where Rose actively represses Louise's expression of age. The narrative takes place over a period of ten years, meaning Louise ages from 8 to 18 years old, over the course of the show. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the development of Louise's main song, "May We Entertain You/Let Me Entertain You" throughout the show and Louise's relation to it corresponds with her coming of age and discovery of her sexuality. To expand on this analysis, the song also tracks the repression of Louise's age identification. In the first iteration, Louise properly identifies with her young age and the song reflects this; musically, the melody stays within an octave and moves by step with no leaps larger than a perfect fourth, and four-measure antecedent phrases ending on half cadences are complemented by standard four-measure consequent phrases with ii – V – I resolution (mm. 35-38). The second iteration highlights the aging of the child performers into teens, while the act remains relatively unchanged. Only in the last version is Louise's proper age realized when she notices her body for the first time. In this iteration, the cuteness of June's song

[109] Sally Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women*, 37.

is literally stripped away. This iteration finds the song slowed down and sexualized though different orchestration and bump-and-grind rhythms. The lyrics creatively serve all three situations.

Rose forces her daughters to age at a slower rate by having them continuously perform and act as younger than they are. Louise's identification with her age, or rather, her confusion about her age identity, is significant to the relationship that she has with her mother. She expresses this confusion in the song "Little Lamb," which she sings on her birthday after her party is usurped by Rose, who shifts the attention away from Louise to her meeting of Mr. Goldstone. In the song, she equates sadness with birthdays, singing, "Little Cat, Little Cat/ Ah, why do you look so blue?/ Did somebody paint you like that?/ Or is it your birthday, too?" She also shows immaturity for her age with a fondness for stuffed animals and toys to whom she confides ("Little Hen, Little Hen/ What game should we play and when?"). Rose psychologically affects Louise's sense of self by treating her like a child, which strips her of her confidence. I would argue that Rose's relationship with Louise, and especially her decision to use Louise to save her dreams of stardom are in part rooted in Rose's desire to maintain the mother-daughter power dynamic. As long as Rose can prevent Louise from aging into an adult, she can remain the mother figure and feel useful. As we will see, when Louise does grow up, Rose's fears of uselessness are realized.

Ambivalence: Desire and Endings

Rose's determination not to change her trajectory or give up on her dreams is at once a respectable feature because it demonstrates her perseverance, but also what ultimately leads to her rejection by Herbie, June, and Louise. In the final scene of Act I, Rose has been abandoned

by June and the boys from her act. She is given the opportunity to become a traditional (i.e. domesticated and sedentary) woman with Herbie and Louise. Rose refuses and instead comes up with a plan to turn Louise into a star. She sings "Everything's Coming Up Roses," in which she rejects the turning point offered to her. Instead Rose decides to keep moving forward with her dreams and ambitions; she is celebrated as a fighter in this moment. The fast moving harmonic progression signals her determination and perseverance.

Through the juxtaposition of emotions present on the stage, it becomes clear that Rose is moving forward with this plan not because it is what Louise wants, but because it is what she wants. Louise and Herbie look on in horror and they realize that she cannot be stopped even when she is urged to think about the ones who love her; Herbie had offered an alternative and Louise begged Rose to settle down and establish a normal family life. As a result, Rose's upbeat, crowd-pleasing number, which was written primarily to give Ethel Merman a star turn, is transformed into a horrifying display of neglect and selfishness. Furthermore, Rose's dream motif reappears at the beginning of this song, then is transformed into a triplet-like figuration that highlights the title of the song (mm. 24-25). Unaltered from its appearance in "Some People," the first instance of the dream motive appears as a quarter note triplet in common time during the introduction to the song proper (m. 3, for example). This is transformed into a slower triplet feel marked *Poco allargando* as the meter shifts from cut time to 3/2 for two measures. This reimagining of the dream motive can be thought of as Rose's own restructuring of her dreams to make Louise a star. While the two motives are different, they are still, essentially, the same dream, only now repackaged and reframed. This musical subtext reveals Rose's unwillingness to change. This is clear when at the beginning of Act II, we see Rose rehearsing "Madame Rose's

Toreadorables," which is a reimagining of June's act with a Latin flair and Louise in blonde wig; visually, the plan has changed, but musically, it remains the same.

In Act II, Rose hardly sings,[110] but by the time she gets to the finale "Rose's Turn," her outlook on her position in the world becomes more uncertain. "Rose's Turn" is important to understanding her complexity because it highlights her emotional range and ability to react in a moment of crisis. Most significantly, it is "the restless shifting of tempo and mood"[111] that envisions Rose as a character of depth. The song is composed as a series of references to earlier songs in the show. The first section of the song refers to Louise's "Let Me Entertain You" through its burlesque style, denoted by the brassy chorus and triplet figuration.[112] She soon begins to mock Louise's "talents" by showing that she too "has it." But the music at this moment becomes dissonant with clashing B major and C major tonalities (mm. 40-45) which highlight the perversity of Rose becoming a stripper, reinforcing the image of the grotesque aging woman who lacks sexual appeal. The clashing of sonorities here also complements Rose's unsettled emotional state. With Laurents invested in the subtext of his characters, Sondheim notes that this is where music steps in:

> Arthur, both in his own writing and in his frequent tirades on the dire state of the American theatre, emphasized to me the importance of [subtext]: what is not being said, the counterpoint underneath a scene, is what keeps the scene alive. Counterpoint, being a musical idea, is exactly what a composer can supply. This means, however, that you have to have something worth not saying.[113]

The subtext offered by the music communicates the tempestuous state of mind Rose is enduring while she attempts to perform and pass as a potential star.

---

[110] This is mostly likely due to the the fewer new songs introduced in second acts of musicals. Act II is more about the resolution of the story, and less about introducing new emotions through song.
[111] Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*, 226.
[112] Raymond Knapp notes that the triplet figuration that has been associated with Rose's dreams has been appropriated into the strippers' music and is no longer hers. Essentially, Rose has lost her dream and it has been taken by Louise who shapes it into her own vision. Ibid, 227.
[113] Sondheim, *Finishing The Hat,* 57.

On another level, Rose is also grappling with the image of her body as an aged woman. As she works through her simulated striptease, she stumbles over the lyrics "Momma's lettin' go" which is referring to "Momma's Talkin' Soft," an Act I song that was cut during tryouts. Raymond Knapp suggests this breakdown happens "in part because the musical profile already suggests breakdown: a three-beat pattern against the steady duple meter that sounds like a needle stuck in a single groove of a broken record." This stumbling also hints at her recognition of age; when Rose tries to imagine herself as Louise, i.e. younger, sexualized, and confident, she fails, perhaps because of the discord between how her body is perceived, and how she perceives her body.[114] As she performs the similar bump-and-grind burlesque showpiece in her mind, she imagines herself being sexual, saying that she's got "it." But this does not match the rejection, the feeling of uselessness that she has just experienced.[115] Suddenly it hits her; she has outgrown her usefulness, her ability to become a star, her ability to be sexual, because she is perceived by others as old. The fear of being or becoming old is, as Gullette suggests, ingrained in us from a very early age. To realize that you have become old is a moment of recognition that Woodward describes in terms of Lacan's Mirror Stage; when the old or aging woman looks at herself in the mirror, she is struck by a feeling of alienation as the sense of self does not match the image. We might see "Rose's Turn" as a type of mirror, where Rose reflects back on her life and sees where she is now in relation to where she thought she might be at this age.

After a few moments of silence, the orchestra returns, but the big brassy, suggestive orchestration is stripped down into a rather hollow melody played by clarinet, horn, bassoon, and

---

[114] The Act II song "You've Gotta Get A Gimmick" provides an interesting commentary to the aging body and sexuality. The three strippers are typically played by aging women.

[115] Angela Browne-Miller notes that activities like extended child rearing, or adult child rearing, is one way in which people fight feelings of unwantedness in middle age. See Angela Browne-Miller, *Will You Still Need Me?: Feeling Wanted, Loved, and Meaningful as We Age* (Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2010), 55.

vibraphone. The space between the the vocal interjections here is striking. Not one to be at a loss for words, this space implies that Rose is in deep thought. As she comes to terms with June, Herbie, and now Louise's rejection and abandonment, the space between statements shortens; she realizes that she is "out with the garbage" in their eyes. She returns to her dream motive in a reprise of the bridge section of "Some People" as she addresses each of the people who have left her. The orchestral melodic figure continues as an ostinato through this whole section (mm. 63-115) centered about a D major tonality. This melody sits in contrast to the A major dream motif that Rose sings, creating a D/A major bitonality. Held notes in the cellos, basses, and trombones move downward, introducing augmented fourth and minor third sonorities, underlining the more critical jabs that Rose takes at the people who have abandoned her. This is a woman clearly filled with resentment, pain and hurt.

The song culminates in a triumphant climax where Rose comes out on top. Yet we are still met with an ambivalent feeling of sadness, or pity for Rose, who is emotionally broken.[116] During the lead-in to this moment, she demands, "Well someone tell me when is it my turn?/ Don't I get a dream for myself?" She commits to taking care of herself first and dares to be a mother who has ambitions beyond those of her children. This is punctuated by orchestral shots on the downbeat of every two measures which clears the musical texture, underlining not only her voice and her agency, but also the clean slate she is with which she is vowing to start fresh. She claims that "Everything's coming up Rose!" while the brass-heavy burlesque orchestration returns, but this time less sardonic, and more celebratory. She sees a bright future for herself, but what exactly that future will hold remains unclear. In this moment, Rose, unlike the stereotypical

[116] In Raymond Knapp's analysis of this song, he notes that while Rose vows to do things for herself from now on, there still exists a tinge of depression after the song's triumphant conclusion. Knapp, *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*, 228.

mother figures of the Golden Age, is not a symbol of wisdom, and most certainly does not have all the answers. But importantly, she refuses to let her age and her children end her life story. In this way, *Gypsy* closes on an ambiguous note; she is not going to let other people's perceptions of her ability get the best of her, but how she will move forward is unclear.

Conclusion

Rose is often described as being a powerful, boisterous, and strong-headed character in musical theatre, but there is a deep complexity behind her motivations, outlooks, fears, and desires. Significantly, she is the first aging woman, in 1959, to be given a prominent voice in musical theatre; she has the agency to communicate her desires and define how she sees herself in the "I want/I am" song "Some People." Fears that surround perceptions of aging influence her wants and throw into question Rose's real purpose for pushing her children into a life on the road. Ultimately though, Rose's unwillingness to conform to expectations of motherhood and age is an empowering aspect of Rose's middle-aged ambition.

These ambitions, however, prevent her from finding romance in Herbie. While matched in age, musically they are an unequal match, and the dominant couple in *Gypsy* is Rose and her daughter Louise. The prominence of the mother-daughter relationship highlights issues of generational conflict, and we see that Rose's treatment of this relationship is in part reliant on her fears of aging. Her actions damage Louise's confidence, until she is able to reclaim her identity from her mother by realizing that she has come of age and has control over her body and sexual identity.

As a result of Louise's maturation, Rose feels unwanted by her daughter and is forced to face facts about her life, her trajectory, and where she has landed at this point at middle-life.

Through the song “Rose’s Turn” she finds herself in an ambivalent position where she believes that she has the talent to be a star, but her body betrays her confidence; she comes to realize the difference between Louise and herself and is forced to recognize her aging self. *Gypsy* represents a powerful moment in musical theatre history because Rose, as an aging woman, is at once triumphant in her refusal to adhere to a normative life course, and also forced into a state of dejection by an ageist culture. The musical importantly highlights the ambivalences that are part of the aging process.

CHAPTER 3: "Who's That Woman?": Difference, Age, and Temporal Complexity in *Follies*

Introduction

When *Follies* opened in 1971, the music of Stephen Sondheim was lauded for its wit and evocation of an era and tradition of musical theatre that had been all but forgotten.[117] James Goldman's book for *Follies*, on the other hand, was not as well received. Martin Gottfried blatantly admits the book is "weak," while Stephen Banfield notes how Goldman's organization of certain scenes results more often than not in confusion and half-developed and tangential plot fragments.[118] As a result, many of the characters in *Follies* do not develop with the same complexity as, say, Rose in *Gypsy*. Regardless, even if the characters themselves lack development, *Follies* adds layers of complexity to the image of the aging woman in musical theatre, by introducing romance, diversity of characters, and confrontations with time.[119]

This chapter will examine how *Follies* gives new complexity to the aging female subject in musical theatre. Firstly, I will consider the types of duets and relationships that are presented. The duets in this show introduce to the aging woman themes of romance and love. Unlike Rose's one-sided and secondary relationship with Herbie in *Gypsy*, Sally's desire for Ben shows how relationships can become more complex over time. The show also thematizes the naivety of youth through its comparison of duets for younger characters and duets for older characters.

---

[117] Martin Gottfried's elated review suggests that with *Follies*, "Harold Prince and Stephen Sondheim have carried the musical theatre into size, into grandeur…Sondheim's qualities as theatre composer can hardly be overstated. He is constantly extending his vision, a composer applying a trained imagination to a stage he intimately understands." Martin Gottfried, "Flipping Over Follies," *New York Times*, 25 April, 1971, section 2, pg. 1.

[118] Ibid; and Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, 194-5; 211-212. Banfield does give credit to Goldman's efforts to tighten up the narrative in the book of *Follies* for the 1987 West End premiere.

[119] This is because it is a concept musical without a clear or linear plot line. For more on this aesthetic shift, see Stempel, *Showtime*, 517-522.

Phyllis has similar desires for love, but they are expanded on primarily in book scenes. As a result, this section will focus on Sally more than Phyllis.

I will then consider how the image of the aging woman further develops complexity in *Follies* through a comparison of two different aging women. While some musicals written between *Gypsy* (1959) and *Follies* (1971), such as *Mame* (1966) and *Hello, Dolly!* (1969), prominently featured aging women, *Follies* finds two aging women at its centre. This allows for direct comparison between the experiences of two aging women, who, in their youth, held comparable social positions, but have aged differently. As a result, *Follies* highlights how the experience of aging can differ significantly among women. A closer look at Sally and Phyllis's "I want/ I am" songs reveal that the two women have different outlooks and reactions to the aging process. This is largely dependent on their differing socio-cultural milieu.

Lastly, I will briefly consider the role of pastiche and notions of ambivalence that appear in the final series of songs known as the Loveland sequence. Specifically, I will address how pastiche creates an ambivalent temporality that gives agency to both Sally and Phyllis to navigate their fears about aging. The ambivalent setting of the Loveland sequence sets the stage for other ambivalences confronted due to age, such as mobility/immobility and continuity/discontinuity. This ending validates and actually celebrates aging and its ambiguities.

New Desires: Love and the Aging Woman

Throughout *Follies*, both leading women, Sally and Phyllis, desire happy relationships with men they love. This desire is a decidedly Golden Age musical theatre pursuit; romantic plots were largely the purview of young characters, like Laurie in *Oklahoma!* or Cunegonde in *Candide*. In both cases, their narrative trajectories are centered on finding happiness through

"true love." The older women in both of these musicals, for example, serve to help guide the younger leads to their romantic ends.[120] The image of the matchmaker in musical theatre also often tends to be portrayed by aging women, like Yente in *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), and Dolly. Structurally within the narrative, older women were typically found to stand outside of romantic pairings, looking in, and providing didactic commentary.[121]

Follies is perhaps the first musical to alter this trope, portraying aging women as being motivated by romantic desires. But the show's "revisionist" qualities, marked by flashbacks and reminiscence, create a different romantic dynamic, one that highlights the different temporal complexities of romance and aging, while also commenting on the naivety of youthful love. The show ironically reflects on notions of young love and optimism through two duets, "Rain on the Roof" and "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow/Love Will See Us Through." The first of the two duets, "Rain on the Roof," is sung by the minor characters Vincent and Vanessa, who, after 30 years, are still dancing and performing as a couple. The song acts as a commentary on how love and relationships are idealized through performance and music. Its nonsense patter and superficiality underscore a degree of childishness in this portrayal of love, and stand in stark contrast to the more somber style of the non-pastiche book songs of *Follies*.

The performance of this pastiche number creates a double perspective. The first perspective comes from that of Vincent and Vanessa, who are simply reminiscing about their old song, perhaps not aware of the childishness of their performance. But the second perspective

---

[120] The Old Lady from *Candide* does have a solo song that has been staged in a way that presents her as sexual and seductive ("I Am So Easily Assimilated"). However, this is song does not illustrate the Old Lady's purpose throughout the show. Also this song is in a tango style, which only momentarily sexualizes her body in a way that is unusual given the previous grotesque description of her physical appearance.

[121] This commentary often reaffirmed and strengthened patriarchal and heteronormative notions of love. For example, the song "Thank Heaven For Little Girls," in *Gigi* (Lerner and Loewe, 1957) states, "without [little girls], what would little boys do?" In the 2015 revival of *Gigi* this song was sung by the two older women Mamita and Aunt Alicia.

comes from the audience who recognizes that clichés and naivety abound in their performance. *Follies*, through its performances of pastiche numbers, addresses the complexity of love from different perspectives based on age. This is more directly inferred in the song "Waiting for the Girls Upstairs," which precedes "Rain on the Roof." As the two principal couples reminisce about their young courtship in this song, it simultaneously forces a realization of how they were "chuckleheads" in their youth.

This sentiment is similarly conveyed in the first Loveland number, "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow/Love Will See Us Through," sung by young Sally, Phyllis, Ben, and Buddy. Placed after the introductory song of the Loveland sequence and subtitled "The Folly of Youth," the songs address the naïve optimism toward love. First, Young Phyllis and Young Ben sing "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow," an upbeat love duet with cheery wedding bells and lyrical flute doubling the vocal melody, which is supported with rich, low, and tender strings. This is the first and only time that we see Phyllis and Ben happy with each other, as they promise a perfect future together, where Phyllis can say "toodle-oo to sorrow." In the verse, as they effusively express their commitment to one another, every proclamation of love is punctuated by a response, sung on a descending semitone. The first note of this response is set over a ♭ IIM^7 chord, emphasizing beat four of the measure, which resolves back down chromatically by step to a stable IM^7 chord on beat one of the following measure.

BEN: You're gonna love tomorrow
PHYLLIS: Mm – hm
(♭ IIM^7 – IM^7)

In their youthful state, this is heard as Phyllis agreeing with Ben. But because of the retrospective lens of the audience, who is privy to how their marriages turn out, we hear Sally's chromatic agreement as sarcastic. This aligns with the now older Phyllis, who at one point in the show even

asks “would one more day with me really be inconsolable?” The “tomorrow” that Phyllis and Ben sing about is actually something they both eventually learn to dread. A mode of reminiscence again creates a double perspective on relationships where the audience notices the folly in the young couple’s optimistic outlook on love and marriage.

Sally and Buddy then sing “Love Will See Us Through,” in which they admit that, “I've some traits, I warn you,/ To which you'll have objections./ I, too, have a cornucopia of imperfection.” This suggests that, at the outset of their marriage, both Sally and Buddy knew life was not going to be perfect, but, regardless, believed that love would see them through. While the young couple similarly looks to the future with hope, this contradicts how their marriage played out over time. For example, in the song, Sally promises to bolster Buddy’s ego and to cut down their expenses, but in the first scene of the musical, Sally, who has taken a plane to come to the reunion, acts disappointed to see that Buddy followed her to New York from Phoenix. Likewise, young Buddy promises in “Love Will See Us Through” to try never to make Sally frown, but he reveals to Sally just moments before the Loveland sequence begins that he lives with another woman when he’s on the road. Their marriage has been destructive, to say the least.

The same bright music is used in both songs, which suggests that both couples look(ed) to the future with optimism. After Sally and Buddy’s song, the four melodic lines from each song mix together. It is difficult to understand what they are saying and the melodies and lyrics mix together in a cacophonous mass of voices. There is an enjoyment in hearing the interlocking of voices and masterful four-part contrapuntal writing, but their words lose meaning in the jumbled melodies, highlighting the emptiness of their promises and hopes.

The complexity of love and aging is further explored in the show’s only love duet set in the present, “Too Many Mornings,” sung by Sally and Ben as they begin to rekindle their old

flame. The song is characterized by the traditional musical qualities of standard love duets shared between young couples from musical theatre's Golden Age. But it is more nuanced because it also addresses issues of time and aging. The song's intimacy is found in its dark, rich, and sensuous vocal melody which lies in the lower half of Ben's voice and is doubled by alto flute. The simplicity of the melody allows the performer to play with the rhythm, as suggested by the *rubato* marking; Ben is able to slide freely between the melody's close intervals. As Ben sings, the music becomes more passionate as the lyrics become more intimate: the tonal area has shifted upward from B ♭ to G, and then to E as the vocal line reaches toward the top of Ben's range (mm. 34-37). He imagines Sally "standing at the door," "moving to the bed," and "resting in my arms," actions that increase in closeness as Ben moves upward through his melody. However, during this moment, Ben is singing to his memory of Sally. As he begins to sing, the ghost of young Sally slips into his arms. Unaware of the ghost that Ben is singing to, Sally stands behind her younger self, imagining that Ben is singing to her. The fact that she is standing behind her ghost heart-wrenchingly suggests that Sally is merely a shadow of the person to whom Ben is singing. As he finishes the first verse, the vocal line resolves upward by step from D# to E, but the key changes suddenly to C major from E major, which withholds the V – I resolution and substitutes a deceptive V – III cadence in the vocal line (mm. 44-45). Furthermore, the sharp downward shift simulates Ben's return to reality.

The middle-aged Sally comes back into focus at this musical moment and she becomes elated. Blissfully unaware that Ben is only in love with his memory of Sally, she accepts that she and Ben will finally get married. Sally's solo verse differs from Ben's, but is connected by a three note falling motif, itself followed by an ascending scale that Ben sings in the B section of

his verse. Sally repeats this motif but is interrupted by a different two measure fragment, sharply jumping downward a minor 7th (mm. 53-56). This highlights Sally's obsessive state as she sings:

> How I planned:
> What I'd wear tonight and
> When should I get here,
> How should I find you?

This section is contrasted by a shift to a calmer mood while Sally incredulously wonders, "Was it ever real? Did I ever love you this much?" Ben answers, "It was always real," trying to reassure Sally that they will be happy together, but Sally remains stuck in the memory of their past love.

> BEN: It was always real…
> SALLY: I should have worn green,
> BEN: And I've always loved you this much
> SALLY: I wore green the last time

This is the first time they sing together, but their melodies do not match, overlap, or complement each other. In fact, the two lines are separated by their tonal areas. While Ben sings in A ♭ major, Sally sings in the relative F minor (mm. 72-78). Each sings in their respective tonal area which suggests the distancing of their temporal realities, with Ben in the present and Sally in the past. This entire section is harmonically supported by a prolongation of the dominant E ♭ major chord, highlighting the instability of this moment and their relationship.

The uncertainty resolves when they finally sing the main theme in unison in the last verse of the song. As they sing together, time is emphasized in Sondheim's lyrics.[122] Joanne Gordon summarizes, "Even in this love song the theme of time, the interconnection yet irreconcilable separation of past, present, and future is paramount. The two lovers believe that they can escape

[122] Joanne Gordon, *Art Isn't Easy: The Theatre of Stephen Sondheim, Updated Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1992 [1990]), 101.

the plodding inevitability of time through the power of their love."[123] But the audience understands the ephemerality of Ben and Sally's bliss. Their current attraction to each other, especially Ben's attraction to Sally, is based on their memories.

Sally is often portrayed as a victim of her obsession in this duet; her escapist remembrance of Ben can be seen to "glorify the past and deprecate the present…exaggerat[ing] past enjoyments, [and] reveal[ing] a desire to return to the 'good old days.'"[124] Furthermore, Stephen Banfield's analysis of *Follies* highlights the folly in obsessing over the past.[125] While Sally's desire for Ben is not progressive in terms of autonomy for the leading woman, her obsession with Ben positions her as a more complex character when compared to the aging, romantically apathetic women from the Golden Age of musical theatre. This might make her seem more vulnerable, as demonstrated through her music in "Too Many Mornings," but Sally has the agency to seek out new romantic relationships. Furthermore, this portrayal of an aging relationship reveals the complications such as "how many mornings are there still to come?" Sally seeks to reclaim what she considers to be her lost love through her reminiscence of "the time I was happy…" As Alisa Roost points out, *Follies* strips away archetypal masks in favor of exposing private, authentic selves, a characteristic of what she terms "introspective musicals": "[t]he common trajectory of these shows is an introspective journey, focusing on a protagonist's discovering the strength to share emotional vulnerability."[126] The emotional vulnerability that Sally shows in *Follies* creates a more complex image of the aging woman in musical theatre.

---

[123] Ibid, 103.
[124] Paul Wong and Lisa Watt, "What Types of Reminiscence Are Associated with Successful Aging?" *Psychology and Aging* 6/2 (1991): 273.
[125] Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, 177-178.
[126] Alisa Roost, "'Remove Your Mask': Character Psychology in Introspective Musical Theatre – Sondheim's *Follies*, LaChiusa's *The Wild Party*, and Stew's *Passing Strange*." *Modern* Drama 7/2 (2014): 230.

This portrayal of emotional vulnerability can be viewed as liberating for Sally. Given the roles of older women in musical theatre held in the Golden Age – such as Aunt Eller, who was responsible for morally guiding the youth of her town – there is a freedom in uncertainty that Sally, as an aging woman, experiences in her pursuit of love. Some analyses of *Follies* want to suggest that the moral of Sally and Ben's relationship is to show the folly in seeking traditionally youth-oriented desires. But this stance also suggests that it is foolish to seek romance or love at middle-age. To believe that one's desire should be controlled at middle-age is to perpetuate the notion that aging is a process of decline. *Follies* both introduces a new type of relationship and romance that is impacted by aging and time, but also tells that story through a traditional love duet typical of a young couple.

Difference and Experiences of Aging

Golden Age women were often painted in broad strokes. As a result, it is easy to view this group as relatively homogenous; many, if not all women had the same care-based ambitions and outlooks. Earlier, I mentioned that representation of aging women in musical theatre prior to *Gypsy* often focused on figures who supported and worked for the development of the main, youth-oriented couple. One of the developments in age representation found in *Follies* is its focus on different depictions of aging, turning instead to the complexity of the character. Furthermore, with both Sally and Phyllis at the show's centre, direct comparisons can be made between their experiences of the aging process. In this section, I will look to "I am/I want songs"-like songs in which these women express their complex relationships with the aging process and call attention to how *Follies* works to point out differences in how this process is experienced.

It is worth noting the differences in how Sally and Phyllis define themselves because they hint at their different approaches to aging. Sally shows her insecurities from the very beginning of the musical, which she clearly expresses in "Don't Look at Me." Phyllis, on the other hand, is described as a "queenly woman, stylish and intelligent."[127] Her physical appearance and extravagant clothes are noted by Sally, who, upon seeing her for the first time at the party exclaims, "Look at you! You look just like Jackie Kennedy. I want to hug you, but I can't. You're like a queen or something." Conversely, Phyllis is more dominant, expressing strength and poise from the beginning. In "Could I Leave You?" she takes control of the situation and does not shy away from making her husband look like a fool.

First, there are two numbers in Act I in which Sally addresses her outlook on aging: "Don't Look at Me" and "In Buddy's Eyes." [128] In the first of these songs, Sally sees Ben from across the stage and she begins to worry; will Ben recognize her now that they have both aged 30 years? This worry is accompanied musically by an intricately tailored two-voice arpeggiated figure. This figure and its crafted precision reflect the calculated meeting that Sally has planned out in her head. It also expresses the agitation felt by Sally as she worries that her plan will fail. She hesitantly addresses Ben ("Hi, Ben,"), each word marked with a fermata and underscored by an ambiguous mix of A and F major tonalities. She is hit with a wave of immediate regret and begs that Ben doesn't look at her. She sings,

> No, don't look at me.
> Please, not just yet.
> Why am I here?
> This is crazy!
> No, don't look at me.

[127] James Goldman and Stephen Sondheim, *Follies* (New York: Random, 1971), 5.
[128] It should be noted that women's age subjectivity here is, in actuality, written by a creative team of mostly middle-aged, white men. Sondheim was 41, and Hal Prince was 43, and James Goldman was 44 when *Follies* premiered in 1971. These created subjectivities, therefore, are perhaps susceptible to ageist and/or feminist criticism. For Prince, *Follies* was, in part, a negotiation with his own aging. See, Hirsch, *Hal Prince*, 95.

I know that face
You're trying to place the name.

Her lyrics are self-deprecating and the accompaniment figure is highly rhythmic, creating a driving and unsettled feeling as the meter shifts between 3/4 to 2/4 with moments of syncopation in the melody (mm. 23-32). This affective state mirrors Sally's uneasiness in this situation where she boldly risks misrecognition from the man she has been obsessed with for 30 years. [129]

This is preceded by a flashback from the beginning of the song that ironically sets the context for what follows. As the accompaniment starts,[130] we see the young Sally berating the young Ben who has just called off their love affair. The young Sally yells "Ben…Ben Stone, I want a reason! Look at me, damn it! You turn around and you look at me!" The contrast of being seen and not being seen is striking; Sally was once sure that being seen by Ben would lead him back to her, but now after 30 years, she fears the sight of her aging body will prevent him from remembering who she is.

Sally's fear of aging is also a central theme of her second Act I song, "In Buddy's Eyes." In this song, Sally tries to convince Ben that she is happy in her marriage to Buddy. She tells him that Buddy makes her feel young and beautiful, despite the fact that she does not seem to love him. The same intricate arpeggiated figure from the beginning of "Don't Look at Me" is reintroduced and imbues the song with the same sense of frantic worry found in "Don't Look at Me." In the first verse of "In Buddy's Eyes," Sally confesses that her life is mundane and not as

---

[129] Sally has already once experienced this misrecognition earlier in the night. In her conversation with her former colleague, Stella Deems, Stella forgets Sally's name. Sally responds with a sarcastically whimpered, "Ta-da!" and she begins to sing the frantic introduction to "Don't Look At Me." The song is interrupted, however when Phyllis calls out Sally's name, unprovoked. Phyllis's recognition of Sally puts Sally's mind at ease and the song stops.

[130] Peter Purin terms pitch class set 5-35 as Sondheim's "nostalgia" chord (0 2 4 7 9). He identifies it at the opening chord of "Waiting For The Girls Upstairs" from *Follies* and locates it in *A Little Night Music* ("Remember") and *Pacific Overtures* ("The Adventures of Floating in the Middle of the Sea") as well. See Peter Charles Landis Purin, "'I've a Voice, I've A Voice': Determining Stephen Sondheim's Compositional Style Through a Music-Theoretic Analysis of His Theatre Works," (PhD Dis. University of Kansas, 2011), 144. Interestingly, the opening arppegiaiton of "Don't Look At Me" (0 2 4 5 7 9) is a superset of the inversion of the nostalgia chord (0 2 5 7).

extravagant as Ben's. This sets up a socio-economic division between the pair; Sally senses that her parochial life is something that Ben would not approve of. She sings,

Every morning,
Don't faint,
I tend the flowers.
Can you believe it,
Every weekend,
I paint,
For umpteen hours.
And yes, I miss a lot
Living like a shut-in
No, I haven't got
Cooks and cars, and diamonds,
Yes, my clothes are not
Paris fashion.

Despite Sally's love for Ben, she acknowledges that their lives and customs are completely different. She continues, nevertheless, to assure Ben that with Buddy's love, the simplicity of her life is worth it. In the chorus of the song, she sings, "In Buddy's Eyes,/ I'm young, I'm beautiful/ In Buddy's eyes, I don't get older." The chorus is quite separate and musically distinct from the verse. There is a certain glamour in her depictions of how Buddy transforms her life. When she sings about Buddy, it is orchestrated with full, open brass, rolling harp glissandi, and strings in octaves supporting the melodic line, all of which contrast the rather hollow woodwinds in the verse. [131]

While Sally's portrayal of her marriage is accompanied by an ornate orchestration, the music also betrays her claim to marital bliss. Two triads, F major laid over G minor in first inversion, are pitted against one another as Sally sings the text, "in Buddy's eyes." A similar dissonant sonority continues into the last phrase of the chorus, appearing this time as G major

[131] Jonathan Tunick consciously orchestrated "In Buddy's Eyes" to have woodwinds dominate the texture of the song; the dryness of the woodwind timbre conveys a sense of emptiness Sally feels toward her life. Zadan, *Sondheim & Co.*, 154.

laid over F minor in first inversion, which finally resolves to G major as the chorus comes to an end. The change in voicings provide a linearly descending bass line, from B ♭ to A ♭ to G (mm. 37-40). This descending motion parallels Sally's mental state; the bass line brings her down, back to reality at the close of the chorus. The resolution to G major has a similar settling effect. When she comes back down to earth, she realizes how unhappy she actually is and begins to cry. This triggers another flashback that interrupts the song. In this short scene, we see young Sally and young Ben. Sally is again angry with Ben for continuing on with Phyllis when it is obvious to Sally that she and Ben belong together.

The chorus is heard again after this scene, but this time Sally is much more subdued. Continuity and time are highlighted in the second chorus; Sally first sings that "in Buddy's eyes, I don't get older," but later this changes to, "I can't get older," and, "I'm *still* the princess,/ *Still* the prize" (emphasis my own). Sally stays with Buddy because he represents stability and a reality in which Sally is "young and beautiful," taking advantage of Buddy's love and loyalty while giving nothing in return. This sense of stability is signaled by the perfect 5th G-D drone during the last chorus of the song. Both "Don't Look at Me" and "In Buddy's Eyes" present Sally as insecure and self-conscious of her changing, aging body. Musically, they both demonstrate the worry, fear, and ambiguity she feels about aging.

Phyllis only sings once on her own. As a result, "Could I Leave You?" acts almost like an "I want/I am" song that reveals what Phyllis wants from Ben and her marriage and the frustration she has with Ben's unresponsive attitudes. The song is a response to Ben's plea for Phyllis to leave him. Phyllis resents Ben for how he has treated her for 30 years and will not give him the pleasure of getting out of their relationship so easily. She sings ironically about their less than perfect marriage:

Sweetheart, lover,
Could I recover,
Give up the joys I have known?
Not to fetch your pills again
Every day at five,
Not to give those dinners for ten
Elderly men
From the U.N.—
How could I survive?

As the song begins, Phyllis keeps a calm demeanour. A lilting waltz with simple string and harp accompaniment highlight the ironic sting in Phyllis's words. As the song progresses and Phyllis's contempt and anger grows deeper, the tame waltz figuration transforms into a quasi-Ravelian waltz – especially after her mention of suicide – with blaring brass and spinning chromaticism in the B section. Along with pulsing strings, Phyllis's anger increases with each measure, eventually culminating in the lines, "Honey, I'll take the grand,/ Sugar you keep the spinet/ And all of our friends and--/ Just wait a goddamn minute!" Here, the musical line has reached its melodic peak. The song is a powerful protest against how Phyllis altered the way she dressed, and worked to transform herself into the model wife of a politician.[132] It also demonstrates her strength and resilience in putting up with Ben's ego for so many years, as well as her unwillingness to quietly go away. This differs from the meekness of Sally's personality, which is represented through considerably less extravagant music. Phyllis, through the lavishness of a waltz, shows off her confidence in the face of adversity. This adversity – the deterioration of a marriage over time – is similar to Sally's deteriorating (or declining) sense of her aging body that is "fat" and "grey." But where Sally's reaction is to worry and lose confidence, Phyllis remains strong and stands up for herself.

Notably, Sally's insecurities are rooted in her appearance, singing twice about her

[132] Roost, "Remove Your Mask," 238.

physical appearance, while Phyllis does not express concern with her physical signs of aging, giving an air of confidence in herself throughout the show. I would argue that this is the result of differences in the experience of the aging process caused by socio-economic factors, which have been emphasized from the beginning of the show. Musically as well, this difference is made explicit; the waltz style in "Could I Leave You?" complements Phyllis's aristocratic lifestyle, connoting perhaps a European sensibility, as well as images of balls and formal social gatherings.[133] Sally's music is more reserved and less extravagant in style, reflecting her innocence and naivety.[134]

Ambiguity of Time: Temporality and Age in Loveland

The end of *Follies* is a dramatically distinct moment. As the four protagonists reach a climactic breaking point in their narratives/relationships, the fabric of time begins to tear. The two couples reach a highpoint of distrust and blame, shouting over one another. As the stage direction reads, "All four speak simultaneously, each of them turning on their past self with mounting rage as if they mean to do physical violence to the memories."[135] At this moment, the ghosts of their former selves, who have come in and out of the plot, finally break through the

[133] Social gerontologist Toni Calasanti point out that "posh retirement communities assume the sort of active lifestyle available to men whose race and class make them most likely to be able to *afford* it, and their spouses." This suggests that experiences of aging will differ based on access to anti-aging markers and social activities, both of which are often dependent on wealth and status. Sally and Phyllis's music throughout *Follies* highlights this difference. See Toni Calasanti, "Ageism, Gravity, and Gender: Experiences of Aging Bodies," *Generations* 3 (Fall, 2005): 11.

[134] Stephen Banfield has noted that Sally's innocence is central to her identity, linking it as essential to how we hear her music. "Sally's range descends equally far, but she also has to possess a soprano register for the chorus in 'In Buddy's Eyes,' particularly for the long held d'' at the end, and for 'Too Many Mornings,' in which she reaches as high as g''; this furthers the image of innocent sweetness and romance that she projects and protects." Banfield, *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*, 183.

[135] Sondheim and Goldman, *Follies*, 59.

past/present barrier of time, and they begin to interact and consciously communicate with their present forms.

This blurring of time has occurred only twice in the musical before this moment, in "Too Many Mornings" and "One More Kiss." But this climactic moment that pre-empts the Loveland sequence is of a different temporal order. The ghosts of their former selves had been previously housed in what might be termed a "mode of reminiscence," with these characters and their actions existing not entirely in the past, nor entirely in the present. While the past and present rub shoulders in this mode of reminiscence, they remain distinctly separated. The time barrier remains intact and the past remains something observed, but not does not interact with the present. These moments are further characterized by their ephemerality; they are finished before they have really begun, giving us only a glimpse into the past, like a snapshot of time. In the Loveland sequence, the past breaks through the temporal barrier of the mode of reminiscence and, in a sense, the past *becomes* the present.

Importantly, this entire sequence is also musically distinct and isolated. The stage physically transforms into a Busby Berkeley-esque scene, with bright and elaborate design and costumes. In a way, this transformation is the image and remembrance of the past that takes over the present. This new proscenium frames all of the following numbers as *performances* which function to skew time through a prolonged use of music. The opening lines of the first song in the Loveland sequence reveals this. The titular, prelude-esque "Loveland" number explicitly points to the temporal ambiguity of music: "Time stops, hearts are young/ Only serenades are sung." The sequence is further musically isolated by its unique pastiche settings. While pastiches have been featured throughout the show, this instance is unique in its prolonged usage of

pastiche as an aesthetic characteristic. As a postmodern technique, pastiche complicates temporality by forcing a dialectical interplay between past and present.[136]

The pastiche styles of these songs impact the ambiguous temporality of the Loveland sequence. This sequence could be seen and heard to be out of sync with the chronological time of the book narrative. A similar type of asynchronicity has been written about in relation to experiences of aging, where one's chronological age (i.e. one's empirical, numerical age determined by date of birth), or, "chronological measurement," is out of sync with aging characteristics such as cognitive and physical capability and appearance, also termed "subjective personal experience."[137] I would argue that the pastiche setting of this final sequence occurs in a syncopated order of time, different from that of the rest of the musical, one that heightens our awareness of the syncopation of these characters' subjective feelings in relations to their chronological measurement. Furthermore, the Loveland sequence, as a series of songs, also promotes the sense of timelessness or atemporality of this part of the musical. Because its main mode of storytelling is through performance and song, it fully evokes McMillin's conception of lyric time in the musical.[138]

Sally and Phyllis's Loveland numbers, "Losing My Mind" and "The Story of Lucy and Jessie" are rooted in this complex relationship between past and present. Because they are set as pastiches of older songs, the overall mood of this sequence is fixed in this timeless and

---

[136] See Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Post Modern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 197.
[137] Jan Baars, "Chronological Time and Chronological Age: Problems of Temporal Diversity" in *Age and Time: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Jan Baars and Henk Visser (Amityville, New York: Haywood Publishing Company, 2007), 3. Baars goes on to explain and define "chronological measurement" and "subjective personal experience in a separate chapter.See Jan Baars, "A Triple Temporality of Aging: Chronological Measurement, Personal Experience, and Narrative Articulation" in *Age and Time: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Jan Baars and Henk Visser (Amityville, New York: Haywood Publishing Company, 2007), 28-29. The term chronological measurement is synonymous with life-course expectation, although perhaps a bit less subjective.
[138] McMillin, *Musical as Drama*, 31-33.

ambiguous atemporal order of time. Seeing the Loveland sequence in this way allows us to tease out the complex age and time-related emotions that Sally and Phyllis confront. In "Losing My Mind," the implication of Sally's madness or mental instability is clear and has been addressed several times,[139] but this song also addresses the feeling of immobility as Sally is caught between wanting to love like she is 20 again, and the expectation that she is too old to start over.

The song is characterized by its slow-moving rhythm and tempo; whole note chords make up the texture of the A section of this song. The rhythmic progression increases to two half notes per measure in the last two bars of the A section that transitions into the B section, along with the tempo indicator "Faster" in m. 21. This section is further driven by a back-beat bass rhythm throughout. This persists until the last two measures of the B section when, in preparation for a return to A, the rhythmic progression diminishes to a dotted half note/quarter note rhythm. Notably, this rhythmic diminution occurs under lyrics that point to Sally's immobility caused by her ambiguous relationship with time. The lyrics to which I am referring appear below in bold, with the rest of the B section provided for poetic context (mm. 21-28).

> All afternoon, doing ev'ry little chore,
> The thought of you stays bright/
> **Sometimes I stand in the middle of the floor,**
> **Not going left, not going right.**

The first two lines point to her desire for her past love, and the last two lines signal her immobility due to the pressures of life course expectations.[140] Furthermore, one could argue that

---

[139] Scott McMillin has written that "Losing My Mind" shows Sally "going mad in her loneliness." (*The Musical As Drama*, 194). Likewise, the song has also been referred to as an "addiction to the ideas of love," (Robert Lawson-Peebles, "*Follies*: Musical Pastiche and Cultural Archeology," in *The Oxford Handbook to Sondheim Studies*, edited by Robert Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 398), and masochistic (Lawson-Peebles "*Follies*," 398; Stacy Wolf, "Keeping Company with Sondheim's Women," in *The Oxford Handbook to Sondheim Studies*, edited by Robert Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 370.

[140] Aleksei Grinenko also draws attention to this moment and discusses in in relation to Bernadette Peters's performance of this number in Eric Schaeffer's 2011 Broadway revival: "In 'Losing My Mind' Sally confesses to standing 'in the middle of the floor, not going left, not going right' – a behaviour indicative of severe psychic pain. The emphasis of Bernadette Peters' performance in this torch song is revelatory. Each time her Sally reaches these

the return to the tonic key at the end of the B section points to Sally's inability to break away from the normative structure of a traditional life course, one in which to leave her husband at mid-life would be uncommon and considered foolish, regardless of unhappiness.[141]

Similarly, Phyllis's follies number from the Loveland sequence also addresses the ambiguity of time. The song considers Phyllis's two subjective identities "juicy Lucy," who is understood to be the image of Phyllis in her youth, and "dressy Jessie," who is Phyllis as she is currently at mid-life. The lyrics and characters of the song clearly evoke this same ambiguous relationship between chronological measurement and subjective temporal experience. But the dance music that dominates the number adds to this division of identity that is so common to stories of aging. As the 11 o'clock number, the song showcases dance and its associated somatic meanings of sexuality. Set to a bump-and-grind accompaniment, it is "an up-tempo, highly syncopated dance number redolent of burlesque, in which the spectacularly spectacularized Phyllis gets to strut her stuff, as if Sondheim were translating the vocal pyrotechnics of the operatic mad scene into bump-and-grind pyrotechnics."[142]

---

lines, she nearly brings the song to a halt, as though she has come up against a physical wall. She stands still a moment and then begins to push her way though the lyrics angrily fighting a palpable sense of inner immobility. Although 'Losing My Mind,' as performed by Peters, retains its face vale as a song about unrequited love, it comes forth more prominently as a close examination of inner rage colliding against the paralysis of depression." See Aleksei Grinenko, "Follies Embodied: A Kleinian Perspective," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 6/3 (2012), 319.

[141] In 1969, America saw its first no-fault divorce law signed in the state of California. This allowed for divorce without proof that one of the two people in the marriage had been adulterous, abusive or had committed a felony. But divorce statistics from 1960 to the 1970s show that as married couples age, they are less likely to seek divorce. In 1970, only 13.1% of people over 40 sought divorce compared to 48.5% of people who were married between the ages of 20 and 29. It should be noted, that there was an increased growth rate of the age-specific divorce rate in both the 40-49 and 50≤ age groups in the study consulted, but this followed a general trend toward an increase across all age demographics for this time period. See Robert T. Michael, "The Rise in Divorce Rates, 1960-1974: Age-specific Components" *Demography* 15/2 (1978): 177-182.

[142] David Savran, "'I've Got That Thing:' Cole Porter, Stephen Sondheim, and the Erotics of the List Song," *Theatre Journal* 64/4 (2012): 546.

This number, like a striptease, sexualizes Phyllis's aging body in a way that is much more acceptable than Rose's failed striptease in "Rose's Turn."[143] In a sense, to see the aging body as sexual through the number's emphasis on dance is to see the body's continuous connection with the image of a sexier, youthful body; we are reminded that this is the same body that was once coded as beautiful and sexy by its youth, forcing a realization of the continuity of the body through age.[144] But Phyllis experiences a fissure between the continuity of the body and mind, where one is continuous and the other is seemingly discontinuous. Phyllis's division of her personality into Lucy and Jessie shows the experience of feeling like the younger and older self are two separate people. This is thematized throughout *Follies* by having different actors portray the younger versions of the reunion attendees; the presence of an actual, physically different body representing a past self suggests that the past and present selves are not continuous.

Both women express the feeling of being caught in time at mid-life. What I believe is important to glean from this is that the disjunction of the Loveland sequence and its separation from real time and the narrative time of the show give these women the agency to bare their emotions in an honest and truthful way. Furthermore, as diegetic performances, these emotions and fears are validated through our applause; we celebrate their fears and recognize them as legitimate and beautiful.

---

[143] Ibid. Roost also reminds us that in "Ah, But Underneath," the song written to replace "The Story of Lucy and Jessie" for the 1987 West End production, "Phyllis strips as she attempts to intrigue the audience with the fabulous personality hidden under her persona, confessing her angst in verbal pyrotechnics." See, Roost, "Remove Your Mask," 238.

[144] To be certain, the connection between the aging body and sexuality was not readily made in feminism and more widely. As Julia Twigg reminds us, "Work on the body in its early manifestation…was marked by a focus on younger sexier bodies, by concern with the transgressive themes of queer theory and with fashionable and media-focused questions of representation. Aging was not part of this." See, Julia Twigg, "The Body, Gender, and Age: Feminist Insights in Social Gerontology," *Journal of Aging Studies* 18/1 (2004): 60.

Conclusions

Follies introduced to the musical theatre a new, complex image of the aging woman. While the show has been critiqued for its under-developed characters, the two leading ladies, Sally and Phyllis, have an agency that is unrivaled by any aging character from previous musicals. Firstly, Sally is shown to be engaged in the pursuit of a romantic relationship throughout the entirety of the show, a narrative trajectory that had usually been reserved for the young woman. Sally, as an aging woman, moves past the Golden Age trope of acting as facilitator or commentator of young love. Furthermore, her duet with Ben demonstrates the complexity of romance later in life, showing that romance is much more complicated than the naïve and optimistic love songs often sung by younger couples. Sally's access to romance and desire is unique among aging characters in musical theatre, and also validates her emotional vulnerability. Like Rose, Sally has the agency to feel confused, helpless, and afraid, which liberates the aging subject from stereotypes of wisdom and omniscience.

Additionally, *Follies*'s inclusion of multiple women highlights the diversity in the experiences of age, which subverts ideas of a "correct" life course. Sally's insecurities are contrasted by Phyllis's overall confidence. This difference demonstrates how experiences of the aging process are dependent on socio-cultural factors such as class. As a result of Sally and Phyllis's differences in social status, fears of aging and bodily change are much more prominent in Sally's sense of self. By highlighting these differences throughout the show, *Follies* challenges ideas of homogeneity within aging groups.

Finally, the dominance of atemporality in the Loveland sequence implies that there is a temporal ambiguity, in which past and present collide. What this means for both Sally and Phyllis is a resulting ambiguity in what the future has in store. At the end of both of their songs,

they are left in an ambivalent state. These feelings are musically supported by their setting as pastiche numbers which helps to create a sound world that is temporally ambiguous. This also demonstrates that while there are differences among the experiences of aging, the fears surrounding the process are widespread and universal.

CHAPTER 4: "It's very difficult to keep the line between the past and the present": The Mother-Daughter Relationship over Time in *Grey Gardens*

Introduction

The Maysles Brothers' 1975 cult classic, *Grey Gardens*, documents the reclusive lives of Edith Ewing Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Edith Bouvier Beale (Edie, or "Little Edie"), during their time living in the rundown East Hampton estate for which the documentary was named. Edith and Edie are aunt and first cousin to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Lee Radziwill, and lived comfortable lives of leisure. However, following a series of health issues, and Edith's divorce from lawyer Phelan Beale, the two lost virtually all of their fortune. They dropped from the public eye in the decades that followed, and became more and more reclusive. It wasn't until the early 1970s that the pair briefly regained some level of notoriety, when the National Enquirer and the New York Magazine reported that the Suffolk County Board of Health raided their dilapidated house, citing unsanitary living conditions. Jackie and Lee took action, and restored the house to a livable state, securing Edith's and Edie's residency in the historic mansion. It was after this publicity that the Maysles filmed the documentary.

The small-budget film gained popularity because of its two eccentric protagonists and their quotable remarks. In the documentary, the women are presented as manipulative, narcissistic, and delusional. This garnered criticism, with some claiming that the film exploited two fragile, older women. However, others suggested that the film "reveals more about human relationships than almost any [other] film."[145] The musical adaptation of the Beales' story by Doug Wright, Scott Frankel, and Michael Korie portrays these women in a more endearing light.

[145] Alan Rosenthal and Ellen Hovde, "Ellen Hovde: An Interview," *Film Quarterly* 32/2 (Winter, 1978-1979): 8.

Ethan Mordden accurately states that the show "amazingly, tenderized the freak-show documentary" and its music "humanize[s] women who, in the film, seemed irritatingly dotty, especially given that they had once been notables of the leadership class."[146]

Film scholar Matthew Tinkcom notes that the documentary "takes advantage of its status *as film*, as visual and acoustic record, because their facial expressions, postures, tones of voice and gestures reveal (and conceal) as much as the explicit things they say in conversation."[147] In this chapter, I will look to the music of *Grey Gardens* (2006) as a revealing force of Wright, Frakel, and Korie's dramatization of this story, and to explore the complexities behind the aged subject as presented in more modern musical theatre. The first section of this analysis will focus on Edith, and her motivations and outlooks from Act I, where she is portrayed as a late-middle aged, aristocratic woman. I will show that Edith's manipulation of her daughter's future is ultimately catalyzed by her own fears of aging and by her own desire to control the passage of time, and I will argue that the music of Act I thematizes time as a result. This section will only briefly refer to Edie because she is young when this Act takes place. However, her outlooks will be considered as a point of contrast to those of her mother.

Turning to Act II, I will focus on these women's ambivalent relationship with time, while both women, now aged 77 and 56 respectively, deal with their age, their desires, and their outlooks, and how they have changed since the time of Act I. Their songs from Act II reflect Edie's quote: "It's very difficult to keep the line between the past and the present." I will describe how the women play with time as a way of coping with their situation. As a result, they simultaneously inhabit multiple temporalities. I will consider how music becomes a site for

---

[146] Ethan Mordden, *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 265.
[147] Matthew Tinkcom, *Grey Gardens* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 13.

temporal ambiguity and play, as the two women struggle to maintain the boundaries of reality and time.

Lastly, I will reconsider the mother-daughter relationship, first introduced in my discussion of *Gypsy*. Suzanna Walters has noted that the mother-daughter relationship has been portrayed in film, television, and literature as an ambivalent combination of love, responsibility, and blame.[148] *Grey Gardens* provides a unique musical perspective absent from *Gypsy*, namely through the inclusion of duets. These duets underline the intimate and complicated relationship not only between mother and daughter, but also between two older women, especially so in Act II. These duets will be shown to expose the complexities of this relationship, and I will briefly compare them to Stacy Wolf's categorizations of female duets in musical theatre.

Thematization of Time and Fears of Aging

From the outset of the musical, time becomes a central theme, affecting how the narrative is understood. Time is first recognized by aural cues; the prologue and voice over that sets the scene is underscored by harp, keyboard, and alto flute glissandi, supported by muted trumpet, bass clarinet, horn, and tremolo strings, all of which together evoke a sense of mystery and fantasy, establishing an ominous and timeless dreamscape. The voice over outlines Edith and Edie's fall from grace, while newspaper clippings with headlines reading "JACKIE O'S RELATIVES LIVE AS RECLUSES IN RUIN," and "JACKIE'S AUNT TOLD: CLEAN UP MANSION" are projected on the side of the dilapidated house.[149] The theme of time is made

[148] Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart: Mothers and Daughters in Popular Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 1-2.
[149] The same conflation of time that the projection of old newspaper clippings evokes is also used at the beginning of the film *Grey Gardens*, creating a conflation of time. See Albert and David Maysles, *Grey Gardens*, DVD, edited by Ellen Hovde, and Muffie Meyer (New York: Portrait Films, 1975).

clearer in the subsequent song played immediately following the prologue. An old recording of Edith singing a fictional song, "The Girl Who Has Everything," is heard playing on a record player. The scratching of the needle on a vinyl record indicates a technology that, by the 1970s, was being challenged by a cleaner recording technique. In the 21st century, when the musical was first performed, this sound is anachronistic, evoking an awareness of three temporalities, the first two being the "present" time of the musical (1973) and the past from the recording, and the third the current viewing time.

Edith, aged 77, begins singing along with the recording of "The Girl Who Has Everything," and her interaction with it creates a juxtaposition of past and present where her youthful voice enters in a relationship with her old voice, making the difference between youth and old age audible. As the recording fades and the music shifts from diegetic to non-diegetic, we move into Edith's mind, and the music shifts from being heard on the recording to being heard as part of the old woman's imagination. The recording has invoked a memory or a flashback, giving the audience access to Edith's specific version of the past. This leads to an audio dissolve that reveals a younger version of Edith singing "The Girl Who Has Everything;" it is as if the recording has come to life. This dissolve, coupled with the flashback, implies that Act I is set entirely as a memory, but more specifically, it is Edith's remembrance of Edie's engagement party at Grey Gardens. In this manner, the audience's access to the past is coloured by emotions, outlooks, and desires as remembered and (re)constructed by Edith. Therefore, the past is not necessarily factual, but a specific retelling of the past. This becomes apparent in some of the textual foreshadowing in Act I. For example, in the diegetic song "Two Peas in a Pod," Edith and Edie each promise to "give you my

independence," which foreshadows the relationship they develop over their years together. Furthermore, they devote themselves to a "cozy retreat/ which no nosy neighbors/ can see from the street," which will come to reflect their eventual living situation.

"The Girl Who Has Everything" also reveals Edith's outlook on aging. She sings

> The crowds and the clamour
> Aroused by her glamour
> Will fade like the echo of a chime.
> She's the girl who has everything…
> But time.

The lyrics are striking because of the blatant reference to notions of decline, and it becomes clear that Edith is worried about losses associated with aging. Through this song, she is also passing down a master narrative of decline to her daughter. However, the dire text is juxtaposed with the lyrical melody, with its embellished accompaniment. The music can be heard to mask the decline narrative in the text. The overall optimism and nostalgia of the musical affect hides the textual ideology of decline; it is innocuously wrapped within a Rombergian ballad, similar to "When I Grow Too Old to Dream" (written in 1934 and appearing in the MGM film musical *The Night Is Young* [1935]). Thus this song acts as a covert declaration of Edith's fears of aging. Her fears are then contrasted in a short reprise sung by the young Edie. Edie, on the cusp of leaving the constricting rule of her mother, uses the song as a vehicle to express her joyful outlook toward her future as a married woman, and living a life separate from her mother. She joyfully states, "If life were a book, then today would mark a new chapter, wouldn't it? Out of Grey Gardens and into my own life." She then takes the last verse and reprises the song in her own way,

> …A guy to adore me,
> A whole world before me.

The girl who has everything…
Is free.

This song, shared between the two women, establishes their respective outlooks towards age and aging. The music remains the same for both iterations even though their viewpoints differ substantially. The style in each iteration serves to communicate their respective outlooks; for Edith, the tender musical style conveys nostalgia or longing for a lost youth. But for Edie, this style, along with its newly composed lyrics, romanticizes the future; as Edith looks backwards, Edie is looking to the future. Both women find similarity in their awareness of time, but their respective ages give them different outlooks on life and getting older.

Edith's awareness of time is further thematized in "The Five Fifteen" and suggests that, perhaps as a reaction to her fears about aging, she desires to be in control of time. In "The Five Fifteen" it becomes clear that she is astutely conscious of time, as is reflected in the song's fast swing tempo and patter-like lyrics. Furthermore, a rhythmic disruption at the end of each verse – shifting from cut time to 3/4 for one measure then back – allows Edith to show off a youthful vitality and playfulness (mm. 10-13). This perception allows her to use her control and management of time to mask her aging. The 3/4 measure syncopates the melody, which places the last eighth-note of the 3/4 measure on the first syllable of the next line of text. This syncopation, and her ability to correct it further, reflects her control over time.

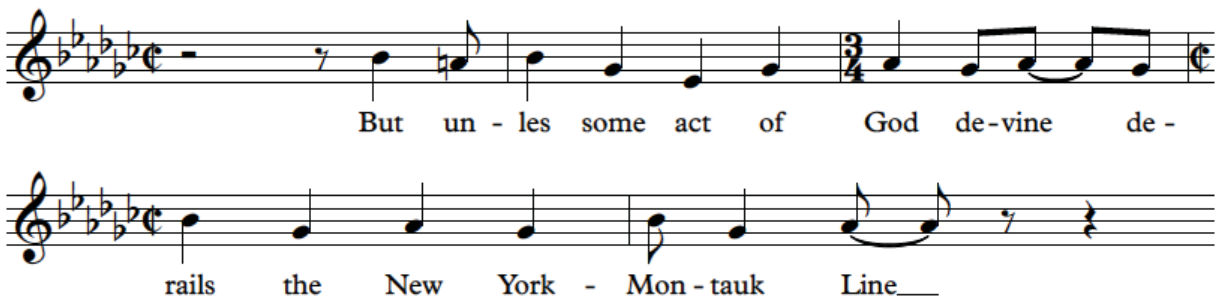

Figure 4.1: Example of syncopation in "The Five-Fifteen" from *Grey Gardens*

With the song's forward-looking temporality and the text's emphasis on planning the perfect party, the song demonstrates how control becomes an important motivating factor for Edith. She believes that as a long as she is in control of time and her life, others' perceptions of her aging can also be manipulated.

But as Act I comes to a close, Edith begins to lose control of time, as it quickly moves forwards, causing a startling realization of her aging. She first loses Gould's companionship; Gould breaks the news to Edith that he feels it's time to gain his independence from the Beales. Gould begins to play a tune in which he prepares to say goodbye to Edith. A bouncy staccato accompaniment is light-hearted as he jokes "Remember me, when you're singing 'Tea for One.'" The music slows suddenly and the mood shifts, losing its quick rhythmic progression and sharp articulation. The song "Drift Away" begins with a rubato piano accompaniment as Gould croons to Edith. This shift in mood signals the seriousness of Gould's departure and the severity of the loss that Edith experiences.

Importantly, Edith only sings during moments of reminiscence and otherwise only interjects with spoken appeals to Gould's departure. This voicelessness signals a loss of control over musical time for Edith, as she exists only as an observer of Gould's lyric time.[150] But on a larger scale, the song's vocal inequality points to the end of Edith's musical career with Gould's departure. In a sense, this song can be seen as Edith's forced retirement;[151] in her mind, without Gould, she no longer has the ability to sing, and without her musical career, she loses an important part of her identity which she uses to mask her aging.[152]

---

[150] McMillin, *The Musical As Drama*, 31-33.

[151] Forced retirement was noted and categorized as ageist along with the coinage of the term "Ageism" by Robert Butler in 1969. See Robert Butler, "Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry," *The Gerontologist* 9/4 (1969): 243-246.

[152] There is a wealth of scholarship from age studies that deal with the idea of masking or masquerade. Kathleen Woodward "consider[s] masquerade as a coverup through which old age nonetheless speaks." She explains further, drawing from Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, "It poses the question of the extent to which we may be aware of the spectacle we may make of ourselves in masquerade in old age. It suggests that such masquerade is ultimately

Directly afterward, this song transitions into a reprise of "The Five-Fifteen," which is the first time that Edith sings alone on stage. The melodic carry-over from "Drift Away," which ends with an alto saxophone solo, suggests that ideas of fading saturate her thoughts. Edith reflects on time once again, and the song signals her fears of the passage of time, underscoring the loss of control she feels after her musical identity is taken from her. She wishes to freeze time, to not get older, and to stay in this moment of happiness forever. She sings,

> Like a photo in a sterling silver frame,
> What I wouldn't give
> To keep thing just the same.
> My darling daughter,
> Gould and Me
> Performing songs for company
> Our little family safe…serene.
> Will it all be gone at five-fifteen?

Time is once again musically thematized during this reprise, though differently than it was in the song's first iteration. A pulsing rhythm, much slower than the swung syncopation of the previous version, gives a more regular sense of time's forward motion. This regularity of time is juxtaposed by a slowing of time, invoked by the heavenly timbre of the celeste and a long, drawn-out countermelody in the violin, both of which help to give a feeling of suspended time. These musical elements also support the interiority of the moment when Edith questions what will happen to her after Edie's imminent departure. As a reaction to these thoughts, she wishes to freeze time, to keep Gould and Edie at her side. She sees the two of them as integral to her age identity, both contributing to her maintenance of a more youthful image, those of performer and mother of an unmarried daughter.

---

always visible to others, that the mask does not hide old age but that it makes it all the more visible, that it expresses the 'truth,' which is the desire for youth and the unimpeachability of death." For more, see Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents*, 148; 150. More generally, see Chapter 8 of Woodward's book, "Youthfulness as a Masquerade: Denial Resistance, and Desire," pg. 147-166.

Gould's departure coupled with Edie's self-reflection of role as a mother make Edith being to see Edie's engagement as the next step toward her decline. She fears loneliness and the forced entry into a post-maternal stage of the life-course. Instead of accepting this fate, Edith chooses to keep control of time by resisting a future where she takes on roles traditionally ascribed to the aging (grandmotherhood and retirement).[153] She has essentially lost all control over her own life-course decisions by being forced out of her musical career by Gould and subsequently forced out of motherhood by Edie.

Edith is then dealt yet another blow that contributes to her fear of aging. She intercepts a telegram addressed to Edie that reveals that Edith and Phelan are separated and that he has married another, presumably younger, woman. This moment is underscored by a distortion of "The Five-Fifteen" music, ending with a dissonant, layering of two perfect fifths (A ♭ – E ♭ – G – D) that does not resolve (mm. 32-36). This sonority carries over into the next scene and imbues Edith's thoughts. When Joe interrupts her private moment, Edith sees her daughter's future in him. She is not jealous or ill-intentioned when they begin talking about Edie, but, rather, Edith simply does her motherly duty in asking that he makes her daughter happier than she was in her own marriage. But it becomes clear to Edith that Joe's intentions for Edie's future might cause her daughter the same pain that she experienced. In other words, she believes that Joe will try to repress Edie's dreams of the stage. This comes to light after Edith recounts her marital conflicts with Phelan surrounding her performance career.

---

[153] Women with professional careers throughout their adult life often comment on the sense of loss associated with retirement. Gerontologist Christine Price notes common themes of identity sacrifice, loss of social contacts, and stereotypes of inability or incompetence, which are sometimes "subtle [or] not so subtle display[s] of ageism." See Christine A. Price, "Women and Retirement: Relinquishing Professional Identity," *The Journal of Aging Studies* 14/1 (2000): 94. Ironically, Gullette notes the still pervasive attitude that older workers have towards retirement and life-course expectations. ""At readings I gave around the country in 1997, two midlife women and one man said that 'we' ought to give up our jobs so younger people can have them. They too have absorbed the anecdotes [of decline]." Gullette, *Aged by Culture,* 52.

> EDITH. I was asked to sing a *private concert*. To benefit the Ladies Village Improvement Society. "Un Bel Di." Puccini. Well! Phelan was apoplectic. "You will not" – he shouted at me – "you will not sing the role of a common prostitute, Japanese or otherwise!" *(Edith stops herself, abruptly.)* Edie's sure to be happier, isn't she?
> JOE. Happier?
> EDITH. Promise me you won't forbid her love of the stage.
> JOE. A woman should have hobbies. My mother plays bridge.
> EDITH. It's more than a mere game with Edie! Why, she's a natural-born performer!
> JOE. Oh, we'll have a piano. For sing-alongs, like yours.
> EDITH. Sing-alongs?
> JOE. With the family. On holidays and such.

It is after this short exchange that Edith sees her opportunity to strike and shares with Joe, an aspiring presidential candidate, the rumors of Edie's promiscuity. It seems that Edith's motivation in sabotaging Edie's engagement comes partially from maternal care as she is trying to protect her daughter from a marriage where her personal ambitions were not respected, or at least this is how Edith, who acts as narrator for this Act, sees it. But one cannot simply ignore Edith's selfish desire to preserve this moment in time where both her daughter and Gould remain in order for her to continue living out her fantasy of midlife. In this act, she retakes control of how she views her age, in a similar way as Rose, by stopping her daughter's marriage, which delays Edie's coming of age. Therefore, I argue that her motivations are rooted in the ambivalent divide of maternal care and self-fulfillment: her actions will simultaneously protect her daughter (in her eyes) while also helping to slow the passage of time by preventing Edie from leaving Grey Gardens. The multiplicity and simultaneity of Edith's conflicting motivations contributes to our understanding of the complexity of the aged woman as the subject of this show.

When Edie discovers what has transpired between her mother and Joe, she is furious. As someone who relishes her coming of age and optimistically looks out into the future, she does not understand the complexity of her mother's motivations. From a youth perspective, a

viewpoint that, as de Beauvoir suggests, is filled with limitless possibilities,[154] Edie identifies differently with time. This difference is what causes Edie to see her mother's motivations to be rooted in jealousy and desperation. In other words, Edie is able to identify age as the factor leading to her mother's sabotage.

> EDIE. You're jealous, that's all
> …
> EDIE. Because I've still got my *looks* – my *voice* – my *potential* –

Edith's actions backfire, however, and Edie leaves, renouncing her mother. Act I closes with Edith asking, "What in heaven's name am I going to do?" As she looks to the future in the final song of the Act, "Will You?" Edith is now uncertain as to what is in store for her. The song, sung by an aging woman who is unsure about her position as a mother, as a performer, and, more generally, as a person has an expression of pained uncertainty. The slow harmonic progression suggests a certain amount of trepidation as Edith wonders how her daughter will respond to her actions – actions she knows to be harsh, but justified as for the best. Low legato strings create the same pulsing rhythm as that heard in the reprise of "The Five-Fifteen" and solo violin and cello emerge from the texture with sweet countermelodies. This song can be read as an expression of Edith's heartbreak in the moment, although the affect changes in the second half of the song. After an instrumental interlude, over which Edith addresses the crowd for which she is singing, she asserts, "She won't be gone for long, I just know it….Because I ask you…*(Edith's voice cracks with uncertainty and emotion)*…who could ever bear to leave?" The music swells both in intensity and volume as the accompaniment ascends via chromatic voice-leading, landing triumphantly on a tonic F major chord (mm. 52-

[154] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age*, translated by Patrick O'Brian (New York: Putnam, 1972), 378.

55). This optimism is important because it shows a turning point for Edith. She begins to hope that perhaps Edie will return. This song bolsters her spirits through to the final, "will you?" of the song, which is spoken as an outright question more than it is sung.

As the song fades out of remembered time, and the house transforms back to its decrepit state, the old Edith is found again framed in a window of the house. This image acts as a powerful reminder that Act I is framed by Edith's remembrance; Act I exists as Edith's memory of her motivations and could quite possibly represent a revision or a justification of the past.

Temporal Ambiguities and Aging-Associated Ambivalences in Act II

In Act II, the narrative temporality is constantly shifting between past, present, and future. This is a theme of the documentary in which, as Matthew Tinkcom notes, the Beale women are "endlessly revisiting (and revising) their memories of the past."[155] Throughout the second Act, both Edith and Edie's actions are simultaneously situated in relation with the past, in reaction to the present, and with outlook to the future. As a result, I argue that Act II demonstrates the psychological complexity of these aging women as they navigate and construct unique temporalities. For ease, I will break up the discussion of this Act and focus on the two women individually. their relationships with time differ substantially as they interact with the past, present, and future to achieve different goals.

Edith and Reconciliation with the Past

[155] Tinkcom, *Grey Gardens*, 13.

Throughout Act I, Edith was motivated by her fear of age and her desire to control the passage of time. In Act II, she continues to manipulate time, but less out of fear of aging and more as a means to justify her past, reconciling her behaviors and actions. This is no more apparent than in Edith's first song as an old woman, "The Cake I Had." In it, she asserts that her life was marvelous, even despite her failed marriage, current state of poverty, and failing health. The easy 4, honky-tonk style frames her recollection of the past in the present. The style, ironically, is not contemporary to Edith's present; the honky-tonk moments in this song would have been considered anachronistic by 1971.[156] I believe this displacement of musical style suggests a delusional state, the confusion of time, or an inability to maintain a coherent present. But the honky-tonk style only appears at certain moments in the music, like an allusion to the style, notably when Edith sings about her past. Thus, Edith is shifting between past and present, showing an awareness of the past, and the nostalgic music suggests that she looks back on it fondly. The fondness of her memories suggests a life review process in which she is reconciling regrets from her past in preparation for a happier later life.[157]

At the same time, the music that refers to the present in "The Cake I Had" has an air of sardonic provocation, as if Edith is framing her life as better than it actually was to get a response out of her daughter, who passionately disagrees that their lives were pleasant. The clumsy and angular accompaniment is prodding and almost annoyingly argumentative similar to Edith's demeanor in pointing out Edie's faults. Furthermore, effects such as flutter tongue, the

---

[156] As a genre, honky-tonk is a derivative of ragtime, which would have also been an musical anachronism. As Trent Hill explains, by 1955, "rock and roll began to gain dominance in the newly consumeristic 'youth market,'" thus pushing honky-tonk as a profitable genre to the margins of the popular music industry. For more on the decline of honky-tonk see Trent Hill, "A Distinctive Country Voice: The Nashville Sound and Country's Genre Crisis in the 1950s," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 11-12/1 (1999): 5-8.

[157] Robert Butler was one of the first advocates of the life review process, citing its positive effect on the aging subject. See Robert Butler, "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged," *Psychiatry* 26 (1963): 65-75; and Robert Butler, "Successful Aging and the Role of Life Review" *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 22 (1974): 529-535.

use of odd percussion such as vibraslap, and chintzy keyboard sound effects such as harpsichord, help contribute to the facetious nature of Edith's baiting of her daughter. Her misremembered past upsets Edie because it takes away from the sacrifices that she believes she has made for her mother's happiness. Edie tries to bring Edith back to reality, insisting that her life was not as happy as her mother lets on.

Edith's blissful ignorance of reality, as Edie sees it, is only one layer of Edith's complex relationship with the past. She prefers to remember her past in terms of fulfillment, which, as Act I has shown, is not the truth. Regardless, Edith contends that she has lived life to the fullest. Thus, Edith's remembrance of the past in "The Cake I Had," is also an instance of creative memory. Michael Mangan reminds us that "[m]emories are affected by later events, they get mixed up with other memories, they contain gaps which the mind rushes to fill up, they are dependent upon the language in which they are recalled. To remember the past is, whether we like it or not, to perform a creative act in the present."[158] Edith's reminiscence, while perhaps not factual, could also be described as creative autobiography. She bends the truth surrounding her marriage and her relationship with Edie in a way that allows her to approach a version of the past that justifies her actions.[159]

A third interpretation can be made with respect to Edith's retelling of her past life. This is a result and product of the source material for this song. The Maysles Brothers' documentary technique, direct cinema, was intended to produce a "fly-on-the-wall" aesthetic, where the subject of the film is observed without authorial intrusion. This had worked for the Maysles with

---

[158] Mangan, *Staging Ageing*, 123.

[159] Jeanette King argues that when facts no longer dictate truth, the mind of the aging subject approaches a version of the truth they can happily live with. See, Jeanette King, *Discourses of Ageing*, 120. Amelia DeFalco so emphasizes the importance of multiple narratives of life, noting that this is something one confronts in old age. See, Amelia DeFalco, *Uncanny Subjects: Aging in Contemporary Narrative* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 21-23.

other films, but the Beale women lured the filmmakers into the frame of view, often addressing them directly and engaging them in conversation. At one point, the audience is made aware of their presence when they are forced to film themselves in a mirror while turning the camera away from Edith's exposed breasts. Edith is seen as especially vulnerable in this moment and incites a feeling of voyeuristic shame.[160] The Maysles, in becoming a part of their world, shape how the women speak and act. Much of what is said by the two women can be seen as performance; both having learned from their socialite background that appearances are everything, they shape their actions and conversations around what might be expected of them. These expectations, however, are complicated because they are rooted both in their image as members of high society, as well as old and poor women.

If the source material for the musical is in actuality a performance based on how Edith perceives the audience's expectations, then this might explain the crafty reconstruction of Edith's past. The musical differs from the film in that the Maysles are not included as characters. Still, the source material of the musical shapes Edith and Edie's performance, giving the musical an extra performative quality. Therefore, Edith's retelling of the past could be an effort to uphold expectations of her social class, ones that center on appearances of success and domestic bliss. As a result, this song shows how Edith is concerned with keeping up old appearances, adhering to social norms of the 1940s and 1950s American aristocracy. Furthermore, the anachronistic music described above also shows that Edith still tries to adhere to a past ideology. This provokes Edie, who is considerably more modern and forward thinking, and who consciously

[160] This moment happens in the infamous Pink Room scene when Edith's breasts are almost exposed and they offer to turn away to give her privacy. As they turn they film themselves in a mirror, both men with then heads hanging in a classic sign of shame. See Graff, "Bitchy, Messy, Queer," 27-8.

tries to detach herself from their former social class, which she views as artistically restrictive and conservative.

It is difficult to reconcile these different motivations for Edith's reconstruction of the past, but I argue that the fact that she has the agency to do so is perhaps the most progressive representation of the aging woman that has been found in the three musicals discussed in this thesis. Edith represents a different and complex woman who has fears about aging and has tried to cope with them as best as she can. Her recollection of the past is a coping mechanism explained most clearly in the song, "Choose To Be Happy," which is a musicalized radio sermon by the real-life minister, radio personality, and author of "The Power of Positive Thinking," Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. The song is heard after a particularly vicious fight between Edith and her daughter, and is presented as a justification for her behaviors. Edith is seen agreeing with the radio when Peale says:

Choose to be happy
Make that the motto
You use to be happy.
Happy to choose what
You choose not to see.

These lyrics explicitly point to Edith's penchant to deny reality. She chooses "not to see" things that are difficult to deal with emotionally. The gospel setting of the song is not only appropriate given Dr. Peale's religious stature, but this setting also functions to glorify Edith's mantra that promotes blissful ignorance. For Edith, it qualifies her actions as she justifies her past behaviors as being rooted in the pursuit of future happiness. The song also gives hope to Edith, suggesting that positive thinking will give her a better forward outlook. As the verse approaches the chorus the key shifts upward from C major to D major (mm. 20-21). This harmonic motion is uplifting, reassuring Edith that her recollection of her past actions, while

largely fabricated, will allow her to move forward without regret. She chooses to see the past as happy, which allows her to look forward with more optimism. The song also ends with a rhythmic shift from 3/4 to a fast gospel cut time that continues to repeat until a complete fade out (beginning at m. 108). This never-ending mantra sustains Edith well into the future. It approaches an explanation of Edith's relationship with the past that helps her justify her selfish and, at times, monstrous behavior toward Edie.

Edie's Ambivalent Time in Late-Middle Life

In Act II, Edith strives to make peace with her past as she moves into the last stage of her life. Edie, on the other hand, is pulled in several different temporal directions. In her first song of the Act, "The Revolutionary Costume," she is clad in one of her iconic costumes: a pair of pantyhose worn over shorts, which are worn under a skirt that, according to her, can double as a cape, topped with a sweater worn as a turban that is ornamented with a brooch. Her look reflects a certain resistance to age and a refusal to surrender her fashion sense to her poverty.[161] The militant text and revolutionary rhetoric of the song show how forward thinking Edie can be, thus combating stereotypes of aging being associated with a growing conservatism. While Edie displays the will to "subvert the Cris-Craft boaters/ Those Nixon-Agnew voters," her musical voice is stuck somewhere in the past, resembling the orchestration of George M. Cohan,[162] but also approaching the playful sophistication of Stephen Sondheim; wind-heavy orchestration dances around her delightfully imaginative turns of phrase. The Cohan sound places Edie in a

[161] Samantha Holland, Andy Bennett, and Paul Hodkinson all address the important of fashion and body modification in the subversion of expected age presentation. For more on this topic, see Samantha Holland, *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age, and Identity* (Oxford and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004) and Bennett and Hodkinson (eds.), *Aging and Youth Cultures*.

[162] Cohan's sound is characterized by heavy use of woodwinds, brass, and percussion. See Symonds, "Orchestration and Arrangement," 268.

time closer to her youth, but the intricacies and nuances of the orchestration also place her among a contemporary (1973) Broadway orchestral sound, making her performance in the present a hybrid of both eras of musical theatre sound.

This temporal blurring is more evident in Edie's dance for Jerry in "The House We Live In." According to Edie, this song was a wartime military march that was played at Joe's funeral. Several layers of temporality are enacted in this number. First is Edie's remembrance of the song and its association with her ex-fiancé.[163] Second is how the song is first heard diegetically on an old vinyl record, enacting a throwback for contemporary (2006) audiences. Third, Edie's performance and show of talent possesses a sense of futurity; while performing, she imagines a future in dance, at one-point shouting to Jerry (or anyone who will listen) "I need an agent!" Lastly, the recording triggers a non-diegetic recreation from Edie's imagination, summoning the old Navy singers from the recording onto the stage. These singers exist in a temporally ambiguous and imaginary space that is not past, present, nor future. Thus, Edie is existing in four interwoven temporalities, the past, suggested by her remembrance of the song as a wartime march, the present, as she performs her dance for Jerry, the future, as she sees her performance as a way to escape Grey Gardens and secure a career as a dancer, and, finally, in an imagined timeless space where she glorifies her performance.

Time in Act II begins to show the temporal blurring of past and present. Edie states after her first song "The Revolutionary Costume for Today" the she finds it difficult to "keep the line between the past and present." The inability to organize time in a linear fashion is typically considered a sign of delusion or mental instability, and we might be inclined to come to this conclusion given Edie's eccentricities. But Edie's complex negotiations of time should not be

[163] The actor who plays Jerry is played by the same actor who plays Joe in Act I, further blurring the past (Act I/1941) and the present (Act II/1973).

read as a marker of senility or delusion.[164] Rather they represent the ambivalent relationship with time many people experience while aging, especially given the ambivalent nature of age and time in the transitional middle age.[165] Edie finds herself in a similar, ambivalent position concerning futurity, time, and desire in Act II. In the tragically longing song "Around The World," Edie struggles with her desire to escape Grey Gardens and the manipulative and restrictive control of her mother. At the outset of the song, musical mood is tempestuous, marked by a series of arpeggiated triplets passed between bass clarinet and clarinet, while a sneering stopped horn and agitated tremolo strings reveal Edie's frustration and anger that fuels her desire to leave Grey Gardens and to escape her mother's torment. The mood shifts at the chorus when she addresses the mementos from her youth that she keeps in the attic. The mementos trigger a memory act connecting Edie to the past. The music reveals the tenderness and even calming effect that memorabilia from her past have on her moods and emotions. The music from the angered verse is contrasted in the chorus by the simplicity of a music box melody in 3/4 that is filled out by warm strings, yearning suspensions, and harp ornamentation. The music is comforting, suggesting that Edie finds solace in the past, as it reminds her of a time when she was happier and had more optimism about the future.

Here, Edie's relationship with time is two-fold; the past allows her to both escape the present, and to create desire or see an optimistic future. This song is an act of resistance to the present; the past transports her away from her mother, who is the main instigator of her anger, as

---

[164] Often, the inability to organize time logically is a sign of deterioration in many forms of dementia, age related or otherwise. The last 10 years have seen a reframing of the discourse around experience of time, senility, and aging. For example, gerontologist Daniel Davis has advocated for both a sociological and philosophical rethinking of dementia and temporal existentialism, drawing on the phenomenological writing of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. See Daniel H. J. Davis, "Dementia: Sociological and Philosophical Constructions," *Social Science & Medicine* 58/2 (2004): 369-278.

[165] Jan Baars has recently noted the need for more scholarly attention toward "the role of ambivalence in aging" in order to undercut either-or dichotomies. See Jan Baars, "Aging and the Exploration of Lived Ambivalence," *Age, Culture, Humanities* 1/1 (2014): Online.

demonstrated when Edith interrupts her recollection of the past, prompting the second verse, accompanied again by the same turbulent music. And it is through the calming past that Edie is capable of imagining a hopeful future where one day she will escape the house.

The futurity involved in this act of reminiscence is apparent in the escapist lyrics of the second chorus, as Edie expresses her desire to explore the roads not travelled (as she quotes Frost) beyond "the attic wall." An extended consequent phrase makes the structure of the verse irregular, giving it emphasis. Edie sings about how the act of escaping through memory has prepared her for her future departure from Grey Gardens:

So when you go
The world will be
The one you know…

Following, Edie sees a birdcage that she picks up and sings,

A birdcage I plan to hang.
I'll get to that someday…
A birdcage for a bird
Who flew away…

This moment is musically different and is set to a short coda with a shift from 3/4 to 4/4 which lengthens and draws out the line slightly; a marked ritardando also slows down the music as the rhythm becomes less lilting and more square (mm. 108-111). This slowing of time is a moment of recognition for Edie; she realizes that her desire to leave does not match her reality, and she is left wondering when, if ever, she will be free, like the bird from the cage. A chromatically descending string line in the coda hints at a lament motif that heightens the sense of loss related to this section. While Edie is filled with dreams and desires of escape, she does not know when this will happen.

In Edie's final song, "Another Winter in a Summer Town," she is on the verge of departure, but she ultimately cannot bring herself to lift the latch of the garden gate to leave. This

is a liminal moment for Edie, who stands at the threshold of freedom, as she questions her decision to leave. She has dreamt of this moment many times, but her confidence seems to stop her short. The song has a strong connection to time, and especially chronometric time; a pedal B from a tolling church bell elicits the passage of time, like a clock chime. Edie's resolve is thrown into question when a sequence of dissonant intervals is added to the tolling bell, landing on a minor 7th (G and F) to combine with the pedal B, creating an unresolving Italian 6th chord (mm. 1-5). Textually, the song uses the changing seasons as both a literal sign of the passage of time, but also as a metaphor for the senescing process,[166] where summer represents youth and winter represents aging. Edith sings of the neglect that "winter" brings ("The maple goes from crimson to brown" and "The beach is empty./ they cover the pools./ The patio umbrellas come down."), but, at the bridge, she sings of the ambivalent feeling of age that many of those in middle age describe; she sees herself as a holding onto youth, refusing to accept a master narrative of decline.

One little leaf
Adrift in the breeze
Refuses to fall from the sky.
Blown by the wind
It clings to the trees,
Unwilling to wither and die…

The orchestration is bright and uplifting; florid woodwind figuration with layered entrances builds to a widely voiced G major 9 chord (mm. 24-26). Furthermore, her rising vocal line shows

[166] I am using the term "senescing process" in the way that Jan Baars defines it as existing in syncopation with chronometric time and experiences of aging. "Experiences of *aging* should be distinguished from processes of *senescing* (and not senescence) that refer to functional dynamics and biological processes over the life span. Insofar as chronometric *age* plays a categorizing role in the organization of the life course, it will not fail to affect people as they are aging, but neither aging processes nor processes of senescing take place in synchrony with chronometric age." Ibid. See also Jan Baars, *Aging and the Art of Living* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 47-55.

Edie's strength and hope in fighting decline narratives. The next verse, however, introduces another ambivalence: the struggle between continuity and discontinuity of self. Edie still feels young, "cavorting in [her] carnival crown," continuing to feel that she is the same girl from 30 years ago. But, the visual image of her body betrays this continuity. She sings, "Then glance in the mirror,/ and who do I see?/ A middle-aged woman/ Inhabiting me." The last two lines are imbued with dissonant harmonies, highlighting the words "middle-aged" and "inhabiting." These harmonies seem misplaced among the song's rather consonant harmonic language, further suggesting the divide between physical markers of age found on the body, and the feeling of youth.

The confluence of temporalities in Act II shapes Edie's mid-life experience. And while I believe it is easiest to attribute this behaviour to delusion, I would argue that it instead points to the complexity of navigating intense ambivalences associated with aging, such as continuity and discontinuity, visibility and invisibility, and participation and withdrawal.[167] All of these are constructed from age ideology and notions of decline, and instill a fear of the aging process. *Grey Gardens*, as a narrative about aging women, helps to reveal the psychological complexities of the aging process, and how these fears and negotiations of time change from youth, to mid-life, to old age. Lastly, I wish to consider how the fears of aging and relationships with time described above impact the main pairing in this show, between Edith and Edie, and how the aging process also impacts the important bond between mother and daughter.

Duets and the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship in *Grey Gardens*

[167] Ibid.

As in opera, duets are a staple of the musical theatre genre, functioning in several different ways. Fundamentally, duets are used to demonstrate how two characters relate to one another and are used to show both similarities and differences between two characters. Perhaps the most pervasive iteration of the duet in musical theatre comes in the form of the love duet, where two characters are presented as having a romantic bond. As Scott McMillin notes, this can be achieved in a variety of ways. In *West Side Story*, for example, Tony and Maria are destined to be with each other, even before they meet. Tony sings about Maria in "Something's Coming" even before she is present in the narrative, and their compatibility is understood immediately in "Tonight" when they sing mostly in unison, unequivocally joining the two in romantic partnership for the rest of the show.[168] Alternatively, the love duet can position the lovers at odds with each other, highlighting their differences, as in Sky and Sarah's duet "I'll Know" in *Guys and Dolls*. Their music initially differs, but they eventually find themselves singing the same melody, despite their opposing views on love.[169] However, not all duets are intended to show romantic relationships; "The Confrontation," for example, in *Les Misèrables* functions to show the rivalry between Valjean and Javert, using melodic counterpoint to highlight their differences. Therefore, duets are rarely simply about difference or likeness, but more generally about the power relations and the affective qualities, such as anger, love, or distrust, that result when two people interact.[170]

Since a duet's primary function is to link two characters together in some fashion, discussions of difference and sameness have been found to be fruitful in the analysis of the duet. Stacy Wolf has written extensively on the gender implications of the duet, addressing both the

---

[168] McMillin, *The Musical As Drama*, 59.
[169] Ibid. Wolf offers another example of difference in the love duet in "People Will Say We're In Love" from *Oklahoma!* See Wolf, *Changed For Good*, 197.
[170] Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 45-6.

typical heteronormativity of male-female love duets, but also the queerness of same-gendered duets, especially those shared between two women. Wolf classifies two types of female-female duet: the queer collaborative duet and the queer pedagogical duet.[171] In the collaborative duet, two women work together to achieve a common goal ("Marry The Man Today," *Guys and Dolls*), whereas the pedagogical duet is defined by one woman trying to teach another woman a lesson and the other accepting the lesson, thus undergoing a change in character ("A Boy Like That," *West Side Story*). Wolf considers these moments queer in that "in both kinds of duets, the musical's attention radically shifts to accommodate the two women, and their song displaces the heterosexual couple."[172]

While Wolf's classifications are useful for analyzing the duets of Golden Age musical theatre and the conventional pairings found in that era, the mother and daughter relationship in *Grey Gardens* between Edith and Edie complicates the female duet in musical theatre, moving it beyond the two categories offered by Wolf. Duets shared by the mother and daughter are not as common as other female duets and are found more frequently in contemporary musicals.[173] For this reason, the female relationship presented in the duet is revealing of this often-

---

[171] Stacy Ellen Wolf, "'We'll Always Be Bosom Buddies': Female Duets and the Queering of Broadway Musical Theatre," *GLQ* 12/3 (2006): 351-376. In *Changed For Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical*, Wolf drops the word "queer" from these classification, which, in my opinion, changes the overall analysis, but is nonetheless useful in interpreting the duets she discusses. See Wolf, *Changed For Good*, 34-51.

[172] Wolf, *Changed For Good*, 33.

[173] "Mother, Angel, Darling" (*Irene*, 1973 Broadway revival) is among the first mother-daughter duets on Broadway. Since the 1990s, this type of song has gained more exposure. For example, see "Our Little World" (*Into The Woods*, 1990 Original London production), "Welcome To The Sixties" (*Hairspray*, 2002), "Three Bedroom House" (*Bat Boy: The Musical*, 2002) and Diana and Natalie's duets in *Next To Normal* (2009). In 1957, Rodgers and Hammerstein wrote "A Lovely Night" for Ella, Stepmother, Charlotte, and Gabrielle, which is an interesting quartet from mother-daughter/stepmother-stepdaughter/stepsisters. These examples exclude duets with mother-like figures, a relationship common in the Golden Age. While the Mother Abbess acts as a mother to Maria in *The Sound of Music*, or The Old Lady to Cunegonde in *Candide* acts as mother, these figures are typically adopted replacements to otherwise absent mothers, and therefore do not contain the same psychodynamic baggage that mothers and daughters face in the examples listed above. Christian Mendenhall notes that the absent mother becomes a trope in the American musical theatre's Golden Age and I believe that the mother figures that replace the biological mother are made up of a much less complex relationship, making it easier for these characters of the Golden Age to be one-dimensional, inhabiting a benevolent and caring role. See Christian Mendenhall, "American Musical Comedy as a Liminal Ritual of Woman as Homemaker." *Journal of American Culture* 13/4 (1990): 59.

underrepresented female bond.[174] Furthermore, while *Gypsy* introduced the issues of aging and mother-daughter relationships, mother-daughter duets between Rose and Louise are absent from the show. Thus, *Grey Gardens* allows us to consider the complexities of this relationship through song.

In Adrienne Rich's groundbreaking analysis of the mother and daughter, she refers to the ambivalent nature of the relationship, noting her desire to be like her mother, while at the same time, wishing to be completely different from her; "I too shall marry, have children – but *not like her*. I shall find a way of doing it all differently."[175] Edith and Edie's relationship represents in musical theatre a different kind of complexity for the aging woman by showing that older women must continue to struggle with the deep psychological complexity of familial bonds. The complex psychological relationship between mother and daughter as outlined by numerous scholars such as Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow,[176] and Marianne Hirsch, is reflected in the duets between Edith and Edie in *Grey Gardens*.

Their first duet in Act 1, "Mother Darling," acts out the familial ambivalence between self-fulfillment and familial devotion. In this song, Edie has just discovered her mother's concert program for her engagement party. Edie tries to persuade her mother not to sing while still acting as the caring and supportive daughter. She pleads with her mother to show some "decorum" and to cut the number of songs she has planned to sing. While their argument results in a compromise that strongly favours Edith, both are strategic in how they approach the case, carefully constructing their argument in a show of great diplomacy. The ambivalence between

---

[174] Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart*, 8.
[175] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 219.
[176] Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

independence and upholding family relations is perhaps best exemplified in the lyric "It's a day for me…/ And all of us to shine" first sung by Edie and then by Edith, Edie, and Gould, who steps in as moderator. Marianne Hirsch notes that the balance between selfhood and care is a constant struggle between mothers and daughters in fiction,[177] and the musical language in "Mother Darling" demonstrates the delicacy in which mother and daughter dance around the issue, their plotting and meticulous manipulation shown through short melodic cells of two descending minor thirds. Breaks in the melodic line also create the effect of thoughtful and careful word choice (mm. 5-12, for example).

Ironically, the hesitation felt in the breaks in the melodic line are paired with the line "wondrous…truly…" which she uses to positively reassure her mother's musical career. Furthermore, as she reminds Edith that she is the one who has always supported her singing, the meticulous nature of this familial work is implied in the straight staccato eighth notes in the bassoon and the woodblock strike on beat 3 that punctuates the list of performances that Edie dutifully attended (mm. 17-20).

For Edith, asking her not to sing is essentially asking her to repress the part of her identity in which she finds her sense of youthfulness. Perhaps Edith is threatened by Edie's youth and future and sees her daughter's request as an attack on her identity. Furthermore, if Edith is not performing she is static, and might be viewed as older, especially in comparison to her youthful and optimistic daughter. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, mothers can find themselves at risk of being supplanted by their daughters once they themselves become mothers. This action, rooted in the sexual activity of the daughter, relegates the daughter's mother to grandmother and

[177] Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 1989), 194.

therefore will be seen as being old.[178] Thus, Edith's need for attention is motivated by a set of factors, such as the need to identify as young, and the need to affirm her position as mother, to maintain the power dynamic between mother and daughter. Both of these responses are ultimately a reaction to the fear of being perceived as old.

Their second duet demonstrates the care side of this ambivalent relationship. The Act 1 song "Two Peas in a Pod" is instigated by Edie who feels the need to quell her mother's dejection after Edie's grandfather (Edith's father, Major Bouvier) suggests that she has wasted her life on music, and that her husband favours other, presumably younger, women. This assault on Edith also suggests that her behaviour is unacceptable given the expectations of a woman of her social class and age. Edie uses the song to draw parallels between herself, a young woman, and her mother, a middle-aged woman. Through this diegetic song, Edie is taking on the role of emotional labourer, taking a deferential position to buoy Edith. This highlights the devotion and sense of duty that colours and defines conventional family dynamics.

The song they sing is a list song that identifies many examples of perfect pairs (Dagwood and Blondie, India and Ghandi, and Siamese twins). The similarities brought out in the song allow Edith to continue her youthful identification through seeing similarities between her and her daughter. Musically, they often sing in unison and in thirds, invoking a sense of togetherness or sameness. This is contrasted with "Mother Darling"'s lack of unison singing and its more contrapuntal, combative, and rhythmically complex moments. One might argue that this is a collaborative duet. However, its context is more complex than simply functioning to "support

[178] As noted in Chapter 2, Sally Chivers discusses the danger felt by mothers whose daughters become mothers themselves; Chivers, *From Old Woman to Older Women*, 37. The fear of aging in mid-life is also addressed by Gullette, *Aged By Culture*, 107-108, that assumptions of age "will refer not to a fixed chronology but to cultural pressures that stabilize age ideology or engineer its novelties."

each other emotionally" or "collude on a plan."[179] There is a bit of a sense of artifice, not only in its performative nature as a diegetic piece, but also in Edie's intentions. Her actions are motivated by familial devotion, perhaps comparable to how Louise ultimately agrees to become the focus of Rose's dreams. "Two Peas in a Pod" functions as emotional labour in which Edie works to strengthen Edith's youthful age identity after her grandfather's tirade on life-course and social expectations. Edie does benefit in the end from strengthening their bond as mother and daughter as Edith concedes and promises not to sing, but this was not Edie's intention at the outset of the song, and for this reason, its main function is rooted in a sense of devotion to her mother's emotional well-being.

Grey Gardens is further unique because it offers a glimpse into the mother-daughter relationship in later life. However, there are no conventional duets between Edie and Edith in Act II, perhaps suggesting that their relationship with one another has deteriorated and has remained fragmented after all these years. There are two moments, in "Jerry Likes My Corn" and "Another Winter In A Summer Town," where the two women sing together. The first of the two songs, "Jerry Likes My Corn" shows us how much Edith appreciates the companionship of those who are younger. Edith uses Jerry in a similar way to how she identifies with Edie's youth in "Two Peas in a Pod." Edith appreciates Jerry's youthfulness for its ability to make her feel "reborn." Her identification with him also gives her access to a mask of youth, one in which she feels that because she "understands his grunts" and knows about "Mountain Dew, Superbowl/ Drugs 'n' sex 'n' Rock 'n' Roll," she can, to a certain degree, pass as younger.

But ultimately Jerry is used as a tool for Edith to secure and maintain Edie's devotion. Edie views Jerry as someone who is stealing her mother's love away from her, which she

[179] See Wolf's definitions of her classifications in Wolf, "Bosom Buddies," 354.

believes she deserves in return for her care and attention. Edie tries to counter her mother's appreciation and praise of Jerry by pointing out that she has her own sons, both of whom have not been as devoted to her as she. This song shows the co-dependency that defines their relationship in Act II; Edith needs to keep Edie close so that she will continue to take care of her, and she does this by manipulating Edie's desire and need to be loved and appreciated by her mother.

The last duet moment in the musical, at the climax of "Another Winter in a Summer Town," paints the two women as sharing similar feelings of loss associated with age and suggests a co-dependence based on mutual understanding of their fears of loneliness and aging. They are musically joined as both reveal their fears and anxieties of aging. Both admit the loss of their youth and their melodies join in thirds for the first time since "Two Peas in a Pod," singing together the lines "My season ended/ A long time ago" (mm. 59-61). Both Edith and Edie recognize their aging, and, in the process, find a commonality; they find common ground in their fears of growing old and being forgotten. This bond is stronger than that implied by their relationship as mother-daughter, which is seen to be toxic and fractured.

This song leads to the tragic and beautiful ending of *Grey Gardens*, which ultimately acts as a commentary on family, devotion, and care in late life. Edie fears that she has wasted her life, and by the end of the song, she has decided to leave to make the best of the time she has left. As she heads for the gate to leave, Edith calls for her from their bedroom. Her mother is hungry and alone, and Edie, recognizing her mother's vulnerability, cannot bring herself to abandon her, regardless of the manipulation and ill-treatment she receives. As Edie retreats back into the house to help her mother, the audience is left wondering whether Edie will ever escape and be able to live the life of which she has always dreamt. *Grey Gardens* highlights the complexity in

this relationship, especially when both women are aging, bringing into consideration aspects of care work, family devotion, and gender expectations.[180]

The duet, as a convention that relates two people, is an important tool in musical theatre; it helps to establish the relationship that two characters can have. As seen through the mother-daughter duets in *Grey Gardens*, the duet functions to highlight the complexity of this relationship. The songs that Edith and Edie share are neither collaborative nor pedagogical and, as a result, beg for a different, more complex classification beyond those offered by Wolf. I would categorize the "sorry-grateful" duet of the mother-daughter relationship as its own type of duet, one that carries the psychological complexity of this unique bond, and confronts the ambivalence of cynicism and empathy. Both "Mother Darling" and "Peas in a Pod" demonstrate the very different functions in establishing this relationship, and should therefore be considered in conjunction with the the psychodynamics based on gender, age, and familial expectations of care and devotion. What is particularly unique to these duets in *Grey Gardens* is that they abandon the trope of the wise aged woman, showing that these complex relationships are life-long, can be challenging, and do not necessarily get easier. These songs also show that throughout the aging process, there are multiple ways in which one can use, abuse, and benefit from this relationship. As the musical progresses, Edith and Edie's unique relationship moves from a struggle between autonomy and care, to an unhealthy co-dependent union, rooted in a complex blend of resentment and mutual understanding. As aging women, they are able to find

[180] It is well known that when care is to be given to the elderly from within the family, adult daughters are normatively the primary caretaker. Recent filial care research as shown that daughters will convert to caretaker more often then sons, especially if the one in need of care is the mother. Merril Silverstein, Daphna Gans, and Frances M. Yang, "Intergenerational Support to Aging Parents: The Role of Norms and Needs," *Journal of Family Issues* 27/8 (2006): 1068-84.

the most common ground, sharing a mutual understanding of their fears of failure, loneliness and aging.

CONCLUSION

By way of closure, I would like to recount two stories about aging women and musical theatre. Since the early 2010s, it has been reported that musical theatre diva Barbara Streisand has been working on a new film adaptation of the 1959 Laurents, Styne, and Sondheim musical *Gypsy*. Remarkably, Streisand has not had the chance to star as the infamous stage mother, Rose. After several setbacks, including a no-go on the project from Laurents, the project is currently in its last stages of negotiation.[181] Criticism of this project has been effusive and has polarized fans. Many believe that it is her time to shine in a role known for attracting big names, big voices, and big personalities, while many others comment that Streisand's demeanor is too glamorous and clean to be the ruthless and gritty Mama Rose. But, some of the most recent criticism – which has been rooted in the popular discourse among fan groups and online discussion boards – has centered on Streisand's age.[182] Currently aged 74, some critics and fans are suggesting that Streisand is too old to be the mother of two little girls, roughly aged 5 and 8. Further, many are concerned that the filmic medium will not allow the diva to hide her age.

These remarks are shockingly common among those interested in this project. Some suggest that Streisand should leave well enough alone, or forfeit her role to a younger actress, more fit for playing the mother of two young children, while others note that this role will allow

[181] This is as of April 11, 2016 reports that STX Entertainment was taking over the project after Universal Studios effectively dropped it after a lengthy development stage. See Brent Lang, "Barbara Streisand, Barry Levinson Reviving 'Gypsy' for STX Entertainment," *Variety* (April 11, 2016). Online. http://variety.com/2016/film/news/barbra-streisand-gypsy-barry-levinson-1201750655/

[182] There have been harsh criticisms from online forums from the general public who have focused on Streisand's age as a limiting factor to her ability to play this role. The following is a tame example: "Barbra Streisand will NEVER pass for 50, except maybe in her own mind. On top of which, even a 50-year-old actress is too old to play Madame Rose. In the ten or so years the bulk of the Gypsy story took place, Rose Hovick was only in her mid-20s to mid-30s." Kaysings comment on Charles McNulty, "Barbara Streisand, still gunning for 'Gypsy,' samples some Stephen Sondheim at Staples Center," *Los Angeles Times* (August 3, 2016), Online. http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-streisand-mcnuty-notebook-20160803-snap-story.html.

the actress and singer to "go out with a bang." While the criticism of the casting choices might hold true in terms of a realist aesthetic for the film, I am left wondering, what other roles are there for Streisand to play? When it comes to aging characters in musical theatre, the list of roles is sparse, especially for women with the cultural stature of someone like Streisand. Few of the criticisms that Streisand faces, however, deal with her ability to perform this role, not only musically, but emotionally and dramatically as well.[183] With the agency (not to mention professionalism and experience) that Streisand – as an older performer – would bring to the role, these themes would become much more apparent and would bring out a new nuanced version of the character very much in line with the one that I have outlined in Chapter 2.

More recently, the Broadway actress Melissa Errico, best known for her portrayal of Eliza Doolittle in the 1993 revival of *My Fair Lady*, penned an op-ed piece in The New York Time titled, "I'm 46. Is That Too Old to Play the Ingénue?"[184] The article describes the discrepancies between an actress's age and character's age and the fear she has felt as she prepares to perform the role of Sharon McLonergam in an Off Broadway revival of the musical *Finian's Rainbow*. Errico, who is by musical theatre standards a light lyric soprano (as opposed to a 'belter'), has made a career out of playing the ingénue. She contemplates the difficulties and the paradox of the aging ingénue, an archetype known for her naivety and purity. As she aged into her 30s, Errico found herself wanting to develop her characters past these notions tied to the character type, but she found it profoundly difficult. Can the aging actress who is gripped with a sense of personal experience and worldly wisdom continue to be convincing as the virginal ingénue?

---

[183] Streisand is on record stating that she is interested in this role – and has been interested in this role for a long time – because of her relationship with her mother. See Bernard Weinraub, "Barbra Streisand, Still Not Pretty Enough" *The New York Times*, November 13, 1996, Online.

[184] Melissa Errico, "I'm 46. Is that too Old to Play the Ingénue?" *New York Times*, August 26, 2016, Online.

Errico brilliantly articulates the conundrum that the aging woman faces in musical theatre: "The truth is that women in musical theater still tend to be segregated: romantic innocents or worldly dames. Where is the elusive middle? What roles are there for actually aging, still human women? Very few come to mind: Arlene in 'Baby.' Anna in 'The King & I.' I'm not ready to be Auntie Mame or Norma Desmond yet."[185] This is a loaded statement; while Errico is advocating for her agency to continue to play the roles that she is vocally suited for and professionally experienced in, she is also expressing her fears of being marked as "old."

Both stories point to the dearth of aging women being represented on the musical theatre stage. They also demonstrate the gravity and immediacy of these issues within the genre. While it becomes more commonplace for older singers and actresses to continue their careers on stage well past middle life, musical theatre needs to makes space for these people. Furthermore, I imagine these roles would be appreciated by the aging demographics of the Broadway musical theatre audience. Stories of aging become increasingly important as the aging population grows exponentially in North America. A critical approach to both race and gender have been applied to the study and practices of musical theatre, yet we continue to accept narratives of decline that work to perpetuate unexamined prejudices that pervade discussions and performances of musical theatre.

Historically, musical theatre has been an art form made by and for younger artists. But this does not mean that aging women have been absent from its history. As I have shown, there has been a progression in the types of roles being written for aging women that has made this character type more visible and more complex. In the 1930s, the aging women was not often present; the rare case found her in secondary roles with no musical voice. With the advent of the

[185] Ibid.

integrated book musical there was an increase in the number of singing roles for older women, however, these roles were still supportive and superficially represented this character type as benevolent, caring, and wise. When *Gypsy* came to Broadway in 1959, Rose's brashness left audiences dumbfounded, but she paved the way for other older protagonists like Mame and Dolly. Shortly after, the aging woman gained a more complex and ambivalent voice, one that allowed these characters to be vulnerable, and to approach topics like regret, time, sex, and death in *Follies*. In the following years, older women began to appear more frequently on the Broadway stage, although with varying degrees of complexity.[186] It wasn't until the turn of the century that Broadway saw an increase in the visibility of aging actresses. Here, middle-aged and older women were found to dominate the stage dramatically and musically in shows such as *Grey Gardens*, *Next To Normal* (2008), and *War Paint* (2016). To clarify, this progression does not represent a large proportion of musicals. The aging woman on the Broadway stage is still a rarity; I am implying that when she does appear, it is in a significantly more complex and important position than what one might have expected 50 years ago.

In addition to a historical argument, I aim to foster a new theoretical perspective for musicologists to consider how themes of aging can be applied to musical analysis. I have introduced some of the major themes of age studies into the analysis of these musicals and their numbers, including issues of decline, normative expectations of life course, resistance to the aging process, reminiscence and memory, generational difference and conflict, and ageism and oppression of the aging. These theoretical suggestions answer the recent call within age studies

[186] Some examples include: *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Gigi* (1973), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), *Passion* (1994), *Sunset Boulevard* (1994). Interestingly, I observed in my survey of Broadway musicals in the late 1950s and early1960s featured older or middle-aged characters. This, I believe, corresponds with the rise in youth markets during this time.

for more humanities scholars to approach texts with an aging lens.[187] This project enriches our understanding of these shows and reveals the sophisticated goals of their authors, along with helping to explain why we find these unlikely protagonists enduringly fascinating. Additionally, it provides a new intersectional analysis of the history of the genre. On a larger scale, this project both broadens our understanding of identity in musical research and provides a model for understanding age in a wider artistic context.

Lastly, this thesis also uniquely considers the experiences and diverse representations of a marginalized group. My analysis brings to light the glossing over of age in the history and study of musical theatre. By pointing out themes of aging in musical theatre, I hope to inspire conversation around the social responsibilities of scholars and practitioners of the genre to approach musicals with sensitivity and care for all people involved. While this thesis takes the first step in introducing themes of age and aging into the study of musical theatre by considering issues of identity and representation, it is limited by its consideration of a relatively narrow group of fictional characters. The next step would be to include the effects aging has on the many different facets of musical theatre. Consideration of creative teams (composers, librettists, directors, choreographers, producers) and how aging influences collaboration and creation could lead to a discussion of why certain stories about age are favoured over others. Likewise, a survey of the careers of aging actors could shed light on real, lived experiences of growing older in an industry known for giving life to narratives that privilege young characters. Furthermore, this consideration of actors' experiences with age could (and should) be expanded to include all genders, races, and classes. Finally, a reception history of these shows (and others with age narratives) would shed light on how audiences, both young and old, react to and understand

[187] See Stephen Kats, "What Is Age Studies?," *Age, Culture, Humanities* 1/1 (2014): Online.

aging as a thematic element in music and theatre. Such analyses would be valuable in developing an enlightened, sensitive, and thought-provoking approach to musical theatre, helping to change people's thinking around issues of aging.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, Thomas. "The Musical Dramas of Stephen Sondheim: Some Critical Approaches." *Journal of Popular Culture* 12/3 (1978): 513-525.

Allen, Robert Clyde. *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Altman, Rick. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Baars, Jan, and Henk Visser (eds.). *Age and Time: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Amityville, NY: Haywood Publishing Company, 2007.

Baars, Jan. "Aging and the Exploration of Lived Ambivalence." *Aging, Culture, and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2014): Online.

___. *Aging and the Art of Living*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Banfield, Stephen. *Sondheim's Broadway Musicals*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993.

Barnes, Grace. *Her Turn on Stage: The Role of Women in Musical Theatre*. Jefferson, NC McFarland & Company, 2015.

Basting, Anne Davis. *The Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Coming of Age*. Translated by Pat O'Brien. New York: Putnam, 1972.

Bennett, Andy, and Paul Hodkinson (eds.). *Aging and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.

Block, Geoffrey. *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from 'Show Boat' to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Browne, Colette. *Women, Feminism, and Aging*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1998.

Browne-Miller, Angela. *Will You Still Need Me?: Feeling Wanted, Loved, and Meaningful as We Age.* Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010.

Butler, Robert N. "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged." *Psychiatry* 26 (1963): 65-75.

___. "Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry." *The Gerontologist* 9/4 (1969): 243-246.

___. "Successful Aging and the Role of Life Review." *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 22 (1974): 529-535.

Calasanti, Toni. "Ageism, Gravity, and Gender: Experiences of Aging Bodies." *Generations* 3 (Fall 2005): 8-12.

Calasanti, Toni M., and Kathleen F. Slevin (eds.). *Age Matters*: *Realigning Feminist Thinking*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Chambers, Pat. *Older Widows and the Lifecourse: Multiple Narratives of Hidden Lives*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.

Chivers, Sally. *From Old Woman to Older Women: Contemporary Culture and Women's Narrative*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2003.
Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978.
Cole, Thomas R. "Preface." In *Voices and Visions of Aging: Toward a Critical Gerontology*, edited by Thomas R. Cole, W. Andrew Achenbaum, Patricia L. Jakobi, and Robert Kastenbaum. vii-xiii. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1992.
Cruikshank, Margaret. *Learning to Be Old: Gender, Culture, and Aging*, 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.
Davis, Daniel H. J. "Dementia: Sociological and Philosophical Constructions." *Social Science & Medicine* 58/2 (2004): 369-278.
Decker, Todd R. *Showboat: Performing Race in an American Musical*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
DeFalco, Amelia. *Uncanny Subjects: Aging in Contemporary Narrative*. Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010.
Elliott, Richard. *The Late Voice: Time, Age, and Experience in Popular Music*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
Errico, Melissa. "I'm 46. Is that too Old to Play the Ingénue?" *New York Times*, August 26, 2016.
Friedman, Andrea. "'The Habits of Sex-Crazed Perverts': Campaign Against Burlesque in Depression-Era New York City." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7/2 (1996): 203-238.
Goldman, James, and Stephen Sondheim. *Follies*. New York: Random House, 1971.
Gordon, Joanne. *Art Isn't Easy: The Theatre of Stephen Sondheim, Updated Edition*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1992.
Gottfried, Martin. "Flipping Over Follies." *New York Times*, 25 April, 1971.
Graff, Agnieszka. "Bitchy, Messy, Queer. Femininity and Camp in Maysles Brothers' *Grey Gardens*, its HBO Remake, and Krzysztof Warlikowski's *Tramway*." In *Narrating American Gender and Ethnic Identities*, edited by Aleksandra M. Różalska and Grażyna Zygadło. 15-34. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.
Grinenko, Aleksei. "Follies Embodied: A Kleinian Perspective." *Studies in Musical Theatre* 6/3 (2012): 317-324.
Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Declinging to Decline: Cultural Combat and the Politics of the Midlife*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1997.
___. *Aged By Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
Hanson, Kristin. *Stage(d) Mothers: Mother-Daughter Tropes in Twentieth-Century American Drama*. (Ph.D. diss.: Louisiana State University, 2006.
Hanson, Laura. "Broadway Babies: Images of Women in the Musicals of Stephen Sondheim." In *Stephen Sondheim: A Casebook*, edited by Joanne Gordon. 13-34. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997.
Hassan, Ihab. *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Post Modern Theory and Culture*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987.
Haworth, Catherine, and Lisa Colton (eds.). *Gender, Age, and Musical Creativity*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2015.
Hepworth, Mike. *Stories of Ageing*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2000.
Hill, Trent. "A Distinctive Country Voice: The Nashville Sound and Country's Genre Crisis in the 1950s." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 11-12/1 (1999): 3-17.

Hirsch, Foster. *Harold Prince and the American Musical Theatre*. New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2005.
Hirsch, Marianne. *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989.
Horowitz, Mark Eden. "Way Up There: A Close Examination of *Follies*' 'Haunting' Score." *The Sondheim Review* 18/1 (Fall 2011): 16-20.
Hoskins, Janet. *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of Peoples' Lives*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
Holland, Samantha. *Alternative Femininities: Body, Age, and Identity*. Oxford and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004.
Jameson, Frederik. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991.
Jennings, Ros, and Abigail Gardner (eds.). *'Rock On': Women, Ageing, and Popular Music*. Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2012.
Jones, John Bush. *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre*. Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003.
Kats, Stephen. "What Is Age Studies?" *Age, Culture, Humanities* 1/1 (2014). Online.
King, Jeanette. *Discourses of Aging in Fiction and Feminism: The Invisible Woman*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.
Knapp, Raymond. *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005
___. *The American Musical and the Performance of Personal Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.
Knickerbocker, Paine. "How Leland Hayward Would Save the Theatre." *San Francisco Chronicle* 6 July, 1961, 27.
Lang, Brent. "Barbara Streisand, Barry Levinson Reviving 'Gypsy' for STX Entertainment," *Variety* (April 11, 2016). Online.
Laurents, Arthur, Stephen Sondheim, and Jule Styne. *Gypsy, A Musical Suggested by the Memoirs of Gypsy Rose Lee*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989 [1959].
Lawson-Peebles, Robert. "*Follies*: Musical Pastiche and Cultural Archeology." In *The Oxford Handbook to Sondheim Studies*, edited by Robert Gordon. 384-403. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
Lovensheimer, Jim. "Stephen Sondheim and the Musical of the Outsider." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2nd ed, edited by William A. Everett and Paul R. Laird. 181-196. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
Macdonald, Barbara. "Outside the Sisterhood: Ageism in Women's Studies." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 25/1 (1997): 47-52.
Mangan, Michael. *Staging Ageing: Theatre, Performance, and the Narrative of Decline*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
Maysles, Albert, and David Maysles. *Grey Gardens*. DVD. Edited by Ellen Hovde and Muffie Meyer. New York: Portrait Films, 1975.
McMillin, Scott. *The Musical as Drama: A Study of the Principles and Conventions Behind Musical Shows from Kern to Sondheim*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.
McNulty, Charles. "Barbara Streisand, still gunning for 'Gypsy,' samples some Stephen Sondheim at Staples Center," *Los Angeles Times* (August 3, 2016).

Mendenhall, Christian. "American Musical Comedy as a Liminal Ritual of Woman as Homemaker." *Journal of American Culture* 13/4 (1990): 57-69.
Michael, Robert T. "The Rise in Divorce Rates, 1960-1974: Age-specific Components." *Demography* 15/2 (1978): 177-182.
Miller, D. A. *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
Mordden, Ethan. *Coming Up Roses: The Broadway Musical in the 1950s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
___. *Sing For Your Supper: The Broadway Musical in the 1930s*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
___. *Anything Goes: A History of American Musical Theatre*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
Most, Andrea. *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
Port, Cynthia. "No Future? Aging, Temporality, History, and Reverse Chronologies." *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 4 (May 2012): 1-19.
Price, Christine A. "Women and Retirement: Relinquishing Professional Identity." *The Journal of Aging Studies* 14/1 (2000): 81-101.
Purin, Peter Charles Landis. "'I've a Voice, I've A Voice': Determining Stephen Sondheim's Compositional Style Through a Music-Theoretic Analysis of His Theatre Works." PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2011.
Rhodes, John David. "'Concentrated Ground': Grey Gardens and the Cinema of the Domestic." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 47/1 (Spring, 2006): 83-105.
Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976.
Roof, Judith. *All About Thelma and Eve: Sidekicks and Third Wheels*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
Roost, Alisa "'Remove Your Mask': Character Psychology in Introspective Musical Theatre – Sondheim's *Follies*, LaChiusa's *The Wild Party*, and Stew's *Passing Strange*." *Modern* Drama 7/2 (2014): 229-251.
Rosenthal, Alan, and Ellen Hovde. "Ellen Hovde: An Interview." *Film Quarterly* 32/2 (Winter, 1978-1979): 8-17.
Savran, David. "'I've Got That Thing:' Cole Porter, Stephen Sondheim, and the Erotics of the List Song." *Theatre Journal* 64/4 (2012): 533-548.
Secrest, Meryle. *Stephen Sondheim: A Life*. New York: Random House, 1998.
Silverstein, Merril, Daphna Gans, and Frances M. Yang. "Intergenerational Support to Aging Parents: The Role of Norms and Needs." *Journal of Family Issues* 27/8 (2006): 1068-84.
Slater, Charles L. "Generativity Versus Stagnation: An Elaboration of Erik Erikson's Adult Stage of Human Development." *Journal of Adult Development* 10/1 (2003): 53-65.
Slevin, Kathleen F. "'If I Had Lots of Money…I'd Have a Body Makeover:' Managing the Aging Body." *Social Forces* 88/3 (2010): 1003-1020.
Smith, Susan. *The Musical: Race, Gender, and Performance*. New York: Wallflower, 2005.
Sondheim, Stephen. *Finishing the Hat: Collected Lyrics (1954-1981) with Attendant Comments, Principles, Heresies, Grudges, Whines and Anecdotes*. New York: Knopf, 2010.
Sontag, Susan. "The Double Standard of Aging." *Saturday Review* (September 23, 1972): 29-38.

Stempel, Larry. *Showtime: A History of the Broadway Musical Theatre*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
Swayne, Steve. *How Sondheim Found His Sound*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
Symonds, Dominic. "Orchestration and Arrangement: Creating the Broadway Sound." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf. 266-281 New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
Tinkcom, Matthew. *Grey Gardens*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.
Twigg, Julia. "The Body, Gender, and Age: Feminist Insights in Social Gerontology." *Journal of Aging Studies* 18/1 (2004): 59.73.
Vogels, Jonathan B. The *Direct Cinema of David and Albert Maysles*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010.
Walters, Suzanna Danuta. *Lives Together/Worlds Apart: Mothers and Daughters in Popular Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.
Weales, Gerald. "Nostalgia and Beyond." *The North American Review* 256/4 (Winter 1971): 78-80.
Wells, Elizabeth A. *West Side Story: Cultural Perspective on an American Musicals*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011.
Weinraub, Bernard. "Barbra Streisand, Still Not Pretty Enough." *The New York Times*, November 13, 1996.
Whiteley, Sheila. *Too Much Too Young: Popular Music, Age, and Gender*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003.
Williams, Linda. "'Something Else Besides a Mother': 'Stella Dallas' and the Maternal Melodrama." *Cinema Journal* 24/1 (1984): 2-27.
Woll, Allen L. *Black Musical Theatre: From* Coontown *to* Dreamgirls. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.
Wolf, Stacy. *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*. Ann Arbour, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002.
___. "'We'll Always Be Bosom Buddies': Female Duets and the Queering of Broadway Musical Theatre." *GLQ* 12/3 (2006): 351-376.
___. *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
___. "Gender and Sexuality." In *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, edited by Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Wolf. 210-223. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
___. "Keeping Company with Sondheim's Women." In *The Oxford Handbook to Sondheim Studies*, edited by Robert Gordon. 365-383. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
Wong, Paul, and Lisa Watt. "What Types of Reminiscence Are Associated with Successful Aging?" *Psychology and Aging* 6/2 (1991): 272-9.
Woodward, Kathleen. *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991.
___. "Introduction." In *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, edited by Kathleen Woodward. ix-xxviii. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.
___. "Inventing Generational Models: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Literature." In *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations* edited by Kathleen Woodward. 149-170. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1999.

Wright, Doug, Scott Frankel, and Michael Korie. *Grey Gardens*. New York, NY: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2008.
Zadan, Craig. *Sondheim & Company*. Carbondale, IL: Da Capo Press, 1994.